POETIC FICTION : a study in representation with reference to Virginia Woolf and D.H. Lawrence.

by

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CHAPTER ONE : FROM REALISTIC TO POETIC FICTION

"Nothing", wrote Dr. Johnson, "can please many, and please long, but just representations of general nature."[1] The self-assurance of Johnson's statement is refreshingly direct and simple. It smacks of that society of which he was in many ways the spokesman, a society more straightforward than our own, a society in which literature and life were readily definable and could be measured against universally held general principles. We lesser critics of the modern age are apt, like diligent ants in the shadow of this colossus, to worry over details and avoid principles. We are apt to question Johnson's statement and to ask which kind of representation? Exactly what kind of mirror is that "faithful mirrour of manners and of life" that Johnson commends?

This question is nowhere more intriguing than in connection with the novel. When the novelist creates a fiction what is he doing? He is, we may say, creating a miniature "world", a miniature version of the real world which stands for that real world. The fiction is a mirror, to use Johnson's metaphor, an image of life through which the novelist can reflect artistically what he understands to be "life".[2]

[1] Samuel Johnson, "Preface to Shakespeare" in Johnson : Poetry and Prose selected by Mona Wilson, Rupert Hart Davis (1968), p.491

[2] This idea is far from being new. For Scholes and Kellogg, for example, "Meaning, in a work of narrative art is a function of the relationship between two worlds: the fictional world created by the author and the 'real' world, the apprehendable universe. When we say we 'understand' a narrative we mean we have found a satisfactory relationship between these two worlds." (See R. Scholes and R. Kellogg, The Nature of Narrative, Oxford University Press (1966), p.82)

This is as much true for the poet as for the novelist. Joseph Conrad has written that the artist begins by "creating for himself a world, great or little, in which he can honestly believe. This world cannot be made otherwise than in his own image: it is fated to remain individual and a little mysterious, and yet it must resemble something already familiar to the experience, the thoughts and sensations of his readers." [3] As far as narrative art is concerned, there are many varied kinds of fictional worlds, many different kinds of mirrors by means of which the artist can present a fictional image of life. They work in different ways, but they have this in common: they are each an invented artifice, a vehicle through which the artist presents life.

In modern times from the Renaissance onwards in the tradition of the novel, the dominant kind of fictional world used by the artist has been realistic - what we have come to see as the tradition of realism. It is the thesis of this study that at the end of the nineteenth century the dominantly realistic fictional image gave way to a different kind of fictional image - the non-realistic image of poetic fiction - which developed out of realism a different manner of presenting life from that which had held sway for so long over the novel as a form. To understand this development we need to first establish in some measure what realistic fiction is and how the realistic fictional image works.

Realism is a much discussed and, as a result, very confused critical term and it will be as well at the outset to give it a clear definition.[4]

[3] Joseph Conrad, "Novel as World", in The Theory of the Novel ed. P. Stevick, New York: The Free Press (1966), p.29

[4] A convenient review of the variety of meanings associated with the term can be found in H. Levin, "Realism in Perspective" in Approaches to the Novel ed. R. Scholes, California : Chandler (1966), p. 101-20.

As far as the tradition of the novel is concerned, Ian Watt has most clearly divorced the term realism from all its associations with a certain type of subject matter, and defined it entirely in terms of a certain way of presenting experience: "the novel's realism does not reside in the kind of life it presents, but in the way it presents it."[5] Watt goes on to outline some of the ways of presentation which are to be associated with the realistic novel. He notes, for example, the emphasis upon individual experience presented through such means as autobiographical memoir, the emphasis upon particularity of events, setting and character. The novelist attempts to create "what purports to be an authentic account of the actual experiences of individuals"[6], and he does so by introducing such means of presentation as Watt describes.

This is the basis for the realistic fictional image of life. The realistic fictional world works by virtue of the illusion it creates of being a literal and direct mirror-image of actual life. By contrast with, for example, myth or allegory, realistic fiction pretends for the purposes of its art to imitate what people actually do in life itself. It creates a belief in the reader that the fictional world before him is credible, and could be met with in life itself. But authenticity is not the <u>aim</u> of the realistic novel: it is simply the means. We can demonstrate this by pointing out how futile and uninteresting would be a truly direct and objectively accurate transcription of life. A novelist like W. D. Howells comes very close to this and illustrates how interest is destroyed by simply imitating faithfully the particularities of the original model.

[5] Ian Watt, <u>The Rise of the Novel</u>, Chatto and Windus (1957), p.11.

[6] Ian Watt, <u>ibid</u>., p.27.

The true art of the realistic novel does not lie in the measure of accuracy with which it depicts actual life. Its art lies in the way the novelist significantly uses this illusion of authenticity to illuminate the general nature and meaning of life. By creating a fictional image which for all purposes is a perfectly believable image of life itself, the novelist can then shape the image so that it reflects a degree of significance not found in life itself and thus can convey his "meaning". Unlike an allegorical fictional world, a realistic fictional world has no readily abstractable secondary level of "meaning". The "meaning" is generated, conveyed and understood entirely in terms of the dramatic actuality and authenticity of the image and its immediate relation to real life. Hence we may say that the art of realistic fiction is essentially dramatic in its nature. One example from countless other enticing possibilities must suffice to demonstrate this. We can do no better than to turn to Jane Austen and Emma; and in particular to the beautifully delicate scene in which Emma accuses Mr. Knightley of being unconsciously in love with Jane Fairfax. It will be best to quote the scene in full for the sake of clarity.

> 'I know how highly you think of Jane Fairfax,' said Emma. Little Henry was in her thoughts, and a mixture of alarm and delicacy made her irresolute what else to say.
>
> 'Yes,' he replied, 'any body may know how highly I think of her.'
>
> 'And yet,' said Emma, beginning hastily, and with an arch look, but soon stopping - it was better, however, to know the worst at once - she hurried on - 'And yet, perhaps, you may hardly be aware yourself how highly it is. The extent of your admiration may take you by suprise some day or other.'
>
> Mr. Knightley was hard at work upon the lower buttons of his thick leather gaiters, and either the exertion of getting them together, or some other cause, brought the colour into his face, as he answered,
>
> 'Oh! are you there? But you are miserably behindhand. Mr. Cole gave me a hint of it six weeks ago.'

He stopped. - Emma felt her foot pressed by Mrs. Weston, and did not herself know what to think. In a moment he went on -

'That will never be, however, I can assure you. Miss Fairfax, I dare say, would not have me if I were to ask her - and I am very sure I shall never ask her.'

Emma returned her friend's pressure with interest; and was pleased enough to exclaim,

'You are not vain, Mr. Knightley, I will say that for you'.

He seemed hardly to hear her; he was thoughtful - and in a manner which shewed him not pleased, soon afterwards said,

'So you have been settling that I should marry Jane Fairfax?'

'No indeed I have not. You have scolded me too much for match-making, for me to presume to take such a liberty with you. What I said just now, meant nothing. One says those sort of things, of course, without any idea of a serious meaning. Oh! no, upon my word I have not the smallest wish for your marrying Jane Fairfax or Jane any body. You would not come in and sit with us in this comfortable way, if you were married.'

Mr. Knightley was thoughtful again. The result of his reverie was, 'No, Emma, I do not think the extent of my admiration for her will ever take me by suprise. - I never had a thought of her in that way, I assure you.' And soon afterwards, 'Jane Fairfax is a very charming young woman - but not even Jane Fairfax is perfect. She has a fault. She has not the open temper which a man would wish for in a wife.'

Emma could not but rejoice to hear that she had a fault. [7]

The whole essence of this scene is its relation to the as yet unrealised and unacknowledged love between Emma and Mr. Knightley; and how beautifully Jane Austen plays upon this hidden significance with all the subtle resources of her dramatic art. Everything that is said or mentioned or suggested in the episode has a direct or indirect bearing upon the central issue, veiled though it be, of Emma and Mr. Knightley's relationship. Emma begins in character by diving headfirst into the heart of the matter; "it was better, however, to know the worst at once-". Why, we wonder, is it the "worst"? Is it simply, as Jane Austen directs us to think, that "Little Henry was in her thoughts", that Emma is concerned about the disposition of Mr. Knightley's land outside the

[7] Jane Austen, Emma Chapter XXXIII, Dent Everyman Library (1965), p.251-2. The episode does not end here, but continues for another page to the end of the chapter.

family as a result of a possible marriage? We are told so, but cannot help feeling that this suggests a slightly more personal motive for Emma's thinking Mr. Knightley's marriage the "worst". She goes on a little later in her retraction of the accusation to say "Oh! no, upon my word I have not the smallest wish for your marrying Jane Fairfax or Jane any body. You would not come in and sit with us in this comfortable way, if you were married." Again, the suggestion is veiled: Jane Austen directs us to think of Emma's statement in terms of the direct and immediate occasion - she would lose the pleasure of Mr. Knightley's frequent company. And, what is more, there is absolutely no suggestion that Emma herself realises exactly why she really would not like Mr. Knightley to marry Jane Fairfax or Jane any body. Yet, behind her remarks, we feel Jane Austen has generated a hidden but highly significant dramatic note: Emma does not want Mr. Knightley to marry because she wants to marry him herself.

What of Mr. Knightley himself and his reaction to Emma's suggestion? Very delicately, Jane Austen renders the effect of Emma's words in Mr. Knightley's dramatic personage: "Mr. Knightley was hard at work upon the lower buttons of his thick leather gaiters, and either the exertion of getting them together, or some other cause, brought the colour into his face, as he answered,". It is that "some other cause" that strikes home to the reader. What could be the other cause? Immediately we think, "he <u>is</u> in love with Jane Fairfax!" And then as we read further some other more subtle "cause" is suggested with brilliant dramatic economy and subtlety. Mr. Knightley goes on, after his initial reply, to say "Miss Fairfax, I dare say, would not have me if I were to ask her - and I am very sure I shall never ask her." We ask ourselves, though Emma apparently does not, why is he so sure he will never ask her? Because he does not love her after all. Because, perhaps, he loves someone else already? Who that someone

else might be is itself gently suggested in his later comments. He becomes thoughtful, a trifle abstracted, and questions Emma further "in a manner which shewed him not pleased". Emma, at least, takes his displeasure to be the result of annoyance at being the target for more of her own match-making, for she immediately goes on to excuse herself of such behaviour. We, with the essential hindsight which the rest of the book affords on Jane Austen's dramatic art, feel that his displeasure has perhaps some other source - i.e, in his misguided supposition that Emma is thinking of him in terms of marriage with some other person, and not in terms of herself. Mr. Knightley again goes into a reverie, the result of which is a little speech which, with all its beautifully poised hidden feeling and significance, is a fine example of Jane Austen's art: "No, Emma, I do not think the extent of my admiration for her will ever take me by suprise. - I never had a thought of her in that way, I assure you." The tone of the statement is quite plain and objective, it seems. But if we give just the slightest emphasis to it - "the extent of my admiration for <u>her</u> . . . I never had a thought for <u>her</u> in that way" - then it speaks to us with a really full dramatic suggestiveness. It suggests that perhaps the extent of Mr. Knightley's admiration for someone else, for Emma, <u>will</u> take him by suprise at some time; that he will come to think of <u>her</u> in that way; indeed, that perhaps these few seconds' conversation have already to some extent formed the dawning of his realisation, and that this was the hidden subject of the momentary reverie. This whole episode, minor though it be, is at the very heart of the central subject of the novel - the relationship between Mr. Knightley and Emma, and the gentle comedy of a love which has been in the bud for years blossoming slowly and unnoticed amid the confusions of mistaken purposes. The episode ends as artfully as it has been conducted throughout. Mr. Knightley's criticism of Jane Fairfax, which causes such

delight to Emma, is itself a silent reflection upon the central issue; "She is reserved, more reserved, I think, than she used to be - And I love an open temper." What more of an open temper could Mr. Knightley desire than that which has just displayed itself dramatically in Emma's own well-bred but fiery remonstrance upon Mrs. Elton?

It is undeniable that Jane Austen's fictional image in Emma has all the authenticity and accuracy of presentation necessary to call it realistic. The minuteness of her re-creation of everyday life is quite incredible. In this episode we have examined there is absolutely nothing indecorous with a belief in the literal credibility of the characters and dialogue. How natural the dialogue is; how unobtrusive are the details such as Mr. Knightley's buttons. Everything contributes to the essential impression that this is real and that we can respond to the fiction as to life itself. But authenticity, a direct mirror image of life, is not Jane Austen's aim - it is the means of her art. From the forgoing discussion of this episode we can realise the wealth of suggestiveness to be drawn from the speech, the details, the characters, a wealth which goes far beyond the bounds of simply creating a realistic image. We realise that it is what Jane Austen does with the image that is of first importance. She uses it to present the deeper issues and feelings involved. It is through the actual literal image that she does this. Jane Austen's art is to let the dramatic details of character and dialogue speak for themselves; and they speak volumes. When Mr. Knightley replies to Emma " I never had a thought of her in that way", there is a telling dramatic significance behind what he says. If we catch it, it tells us implicitly of the deeper issues involved. If we miss this significance implicit in the dramatic level we miss the art behind Jane Austen's image of life.

Not only is the significance of the episode conveyed dramatically through the realistic image; it is also to be understood within that context. We understand the episode entirely within an immediately human perspective such as one finds in the actual life of which this is an image. That is, we understand it in terms of characters, of characters' feelings, of human relationships such as one finds in life itself. These are the terms in which the episode is conducted, terms which this fictional image shares directly with life itself. The drama is conducted in personal terms; that much is essential to the nature of the realistic image. The art of the novelist is to make these terms significant. This Jane Austen does through her dramatic suggestiveness; and thus turns this particular image of life into one which has a degree of general relevance. What we do not find is the imposition or presence of any secondary level of meaning outside the immediate human perspective of the dramatic context. Jane Austen makes an image of life which works by being an artful likeness of the everyday world; and thus she can show the general nature of life through something which already engages human interest on an immediate and direct level. This is, perhaps, the outstanding virtue of realistic presentation - that it has an inbuilt and direct relevance to life as it is, by virtue of the very means it uses to present life, an authentic fictional image of the world.

This summary is necessarily very far from being a full consideration of the art of realistic fiction. We have said nothing of the great variety of forms which the other great novelists of the tradition give to the realistic fictional world. We have said nothing of the other major facets of the art, such as the use of the narrator convention. But we have at least established the basic elements upon which the use of a realistic fictional image depends for its effect - the authenticity to life in the world and the credibility of the elements of the image, and the consequent dramatic art which this makes available to the novelist.

It all hinges upon "the reader's belief in the literal reality" of the fictional image. [8]

This kind of representation of life, this kind of fictional world, formed the dominant feature of the tradition of the novel in England. The early twentieth century, however, has seen the development of new forms of fictional worlds out of the realistic tradition. These forms adopt an additional artistic basis to the dramatic basis of realism. Though this in no way implies a divorce from realism, the development grew from a decided feeling that realism, at least in its contemporaneous forms, was somewhat sterile. It seemed that realism had mistaken the means of its art for an end in itself; and had become trapped into making ever more authentic images of life whilst neglecting the art which should inform them. Eduard, the novelist in Gide's Les Faux-Monnayeurs, is a later, more extreme, but nevertheless useful spokesman for this feeling. Eduard argues that the novel has become "a slave to resemblance":

> The novel has never known that 'formidable erosion of contours', as Nietzche calls it; that deliberate avoidance of life, which gave style to the works of the Greek dramatists, for instance, or to the tragedies of the French seventeenth century. Is there anything more perfectly and deeply human than these works? But that's just it - they are human only in their depths; they don't pride themselves on appearing so - or at any rate on appearing real. They remain works of art. 9

Eduard is attacking the presupposition that the novel should present life by means of a fictional world which is, as closely as possible, an authentic image of actual life. The long dominance of the realistic tradition seemed to impose this kind of presentation as a criteria for

[8] Ian Watt, as in n. 5 above, p.21

[9] Andre Gide, Les Faux Monnayeurs, (1925), tr. as The Coiners tr. D. Bussy, Cassell (1968), p.205.

the nature and success of a novel. Eduard's attitude is not simply a swing of the pendulum of taste. His complaints, in common with those of other novelists of the time, sprang from the conviction that realism was no longer necessarily the best mode for fiction. The realistic novelist had become so preoccupied with the authenticity of his fictional image that he seemed to neglect the depths of experience for the surface, and that significant dramatic use of the image proper to the art seemed now to elude him. By referring to the poetic masterpieces of Greek and French drama, Eduard intimated the direction in which he thought the novel should go. To be deeply relevant to life again, to be "perfectly and deeply human", the novelist must learn to forgo the simple creation of an outer semblance to life, and learn, or re-learn, to present the deeper issues. To do this effectively he must adopt a different kind of fictional image, one which is not necessarily realistic, one which like the example from drama, gets to the profound heart of experience through essentially non-realistic images.

The impact of very similar feelings can be found in the two novelists whom we are taking as representatives of this movement away from realism - Virginia Woolf and D. H. Lawrence. Both condemned the state in which they found the realistic novel at the beginning of the twentieth century. However, they did not finally condemn realism itself or the realistic tradition - and this is a vital point to realise. Their attitudes are the product of a particular historical situation and stage in the development of the novel with which they were contemporary - that is, the Edwardian world and the Edwardian novel of Wells, Galsworthy and Bennett. Neither of them denied the validity or the triumph of the realistic tradition in its earlier and greater manifestations. Even though Virginia Woolf developed to an extreme of non-realism in her own practice, her admiration for the capacities of realistic fiction is evident from any of

her essays on the tradition [10]; and when comparing recent examples of the new anti-realism with the older realistic mode, we find her concluding quite objectively that the older method seems "the more profound and economical of the two". [11] Lawrence's respect of the realistic tradition is immediately apparent in that he is a novelist firmly rooted in the tradition of George Eliot. He beganhis career as one of the indisputable masters of the realistic novel; the first half of his earliest major achievement, Sons and Lovers, is a triumph of realistic method. His respect of realism manifests itself also in his essays.

Thus, in both of the writers with whom we are concerned, the movement away from realism did not in any way invalidate the tradition. More discerningly, both Virginia Woolf and Lawrence realised that at the present time the art of realistic fiction was no longer being used to present life with the deep and vivid truthfulness which characterised its highest achievement in the past. Both writers specifically attacked the Edwardian novelists on the grounds that they utilised a debased form of realism. Virginia Woolf defined them as "materialists"[12], "concerned not with the spirit but with the body"[13]. They had "lain an enormous stress upon the fabric of things"[14], and spent "immense skill and immense industry making the trivial and transitory appear the true and the

[10] See, for example, the essay "The Russian Point of View", Collected Essays, Hogarth (1966), Vol. 1 p.244, in which Virginia Woolf expresses her admiration for Tolstoy as a novelist who "proceeds"as we are accustomed to proceed, not from the inside outwards, but from the outside inwards." The earlier sections of the essay "Phases in Fiction", Collected Essays Vol. 2 also serve to demonstrate her appreciation of the realistic method.

[11] Virginia Woolf, "The Tunnel - Dorothy Richardson", Contemporary Writers ed. J. Guiguet, Hogarth (1965), p.122.

[12] Virginia Woolf, "Modern Fiction", Collected Essays Vol. 2, p.104.

[13] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.104.

[14] Virginia Woolf, "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown", Collected Essays Vol. 1, p.332.

enduring"[15]. Her conclusion is that "the sooner English fiction turns its back on them, as politely as may be, and marches, if only into the desert, the better for its soul." [16] Lawrence phrases his attack in different terms but with very similar implications. He condemns Galsworthy for presenting his characters as "social beings" not human beings [17] : Galsworthy's characters, in contrast to those of Dickens or Jane Austen, are "not one of them . . . a really vivid human being", and this, Lawrence suggests, is because they are made to give "too much importance to the external objective reality". [18] In common with Virginia Woolf and Gide's Eduard, Lawrence saw the emphasis upon making an authentic image of life, the devotion to an accurate mirroring of the everyday surface, as slavery for the novel. So, Bennett is "an old imitator" following "rules of construction" copied from other novels [19]

Both writers went further, however, than merely to attack the rather diluted contemporary forms of realism. They both exhibit fundamental reservations about the realistic presentation of life as a novelistic method in general - although again this in no way invalidated the tradition for them. Lawrence states his dissatisfaction with realism in his essay "Art and Morality", in which he decries in art what he calls the "Kodak-vision" and the habit of "seeing just as the photographic camera sees". [20]

[15] Virginia Woolf, "Modern Fiction", Collected Essays Vol. 2, p.104

[16] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.104.

[17] D.H. Lawrence, "John Galsworthy", Phoenix ed. E.D. McDonald, Heinemann (1967), p.540.

[18] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.541.

[19] D.H. Lawrence, Letter to J.B. Pinker, 16th December, 1915, Letters of D.H. Lawrence ed. Aldous Huxley, Heinemann (1932), p.295.

[20] D.H. Lawrence, "Art and Morality", Phoenix, p.526 & 521.

He makes the relevance of this to the novel very clear in another essay where he writes that "If you are too personal, too human, the flicker [of life] fades out, leaving you with something awfully lifelike, and as lifeless as most people are." [21] But it is in the essays on Verga that Lawrence demonstrates his criticisms of realism most fully. For him Madame Bovary and Mastro-don Gesualdo are both great realistic novels, but

> They both suffer from the defects of the realistic method. I think the inherent flaw in Madame Bovary - though I hate talking about flaws in great books; but the charge is really against the realistic method - is that individuals like Emma and Charles Bovary are too insignificant to carry the full weight of Gustave Flaubert's profound sense of tragedy; 22

In the other version of this same essay Lawrence carries on,

> because he is a realist and does not believe in "heroes", Flaubert insists on pouring his own deep and bitter tragic consciousness into the little skins of the country doctor and his uneasy wife. The result is a discrepancy. 23

For Lawrence the realistic presentation of life fails as a novelistic method in that it lacks the capacity to sustain a wider universal perspective on human action and life: "As far as destiny goes, [Gesualdo, and Jude, and Emma Bovary] felt no more than anybody else. And this is because they belong to the realistic world." [24] The characters cannot sustain the heroic dimensions demanded of them because they are presented primarily as authentic people in the traditions of realism. The novelist needs to present life in a different way if the characters are to sustain a wider dimension of significance.

[21] D.H. Lawrence, "The Novel", Phoenix II ed. W.Roberts and H.T. Moore, Heinemann (1968), p. 419.

[22] D.H. Lawrence, "Introduction to Mastro-don Gesualdo by Giovanni Verga", Phoenix II, p. 281.

[23] D.H. Lawrence, "Mastro-don Gesualdo by Giovanni Verga", Phoenix, P. 226.

[24] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p. 227

Intriguingly, the contrast Lawrence makes to the realistic method is with the essentially non-realistic achievements of poetic drama: "The great tragic soul of Shakespeare borrows the bodies of kings and princes".[25] To carry the weight of being universally significant the image of life needs to be somewhat larger than life. To present men who, like Shakespeare's characters, "find themselves, daggers drawn, with the very forces of life itself"[26], the artist must create an artistic world which has some other viable basis than being a realistic image of life.

Virginia Woolf felt a very similar basic dissatisfaction with the presentation of life through the realistic fictional image in addition to her criticisms of present-day realists. Typically, her viewpoint is more theoretical: "Waste, deadness, come from the inclusion of things that don't belong to the moment; this appalling narrative business of the realist: getting on from lunch to dinner; it is false, unreal, merely conventional."[27] Not only is much of the authentic realistic image of life merely conventional and dead; it also unduly restricts the range of significance to the personal. Though Jane Austen does have depths "for all their clarity", Virginia Woolf feels that her basic method by its very nature restricts her from moving onto a wider level of reference: "in order to develop personal relations to the utmost, it is important to keep out of the range of the abstract, the impersonal".[28] Just as the essential nature and virtue of the realistic fictional image is that it has a direct and immediate contact with life as it is, so this very virtue can be a limitation. Both Lawrence and Virginia Woolf felt that realism restricts the novelist by working through the personal and particular, and that as a result the wider level of a more universal

[25] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p. 226

[26] D.H. Lawrence, "Study of Thomas Hardy", Phoenix, p. 420.

[27] Virginia Woolf, A Writer's Diary ed. Leonard Woolf, Hogarth (1965) p. 139.

[28] Virginia Woolf, "Phases of Fiction", Collected Essays Vol.2, p. 75-6.

presentation of life is difficult to reach. They both clearly felt the need for some new or different kind of fictional presentation which could readily encompass a more general view of life. The only way to break the present deadlock seemed to be to transcend realism.

The question we must now consider is, how did they hope to achieve this wider range? What kind of fictional image of life were they seeking to replace, or should we say augment, the realistic image? For neither Lawrence nor Virginia Woolf wanted, in the last analysis, to do away with realism. If the dramatic potentials of realism seemed for a time exhausted, then the only alternative was to go beyond realism; but they could not divorce themselves entirely from the elements of the realistic fictional image, nor did they want to. Realistic fiction was, and is, far from being a dead art. We can look, for example, to works like Alexander Solzhenitsyn's The First Circle for verification. What Lawrence and Virginia Woolf did was to broaden the possibilities for themselves. After all, a fictional image need not necessarily work through being a literal image. This had been one very fruitful, perhaps the most fruitful, possibility. But in the eyes of the early twentieth century novelist it seemed possible to create a fictional image of life which related deeply to human experience without necessarily being a literal image and without being constrained to make its effect through artful imitation of everyday life. There is no reason, for example, other than the demands of the dominant realistic tradition, why the events of a fictional world need to be understood purely on the dramatic level. Events, as with the other elements of a fictional world, can be given a secondary level of meaning beyond the literal or dramatic, as is the case in allegory for example. It is quite possible to create a fictional image of life which has various levels of meaning in addition to the literal or dramatic level. This is the approach which Lawrence and Virginia Woolf had recourse to.

To some extent the past pointed a way. There were the great mythic fictions of ancient tradition and the symbolic narratives of the Bible, both of which Lawrence associated himself with. There were the allegorical fictions of medieval tradition, as well as forms such as fable and fairy tale. There were also the works of poetic tradition and poetic drama, which we have already had some cause to mention and with which Virginia Woolf especially associated herself. All of these variously pointed towards a kind of fiction in which the elements of the fictional world have a presidingly secondary level of significance beyond the literal. More recently, the novel tradition itself had provided examples of certain novelists developing, often from a basic realism, fictional worlds which were quite decidedly larger than life: they depended for their effect on elements other than the authentic image alone, and had a level of significance above the purely dramatic and literal. In such works as Wuthering Heights, Jane Eyre, Middlemarch, Dickens' later novels like Great Expectations, Hardy's later novels like Jude the Obscure and Tess of the D'Urbervilles, as well as in the novels of American writers such as Hawthorne and Melville, some or even a great deal of the effect is derived from elements which go outside the true literal and dramatic level of the realistic image; and we shall see that both Lawrence and Virginia Woolf recognised these and other novelists of the past as predecessors of the kind of fictional presentation which they were themselves attempting. Yet, despite the presence of a discernible symbolic framework underlying the realistic image, Middlemarch, for example, is still very firmly rooted in the realistic tradition. George Eliot's art in this novel derives primarily from our belief in the world of Middlemarch and the characters who inhabit it as an authentic image of life. It is on this that George Eliot bases her art: her striking psychological insight, her involvement of our sympathies, her dramatic and reflective genius, all are dependent upon the vehicle of a realistic image. How else could she reflect so

profoundly upon the general nature of life other than by having a particular and seemingly authentic example before her? The fictional world is still primarily a literal one. But there was no reason why it should remain so. The elements of non-realism in these earlier novelists pointed the way for the kind of fictional presentation which Lawrence and Virginia Woolf attempted.

What, then, was the nature of that kind of presentation? Essentially, it was an imaginative presentation of life rather than a simply dramatic presentation. Both writers created fictions which depend for their effect upon an imaginative understanding of the image rather than a purely dramatic or literal understanding. They used the fictional image to convey a secondary level of meaning in addition to the dramatic level, and it is again vital to realise that this is an addition to the realistic level and not a negation of it. They did this by divorcing their fictional images of life from strict adherenceto life as it is, and by creating them instead upon a non-realistic basis somewhat freed from the demands of strict credibility and authenticity. The image no longer needed to be authentic because it worked upon a different basis: it worked upon the basis of its imaginative significance, its secondary level of meaning.

The main body of this thesis will be concerned with examining the various kinds of non-realistic fictional image which are to be found in the works of Lawrence and Virginia Woolf as examples of the contention just stated. As we will have frequent resort to the word "Imaginative" to describe the art of their non-realistic fiction, it is necessary that we should give some preliminary introduction to the idea, since it lies at the heart of the concept of "poetic fiction". The rest of this introductory chapter is, therefore, devoted to a discussion of the basis of the imaginative presentation of life to be found in poetic fiction.

Before we go on to discuss this in theory, an initial practical demonstration is in order, to clarify the difference between the dramatic working of a realistic fictional world and the imaginative working of a poetic fictional world. We have already demonstrated the effects of a realistic fictional image through a scene from Emma. An example which has a basis for comparing and contrasting the methods of presentation can be found in a scene from Women in Love, Chapter 18 "Rabbit". Again the discussion will profit from a quotation of the scene.

> They unlocked the door of the hutch. Gudrun thrust in her arm and seized the great, lusty rabbit as it crouched still, she grasped its long ears. It set its four feet flat, and thrust back. There was a long scraping sound as it was hauled forward, and in another instant it was in mid-air, lunging wildly, its body flying like a spring coiled and released, as it lashed out, suspended from the ears. Gudrun held the black-and-white tempest at arms' length, averting her face. But the rabbit was magically strong, it was all she could do to keep her grasp. She almost lost her presence of mind.
>
> "Bismarck, Bismarck, you are behaving terribly," said Winifred in a rather frightened voice. "Oh, do put him down, he's beastly."
>
> Gudrun stood for a moment astounded by the thunderstorm that had sprung into being in her grip. Then her colour came up, a heavy rage came over her like a cloud. She stood shaken as a house in a storm, and utterly overcome. Her heart was arrested with fury at the mindlessness and the bestial stupidity of this struggle, her wrists were badly scored by the claws of the beast, a heavy cruelty welled up in her.
>
> Gerald came round as she was trying to capture the flying rabbit under her arm. He saw, with subtle recognition, her sullen passion of cruelty.
>
> "You should let one of the men do that for you," he said, hurrying up.
>
> "Oh, he's so horrid!" cried Winifred, almost frantic.
>
> He held out his nervous, sinewy hand and took the rabbit by the ears from Gudrun.
>
> "It's most fearfully strong," she cried in a high voice, like the crying of a seagull, strange and vindictive.
>
> The rabbit made itself into a ball in the air and lashed out, flinging itself into a bow. It really seemed demoniacal. Gudrun saw Gerald's body tighten, saw a sharp blindness come into his eyes.
>
> "I know these beggars of old," he said.
>
> The long, demon-like beast lashed out again, spread on the air as if it were flying, looking something like a dragon, then closing up again, inconceivably powerful and explosive. The man's body, strung to its efforts, vibrated

strongly, Then a sudden sharp, white-edged wrath came up in him. Swift as lightening he drew back and brought his free hand down like a hawk on the neck of the rabbit. Simultaneously, there came the unearthly abhorrent scream of a rabbit in the fear of death. It made one immense writhe, tore his wrists and his sleeves in a final convulsion, all its belly flashed white in a whirlwind of paws, and then he had slung it round and had it under his arm, fast. It cowered and skulked. His face was gleaming with a smile.

"You wouldn't think there was all that force in a rabbit," he said, looking at Gudrun. And he saw her eyes black as night in her pallid face, she looked almost unearthly. The scream of the rabbit, after the violent tussle, seemed to have torn the veil of her consciousness. He looked at her, and the whitish, electric gleam in his face intensified.

"I don't really like him," Winifred was crooning. "I don't care for him as I do for Loozie. He's hateful really."

A smile twisted Gudrun's face as she recovered. She knew she was revealed.

"Don't they make the most fearful noise when they scream?" she cried, the high note in her voice like a seagull's cry.

"Abominable," he said.

"He shouldn't be so silly when he has to be taken out," Winifred was saying, putting out her hand and touching the rabbit tentatively, as it skulked under his arm, motionless as if it were dead.

"He's not dead, is he, Gerald?" she asked.

"No, he ought to be,"he said.

"Yes, he ought!" cried the child, with a sudden flush of amusement. And she touched the rabbit with more confidence.

"His heart is beating so fast. Isn't he funny? He really is."

"Where do you want him?" asked Gerald.

"In the little green court," she said.

Gudrun looked at Gerald with strange, darkened eyes, strained with underworld knowledge, almost supplicating, like those of a creature which is at his mercy, yet which is his ultimate victor. He did not know what to say to her. He felt the mutual hellish recognition. And he felt he ought to say something to cover it. He had the power of lightening in his nerves, she seemed like a soft recipient of his magical,hideous white fire. He was unconfident, he had qualms of fear.

"Did he hurt you?" he asked.

"No," she said.

"He's an insensible beast," he said, turning his face away.

They came to the little court, which was shut in by old red walls in whose crevices wallflowers were growing. The grass was soft and fine and old, a level floor carpeting the court, the sky was blue overhead. Gerald tossed the rabbit down. It crouched still and would not move. Gudrun watched it with faint horror.

"Why doesn't it move?" she cried.

"It's skulking," he said.

She looked up at him, and a slight sinister smile contracted her white face.

"Isn't it a fool!" she cried. "Isn't it a sickening fool?" The vindictive mockery in her voice made his brain quiver. Glancing up at him, into his eyes, she revealed again the mocking, white-cruel recognition. There was a league between them, abhorrent to them both. They were implicated with each other in abhorrent mysteries.

"How many scratches have you ?" he asked, showing his hard forearm, white and hard and torn in red gashes.

"How really vile!" she cried, flushing with sinister vision.

"Mine is nothing."

She lifted her arm and showed a deep red score down the silken white flesh.

"What a devil!" he exclaimed. But it was as if he had had knowledge of her in the long red rent of her forearm, so silken and soft. He did not want to touch her. He would have to make himself touch her, deliberately. The long, shallow red rip seemed torn across his own brain, tearing the surface of his ultimate consciousness, letting through the for ever unconscious, unthinkable red ether of the beyond, the obscene beyond.

"It doesn't hurt you very much, does it?" he asked, solicitous.

"Not at all," she cried.

And suddenly the rabbit, which had been crouching as if it were a flower, so still and soft, suddenly burst into life. Round and round the court it went, as if shot from a gun, round and round like a furry meteorite, in a tense hard circle that seemed to bind their brains. They all stood in amazement, smiling uncannily, as if the rabbit were obeying some unknown incantation. Round and round it flew, on the grass under the old red walls like a storm.

And then quite suddenly it settled down, hobbling among the grass, and sat considering, its nose twitching like a bit of fluff in the wind. After having considered for a few minutes, a soft bunch with a black, open eye, which was perhaps looking at them, perhaps not, it hobbled calmly forward and began to nibble the grass with that mean motion of a rabbit's quick eating.

"It's mad," said Gudrun. "It is most decidedly mad."

He laughed.

"The question is," he said, "what is madness? I don't suppose it is rabbit-mad."

"Don't you think it is?" she asked.

"No. That's what it is to be a rabbit."

There was a queer, faint, obscene smile over his face. She looked at him and was him, and knew that he was initiate as she was initiate, This thwarted her, and contravened her, for the moment.

"God be praised we aren't rabbits," she said in a high, shrill voice.

The smile intensified a little on his face.

"Not rabbits?" he said, looking at her fixedly.

Slowly her face relaxed into a smile of obscene recognition.

"Ah, Gerald," she said in a strong, slow, almost man-like way. " - All that, and more." Her eyes looked up at him with shocking nonchalance.

He felt again as if she had hit him across the face - or rather as if she had torn him across the breast, dully, finally. He turned aside.

"Eat, eat, my darling!" Winifred was softly conjuring the rabbit, and creeping forward to touch it. It hobbled away from her. "Let its mother stroke its fur then darling, because it is so mysterious -" [29]

[29] D. H. Lawrence, Women in Love, Penguin (1965), p.270-74.

As in the episode from Emma, there is something under discussion which throws light upon the relationship between the two central characters concerned in the scene. In Emma it was the possibility of Mr. Knightley loving Jane Fairfax. Hereit is the rabbit Bismarck. The scene is vivid and authenticated, no less so, indeed, than the episode, from Emma. It is particularised with details and given a distinct dramatic actuality. We notice, for example, the detailed setting of the old court; the very exact and evocative description of the rabbit itself - admittedly, this is done with a precision which is mainly figurative in effect, something quite different to Jane Austen, but no less part of a realistic image -; and we notice the very vivid and authentically detailed dramatic actuality of the characters. The episode, in fact, works in just the same realistic manner as the episode from Emma. We can and do understand the characters on the primary level of their dramatic relationships, through Lawrence's use of this fictional image for its dramatic significance. The incident concerning the rabbit is as much a centre for revealing and displaying dramatically the nature of the characters and the intricacies of their relationship as is the episode from Emma. Thus, for example, Gudrun's rage against the rabbit is a quite believable response to the perversity, the "mindlessness and the bestial fury" which the animal exhibits; and Lawrence uses her feeling for its dramatic significance: the fact that she has such an unsympathetic temper bodes ill for Gerald. Her attitude towards the rabbit dramatically anticipates the future pattern of their personal relations - a point which Lawrence makes in a way foreign to Jane Austen, through a psychological insight, but one which is nonetheless essentially concerned with the dramatic workings of a believable and authenticated image of human behaviour: "Gerald came round as she was trying to capture the flying rabbit under her arm. He saw, with subtle recognition , her sullen passion of cruelty."

Or again, at the very end of the episode, there is the pure dramatic suggestiveness which Lawrence inoculates into their little tête-à-tête about rabbits, with its undertone of sexual display: "'Not Rabbits?' he said, looking at her fixedly . . . 'Ah, Gerald,' she said in a strong, slow, almost man-like way. '- All that, and more.'"

Hence, this episode does have a firm foundation in the realistic fictional image, and a firm foundation in the workings of that kind of image. But when compared with the Emma episode, it is quite obvious that to see this scene from Women in Love purely in those terms alone is insufficient. True enough Lawrence does use an authentic realistic image as the basis of the incident; but the terms in which it is done and the way in which it is presented take the workings of the episode beyond the scope of a purely literal dramatic image. It is not merely that, unlike the episode from Emma, we are shown the inner psychological workings of the characters. This would be nothing new - George Eliot had already achieved this step. Nor would it go beyond realism: psychological presentation is a sophistication of realism rather than anything distinct from it, since it is essentially still a dramatic use of a literal image dependent upon our belief in authentic individual characters. Lawrence does indeed do this in this episode; but he also goes beyond it and beyond the purely realistic fictional image. He loads the responses of the characters and the psychological insight into them with a significance above the dramatic level, and he does so by virtue of the manner of his presentation. Lawrence's method is to use the dramatic level not simply for itself, but as a vehicle for a secondary level of significance, an imaginative level. We notice the difference when compared with Jane Austen in the way Lawrence uses the subject under discussion to throw light onto the characters. For example, there is the very basic difference that instead of being centred upon an issue actually involving the characters

in purely human and personal terms of reference as in Emma, this episode is based around an animal, the rabbit Bismarck. The central issue under discussion is given a rôle quite beyond its purely literal actuality: in his presentation of the rabbit Lawrence generates a power which gives the animal the distinct imaginative appeal of a symbol; and in their involvement with the animal, the two central characters assume imaginative proportions beyond the purely literal or dramatic, which Lawrence conveys through the terms in which he presents their reactions and responses. There is, for example, the clear parallelism between Gerald's fight with the rabbit and his future fights with Gudrun, a parallelism which is imaginative rather than simply dramatic in impact. Lawrence emphasises the rabbit's uncontrollable and powerful life, "Lusty", "demoniacal", and not to be contravened. Gerald's attempt to contain and subdue the life in the rabbit is an imaginative presentation of his essentially negative nature: the parallelism with his relationship with Gudrun suggests that being the kind of person he is, he will do the same with her by stifling her flamboyant free life, with vicious results for both of them. The fight with the rabbit also presents the nature of their relationship in miniature: "Gudrun looked at Gerald with strange, darkened eyes . . . like those of a creature which is at his mercy, yet which is his ultimate victor . . . He felt . . as if she had torn him across the breast, dully, finally." It is not so much that the rabbit itself has any specific "meaning". It is more that the event of Gerald and Gudrun fighting the animal adopts a more than literal significance: through this one image we are shown to the heart of them as characters, but also to the heart of their significance as characters. The terms in which Lawrence conveys their responses to the situation gives them a much wider level of reference than the purely dramatic, or even the purely psychological. Take, for example, the following sentence: "He had the power of lightening in his nerves, she seemed like a soft recipient of his magical, hideous white fire." If we were taking this episode as part of a purely

literal fictional image, we might think Lawrence was exaggerating here. Literally and dramatically, this does not make sense. But what Lawrence is doing takes him further than the dramatic or psychological reality of individual characters. True, he is showing the personal destructiveness of the two characters as individuals; but the terms of sentences such as the one just quoted are designed to take the characters beyond the personal level of the individual in a realistic fictional image. Thus phrases like "underworld knowledge", "hellish recognition", and "implicated . . . in abhorrent mysteries" are not strictly to be understood, and indeed are very difficult to understand, in terms of the dramatic and psychological actuality of the characters alone. Through such phrases Lawrence is setting the relationship between Gerald and Gudrun in the wider contexts of the imaginative framework of Women in Love as a whole. We are equipped for seeing them as playing a rôle in what is, at this level, essentially a symbolic drama.

To go any further towards supporting what are, and must for the moment remain, unproven assertions about the nature of Women in Love as a novel would be to anticipate the work of the rest of this study. We must content ourselves for the present with noticing the immediate point behind this example from Women in Love - its difference from the Emma episode. When we say that the Women in Love episode has a distinct non-realistic level we do not mean that it is necessarily "unreal", that it is incredible or cannot be believed in; nor do we mean that it does not work through the dramatic means of authentic character and action which form the basis for the art of realism. What is so striking and impressive about Women in Love is that it uses this traditional mode as the basis for an extension of fictional art. Lawrence creates a very concrete and dramatically viable scene; but whereas the episode from Emma worked purely through the dramatic reverberations of the characters and their

discussion, this episode from Women in Love is given, through its presentation, reverberations which take it beyond the strictly dramatic level alone, and in effect beyond realism. This is a fictional image presented on a more than literal level. The non-realism of a fictional image is not to be determined simply by asking whether the events and characters are incredible, not a copy of life. The non-realism of poetic fiction is determined by asking whether the elements of the fictional image are being used for more than the literal dramatic effect associated with realistic fiction. It is the way in which the image is used to present life which is all important.

The discussion of this example is necessarily crude and much simplified: we do not want to anticipate the real work of the rest of the thesis, which lies in the very demonstration and élaboration of the points just made and in detailed examination of the way in which elements of a fictional image are used imaginatively. But this short contrast serves a function by showing that there is a different basis for the working of a poetic fictional image as opposed to a realistic fictional image. We have called this kind of presentation imaginative; the fictional image is being used on a level beyond the immediate literal or dramatic level. There is much justification in the writings of Lawrence and Virginia Woolf for suggesting that they came to see the art of the novel in these terms - in terms of presenting an imaginative or non-realistic fiction image of life.

Lawrence lays great stress upon the rôle of art in general as an imaginative apprehension of life rather than a mimetic one. Lawrence's use of the term "imagination", probably derived ultimately from the Romantic poets [30], is defined in "Introduction to These Paintings", in

[30] Lawrence's ideas about imagination have much in common with those of the great Romantic theorist on this concept, Coleridge. Something of Lawrence's close association with the Romantics and Romantic tradition may be gathered from H. Lindenberger, "Lawrence and the Romantic Tradition" in A D.H Lawrence Miscellany ed. H. T. Moore, Heinemann (1961) p. 326-40.

which he writes that "the imagination is a kindled state of consciousness in which intuitive awareness predominates." [31] Lawrence seems to use the terms "intuition" and "intuitive" as interchangeable for "imagination" and "imaginative". [32] The importance of imaginative or intuitive perception for Lawrence was that it went beyond an objective perception of the world to discover the life within: "The reality of substantial bodies can only be perceived by the imagination". [33] Again and again we find him emphasising that the true life of the world and its inhabitants is not to be found simply in the objective fact of their existence. To discover the true "life" of things and achieve a true relationship with the world around him, man must exercise his imaginative faculties:

> by intuition alone can man <u>really</u> be aware of man, or of the living, substantial world. By intuition alone can man live and know either woman or world, and by intuition alone can he bring forth again images of magic awareness which we call art.
>
> our imaginative life is a great joy and fulfilment to us, for the imagination is a more powerful and more comprehensive flow of consciousness than our ordinary flow. In the flow of true imagination we know in full, mentally and physically at once, in a greater, enkindled awareness. At the maximum of our imagination we are religious. And if we deny our imagination, and have no imaginative life, we are poor worms who have never lived. [34]

Hence the importance of art for Lawrence: those "images of magic awareness which we call art" are created by the intuitive awareness of the imagination and reveal that living momentary contact between man and the world that is true "life". In Lawrence's words, "The business of art is to reveal the relation between man and his circumambient universe, at the living moment." [35]

[31] D. H. Lawrence, "Introduction to These Paintings", <u>Phoenix</u>, p.559

[32] Earlier in this same essay he writes about "The imaginative vision which includes physical, intuitional perception, . . .", D.H. Lawrence, <u>ibid.</u>, p. 557

[33] D. H. Lawrence <u>ibid.</u>, p.559

[34] D. H. Lawrence <u>ibid.</u>, p.556 and p.559

[35] D. H. Lawrence, "Morality and the Novel", <u>Phoenix</u> p.527

The way art does this is by representation - but, Lawrence stresses, it is a certain kind of representation: "the plastic arts . . . depend entirely on the representation of substantial bodies, and on the intuitional perception of the reality of substantial bodies." [36] This essay is especially concerned of course with the "plastic" art, painting; but it nevertheless demonstrates Lawrence's basic beliefs about the nature of art and the artistic vision. He emphasises the "intuitional perception of the reality of substantial bodies" as the most living kind of artistic representation. Later in the essay, he goes on to extol Cézanne for developing an imaginative presentation of objects and people at the expense of the literal, the "likeness", of conventional realistic painting, which, Lawrence suggests, has become a cliché unable any more to capture life:

> the intuitive apperception of the apple is so tangibly aware of the apple that it is aware of it all round, not only just of the front. The eye sees only fronts, and the mind, on the whole, is satisfied with fronts. But intuition needs all-roundness, and instinct needs insideness. The true imagination is for ever curving round to the other side, to the back of presented appearance. [37]

Lawrence clearly admires in art that kind of perception and presentation which curves imaginatively round to the other side.

Nearer to home, in his essay on the novel "Morality and the Novel", Lawrence again argues this point through an example from the plastic arts, but in such a way that the direct relevance of imaginative presentation to the novel cannot be denied. He takes the example of Van Gogh's painting of sunflowers: "When Van Gogh paints sunflowers, he reveals, or achieves, the vivid relation between himself, as man, and the sunflower, as sunflower, at that quick moment of time." [38] The relationship is essentially imaginative - the terms are exactly those of the essay just discussed: "His painting does not represent the sunflower". [39]

[36] D.H. Lawrence, "Introduction to These Paintings", Phoenix, p.559
[37] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.579
[38] D.H. Lawrence, "Morality and the Novel", Phoenix, p.527
[39] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.527

Lawrence admires this painting, as he did Cézanne's, because it is not a photographic representation of a sunflower: in achieving a vivid relationship between himself and the sunflowers, Van Gogh has presented their inherent life imaginatively by transforming them into ragged crowns of fire. In this example Lawrence is again demonstrating that imaginative presentation is not a mere alternative to the "Kodak-vision" of photographic realism: for him it is the only way in which the true life of the subject can be revealed. The importance of this for us is that he goes on to relate what he has just said directly to the novel as an art form. This "perfected relation between man and his circum-ambient universe", which Van Gogh achieves in his sunflowers (and which is basically imaginative in nature), "is life itself, for mankind"; and Lawrence goes on to say "The novel is a perfect medium for revealing to us the changing rainbow of our living relationships." [40] The direct linkage suggests quite definitely that, in the face of the often almost photographic realism of some of his contemporaries, Lawrence felt that the novel needed to adopt an imaginative rather than purely realistic presentation of human experience if it were to regain its contact with life. To get at life the novel, in his eyes, needed to go beyond objective actuality and transform it into an imaginative fictional image, an "image of magic awareness".

In his discussions of other novelists, notably his essays on Melville and Hawthorne, Lawrence demonstrates his ideas by association with their fictional practice. He admires Hawthorne's ability to universalize his characters and give them an imaginative dimension, so that the novel is no longer conducted as a simply realistic fictional image on a personal level: "[Hawthorne is] not. . . a realist, nor even a novelist. He is not working in the <u>personal</u> plane. His great characters. .

[40] D.H. Lawrence, <u>ibid</u>., p.527, 532.

are not presented spontaneously as persons. They are abstracted beyond the personal plane. They are not even types. They represent the human soul in its passional abstraction,".[41] He admires the universality of Hawthorne's conception, presented through an essentially non-realistic use of character and action. In Moby Dick it is the conception of the voyage as the basis for the novel which catches his attention, and the way in which Melville infuses the concrete actuality of the fictional world with an imaginative significance. The beauty of this novel for Lawrence lies in "the identity of daily experience with profound mystic experience" [42], and in the way "actuality, of itself, in deep issues, becomes symbolic." [43] In both these cases Lawrence is admiring the use of the fictional image in a non-realistic way on a imaginative level.

Not only does Lawrence look to these novelists, but he looks also back to the ancient traditions of mythic, philosophical and religious narrative. He associates himself with their essentially non-realistic, imaginative presentation of experience by means of non-literal fictional images, and also with the particular quality which this kind of presentation made available to ancient writers - the quality of a universal perspective on life. When looking for a future for the novel in "Surgery for the Novel - or a Bomb", Lawrence contemplates rejecting entirely the petty personal level of modern fiction and turning back to the kind of wider view of life to be found in classical times:

[41] D.H. Lawrence, "Nathaniel Hawthorne 1" in The Symbolic Meaning ed. A. Arnold, Centaur Press (1962), p.139.

[42] D.H. Lawrence, "Melville's Moby Dick", The Symbolic Meaning, p 239.

[43] D. H. Lawrence, ibid., p.240.

> If you wish to look into the past for what-next books, you can go back to the Greek philosophers. Plato's Dialogues are queer little novels. It seems to me it was the greatest pity in the world, when philosophy and fiction got split. They used to be one, right from the days of myth. Then they went and parted, like a nagging married couple, with Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas and that beastly Kant. So the novel went sloppy, and philosophy when abstract-dry. The two should come together again - in the novel. 44

His essays dealing with the texts of the ancient mythic and religious narratives demonstrate his preoccupation with their primarily imaginative presentation of life. In particular, there is the essay on Carter's "Dragon of the Apocalypse". What Lawrence admires about myth, in direct contrast to the schematic, definable fictional images of allegorical narrative, is that its depth and universality, achieved through its symbolic nature, make it entirely indefinable:

> Allegory is narrative description using, as a rule, images to express certain definite qualities. Each image means something and is a term in the argument and nearly always for a moral or didactic purpose . . . Myth likewise is descriptive narrative using images. But myth is never an argument, it never has a didactic nor a moral purpose, you can draw no conclusion from it. Myth is an attempt to narrate a whole human experience of which the purpose is too deep going too deep in the blood and soul, for mental explanation and description. 45

He admires the "imaginative comprehension" of human experience which myth presents, and goes on to say that "the images of myth are symbols. They don't "mean something". They stand for units of human feeling, human experience." He concludes by asking "Who cares about explaining the Apocalypse, either allegorically or astrologically or historically or any other way. All one cares about is the lead, the lead that the symbolic figures give us, and the dramatic movement". 46 Lawrence clearly admires the achievements of these ancient narratives. He seems himself to be seeking some symbolic or imaginative form in which to

44 D. H. Lawrence, "Surgery for the Novel - or a Bomb", Phoenix, p.520

45 D. H. Lawrence, "The Dragon of the Apocalypse by Frederick Carter", Phoenix, p.295-6

46 D. H. Lawrence, ibid., p.297

embody his own life or view of life: "What we want is complete imaginative experience, which goes through the whole soul and body . . . I would like to be able to put my ego into the sun, and my personality into the moon, and my character into the planets, and live the life of the heavens, as the early Chaldeans did." [47]

Such a fictional image of life would indeed be non-realistic. Lawrence did not go so far as that. But we can extract from his associational admiration for mythic narrative some basic points which are directly relevant to his practice in his poetic fiction. He quite clearly admires the imaginative appeal which mythic narrative makes, and the way it utilises an imaginative presentation of life through a basically symbolic fictional image. He admires also the self-sufficiency of myth, the way it attempts to conceive as a whole a universal vision of life - he writes elsewhere that "The old symbols were each a word in a great attempt at formulating the whole history of the soul of mankind.", and describes Apocalypse as a "drama of cosmic man". [48]

The importance of Lawrence's interest in mythic narrative is its reflection upon his own fictional practice. There is evidence to show that he saw his own art as a novelist in terms not far removed from those in which he describes the practices of mythic tradition. In a letter to Gordon Campbell in 1914 we find Lawrence postulating an alternative in art to the personal egoism which characterised modern art:

> I think there is a dual way of looking at things: our way which is to say "I am all. All other things are but radiation out of me." - The other way is to try to conceive the whole, to build up a whole by means of symbolism, because symbolism avoids the I and puts aside the egoist; and, in the whole, to take our decent place. [49]

[47] D. H. Lawrence, ibid., p.297, 298.

[48] D. H. Lawrence, Letter to Gordon Campbell 19th, 20th December 1914, in H. T. Moore, The Intelligent Heart, Penguin (1966), p.226.

[49] D. H. Lawrence, ibid., p.297.

Later, in a letter of 1915 to Lady Ottoline Morrell, Lawrence intimates that this latter "way" is now his own way. In discussing Duncan Grant's paintings he writes:

> Tell him to seek out the terms in which he shall express the whole. He is after stating the Absolute, a whole conception of the existence of man - creation, good, evil, life, death, resurrection, the separation of the stream of good and evil, and its return to the eternal source. It is an Absolute we are all after, a statement of the whole scheme. . . The way to express the abstract-whole is to reduce the object to a unit, a term and then out of these units and terms to make a whole statement. [50]

As is often the case, Lawrence illuminates as much, if not more, about his own aims as those of his subject. We see him here preoccupied with the belief that art can and should express a universal view of life rather than the simply personal outlook of some of Lawrence's contemporaries. Art can, he believes, achieve in modern times the impersonality, the depth of relevance that he admires in ancient art; and the way to do this is to turn, like the ancients, to a non-personalised kind of presentation - the imaginative or symbolic, as he calls it in this particular letter, kind of presentation which we have already demonstrated his interest in. For the novel this means (if we can draw upon the suggestions of his writings on myth) adopting a fictional world which can work symbolically and imaginatively, rather than simply on a literal level.

Such ideas led Lawrence to re-think some of the basic conventions of the novel, conventions derived from the dominance of realism as a mode of presentation. In particular we will find him struggling to escape from and to transform the convention of character conception and presentation. [51] However, what must be stressed is that Lawrence is far from being

[50] D.H. Lawrence, Letter to Lady Ottoline Morrell, 27th January 1915, The Letters of D.H. Lawrence ed. Huxley, p.215.

[51] See below, Chapter 3 Section i.

an extremist. His desire for a wider perspective in fictional art necessitated changes; but they were not changes which ignored or abandoned the past. Though he admired the Futurists for their "revolt against beastly sentiment and slavish adherence to tradition" he also saw that their wish to "deny every scrap of tradition and experience" as "silly".[52] Lawrence's discovery and use of the possibilities of poetic fiction grew out of a firm grounding in realistic tradition. We may remember his admiration for the way Melville based his poetic fiction upon "daily experience".[53] It is for this very quality of balance that Lawrence's best poetic fiction is itself most admirable.

Many of the general principles which we have so far touched upon with regard to Lawrence in this introductory discussion of poetic fiction are equally applicable to Virginia Woolf. We have spent some time exploring Lawrence's ideas on and around the subject simply because they are so many and various, and cover much of the ground which needs to be covered. It will be as well, however, to refer also to Virginia Woolf's writings on the novel which have relevance to this discussion in order to define the terms in which she herself conceived the idea of poetic fiction.

Virginia Woolf's ideas about the presentation of life in the novel, although expressed in somewhat different terms to Lawrence's have this basic similarity: she desired the use of a new kind of fictional image capable of reflecting "general nature" much more directly than the authenticity-ridden intricacies of the prevailing realistic fictional image. As with Lawrence, the need for a new form arose from a desire to deal with a more universal conception of life. In Virginia Woolf's case

[52] D. H. Lawrence, Letter to A.W. McLeod, 2nd June 1914, in Selected Literary Criticism ed. A. Beal, Heinemann (1967), p.19.

[53] See above, p.30 n.42.

this was based in her own quasi-mystical understanding of "life" and "reality", what she called in her diary "the poetry of existence". [54] She was haunted by an acute sense of life as both transitory and eternal at once. She had a distinctive understanding that beneath the apparent chaos of experience there is an eternal "reality", that is "what I call 'reality' : a thing I see before me : something abstract; but residing in the downs or sky; besides which nothing matters; in which I shall rest and continue to exist. Reality I call it." [55] And yet, at the same time, she had a final realisation that this eternal reality can only ever be held in view for a moment, after which it is lost again in the flux of time and experience: "I am haunted by two contradictions. This has gone on for ever; will last for ever; goes down to the bottom of the world - this moment I stand on. Also it is transitory, flying, diaphanous. I shall pass like a cloud on the waves." [56] The desire to present "the poetry of existence" led her to demand a fictional image capable of encompassing such a conception. Her dissatisfaction with the fiction of her contemporaries stems clearly from such an attitude:

> If the English critic were less domestic, less assiduous to protect the rights of what it pleases him to call life, the novelist might be bolder too. He might cut adrift from the eternal teatable and the plausible and preposterous formulas which are supposed to represent the whole of our human adventure. But then the story might wobble; the plot might crumble; ruin might seize upon the characters. The novel, in short, might become a work of art." [57]

There is her no less virulent outburst in the essay "Modern Fiction": she puts forward the idea that "the form of fiction most in vogue", which, she suggests later, is based upon "likeness to life", "more often misses than secures the thing we seek. Whether we call it life or spirit, truth or

[54] Virginia Woolf, A Writer's Diary, p.56.
[55] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.132.
[56] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.141.
[57] Virginia Woolf, "The Art of Fiction" Collected Essays Vol.2, p.55.

reality, this, the essential thing, has moved off, or on, and refuses to be contained any longer in such ill-fitting vestments as we provide. Nevertheless, we go on perseveringly, conscientiously, constructing our two and thirty chapters after a design which more and more ceases to resemble the vision in our minds." [58] We find her seeking, even as early as in The Voyage Out, the kind of fictional image and fictional presentation which will reach this level. As confirmation there is her letter of 1916 to Lytton Strachey in which she describes her aim in writing The Voyage Out as follows: "What I wanted to do was to give the feeling of a vast tumult of life, as various and disorderly as possible, which should be cut short for a moment by the death [of Rachel], and go on again - and the whole was to have a sort of pattern, and be somehow controlled." [59] Years later, the somewhat tentative tone of this proposal was to give way to the determined and clear-sighted confidence of this passage from the 1928 diary:

> what I want now to do is to saturate every atom. I mean to eliminate all waste, deadness, superfluity . . . Why admit anything to literature that is not poetry - by which I mean saturated? Is that not my grudge against novelists? that they select nothing? The poets succeeding by simplifying : practically everything is left out. I want to put practically everything in : yet to saturate. [60]

It is intriguing how Virginia Woolf nearly always associates the kind of fictional presentation which she desires with that of poetry and poets. She was as close to coining the phrase "poetic fiction" or "poetic novel" as anyone could be without actually doing so. In this passage she suggests that the kind of fiction she is aiming at will work in a manner akin to poetry by selecting, simplifying and "saturating". Her words

[58] Virginia Woolf, "Modern Fiction" Collected Essays Vol.2, p.105, 106.

[59] Virginia Woolf, Virginia Woolf and Lytton Strachey - Letters, ed. Leonard Woolf and James Strachey, Hogarth/Chatto and Windus (1969), p.56.

[60] Virginia Woolf, A Writer's Diary, p.139

imply a rejection of the fabric of the realistic image in favour of a more concentrated fictional world, an essentially non-literal image working through an imaginative presentation of life. What she admired about poetic presentation was the power by which the poet goes beyond the literal and sees actuality "strangely transformed" [61], the power of imagination. We find Virginia Woolf's inclinations reflected like Lawrence's in certain of her essays on novelists who share her standpoint in some degree. Thus she admired Hardy for his combination of "the true novelist's power - to make us believe that his characters are fellow-beings driven by their own passions and idiosyncracies" with "the poet's gift" which gives his characters "something symbolical about them which is common to us all". [62] Melville, too, was for her one of the "poet-novelists. . . to whom facts are symbols". [63] The other aspect of the poet's art which she admired and wished to incorporate in the novel was his power to generalise and reflect on life through intensely evocative language. She admired writers like De Quincey for having achieved something similar in prose, and even more remarkable, Sterne, for having achieved something similar in the novel itself. She recognised Sterne's achievement in having created a kind of fictional image which might allow him to reflect about life at will, and follow "the windings of his own mind" [64], rather than be constrained by realistic detail.

[61] Virginia Woolf, "Impassioned Prose", Collected Essays Vol. 1, p.172. For a summary of Virginia Woolf's ideas about the novel and poetry see R.A. Brower, "The Novel as Poem - Virginia Woolf", in M.W. Bloomfield, The Interpretation of Narrative, Harvard : Massachusetts, (1970), p.229-48.

[62] Virginia Woolf, "The Novels of Thomas Hardy", Collected Essays Vol.1 p.261.

[63] Virginia Woolf, "The Novels of Turgenev", Collected Essays, Vol. 1, p.250.

[64] Virginia Woolf, "Introduction" to A Sentimental Journey, by Laurence Sterne, Oxford University Press, (1965), p.x.

However, we must not instil the impression that poetic fiction is simply a matter of avoiding the constraints of the authenticated realistic image. No doubt Virginia Woolf would have agreed with Uncle Toby's advice to Corporal Trim to leave the date out of his story of the King of Bohemia as "a story passes very well without these niceties, unless one is pretty sure of''em." [65] She did say that she herself did not have what she called "that 'reality' gift" [66], which one can well believe from her often cumbersome and even inept handling of the elements of the realistic convention in her two early novels The Voyage Out and Night and Day, and in The Years. But there is much more to her desire to "eliminate all waste, deadness, superfluity" than a fear of the "niceties" of realism. The elimination of the realistic fabric and framework necessitates replacing it with a concrete alternative. Virginia Woolf never really comes down to abstractly specifying her alternatives in her essays, and in her diary she is too concerned with the details of the particular works ever to generalise very much about her own practice. But we do have her own survey of changing fictional forms, "Phases of Fiction", which in many ways is her fullest statement of her own predilection towards using a non-literal presentation in fiction. Taken together with her attacks on contemporary realism and her association with poetic art, this essay is an assurance, if we still need it, that imaginative presentation was what Virginia Woolf sought.

The essay "Phases in Fiction" comes close to a theory of fiction, or as close as Virginia Woolf ever came. She outlined the idea of the essay in her diary for 1925 with characteristically provocative and mischievous humour:

[65] Laurence Sterne, The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Penguin (1967), p.537

[66] Virginia Woolf, A Writer's Diary, p.57

> I think I will find some theory about fiction; I shall read six novels and start some hares. The one I have in view is about perspective . . . I don't think it is a matter of "development" but something to do with prose and poetry, in novels; For instance Defoe at one end; E. Brontë at the other. Reality something they put at different distances. One would have to go into conventions; real life; and so on. It might last me - this theory . . . 67

In effect, Virginia Woolf is describing the possibility of a shift from the use of a realistic fictional image to the use of a non-realistic or non-literal image which we postulated earlier as the basis for this thesis. She clearly associated hereself with Emily Brontë's end of the scale of perspective - the point at which the fictional image is primarily poetic in effect. The essay itself goes into much greater detail, illustrating the different kinds of fictional perspective available to the novelist, avoiding, as must we, any over-simplified view of this as a matter of the novel's historical development. The argument of the essay is characteristically light and playful rather than fully worked out. When planning the essay Virginia Woolf modestly recognised the limitation of her own powers for closely argued thought. 68 But the survey is lively, often ingenious, nearly always stimulating, and of direct relevance here.

She begins her first fictional category, the Truth-Tellers - novelists like Defoe whose art depends upon gratifying "our power of belief". The perspective of such fictional images is very close to life as it is, objective outer life; but this is at the expense of restricting the novelist's vision. This kind of presentation can only encompass a limited view of life through personal or individual circumstances: anymore universal or more mystical view of reality "would so have discredited the landscape and cast doubt upon the substance of the men and women that our belief in them would have perished at the heart." 69 At the same time as pointing out

67 Virginia Woolf, A Writer's Diary, p.83
68 Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.83
69 Virginia Woolf, "Phases of Fiction", Collected Essays Vol.2, p. 58-9.

the limitations of the method, she demonstrates her understanding of the art of realistic fiction: "the mark of a second-rate writer [is] that he cannot pause here or suggest there. All his powers are strained in keeping the scene before us, its brightness and its credibility. The surface is all; there is nothing beyond." [70] The art of the realistic novelist lies in the dramatically suggestive use of the authenticated image rather than simply in its creation. The next category is the Romantic novelists like Scott, who are less concerned with an authentic image of the world and who have something of the non-literal capacity for "obliterating facts". [71] The result of this different presentation is a difference in perspective, a less solid view of life. The Character-Mongers and Comedians are those novelists, like Dickens, Tolstoy and Jane Austen, whose art lies in a full grasp and exploitation of the dramatic potential of the realistic image. Thus Dickens has "an eye which sees once and for all : which snatches at a woman's steel-hair curlers, a pair of red-rimmed eyes, a white scar and makes them somehow reveal the essence of a character" [72] though she also recognises Dickens' imaginative power, his "avenues of suggestion" , his romantic elements. Jane Austen, by contrast, "had not the impulses of a poet", Virginia Woolf wrote elsewhere. [73] Instead she was the true mistress of the controlled dramatic art of realistic fiction: "each stroke of the dialogue brings [the characters] together or moves them apart, so that the group is no longer casual but interlocked . . . The sentence here runs like a knife, in and out, cutting a shape clear." [74] Behind the realistic image there is a distinct sense of dramatic form and significance: "a quality which is not in the story but above it, not in the things themselves but in their arrangement . . . we have been aware of check and stimulus, of spectral architecture built up behind the animation and variety of the scene.", and

[70] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.61
[71] Virginia Woolf, ibid. p.69
[72] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.72
[73] Virginia Woolf, in R.A. Brower, as in n.61 above, p.243.
[74] Virginia Woolf, "Phases of Fiction", Collected Essays Vol.2, p.74-5

this architecture "far from chilling the interest or withdrawing the attention from the characters, it seems on the contrary, to focus it and add an extra pleasure to the book, a significance." [75] Jane Austen represents the highest achievements of the dramatic art of realism and the realistic fictional image.

Virginia Woolf goes on to the breakdown of the traditional form of fictional image based, as it was, on an imitation of actual life. She sees this breakdown as coming at the point when personal relations are transcended and a new form of presentation, bringing a new perspective, is introduced. The legacy of George Eliot's psychological insight into character is that the action moves from the outer to the inner: "The usual supports, the props and struts of the conventions, expressed or observed by the writer, are removed." By no longer being a literal image of objective reality, the fictional world becomes more flexible aesthetically: "By cutting off the responses which are called out in the actual life the novelist frees us to take delight . . . in things themselves." [76] We can gather the direction which Virginia Woolf saw the novel as following from the remarks in the short sketch "The Mark on the Wall": the "novelists in the future" will continue to follow the trend outlined in "Phases of Fiction", " "leaving the description of reality more and more out of their stories, taking a knowledge of it for granted, as the Greeks did, and Shakespeare perhaps.".[77]

"Phases of Fiction" thus postulates a sliding scale of fictional images of life: in proportion as the novelist retreats from a literal translation of the world so his fictional image becomes more and more non-literal in method, working by presenting life and using the fictional image imaginatively rather than purely dramatically. The non-literal and

75 Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.77-8
76 Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.81-2
77 Virginia Woolf, "The Mark on the Wall", A Haunted House and other short stories, Hogarth (1967), p.43-4

non-realistic fictional image works by giving to the elements of the fictional world a further, imaginative level of meaning which does not necessarily correlate to the kinds of assumptions and responses we make to actual life. This is the kind of fictional presentation which Virginia Woolf sought for herself. But she too, like Lawrence, realised the dangers of moving too far away from actual life and from the traditions of realism. Though she never equalled Lawrence's brilliance in the art of realistic fiction itself, she was well aware of its capacities and virtues; and well aware also that the use of a non-realistic fictional image brought with it the temptations of being too abstract or too private by belonging too much to the novelist's own imagination. As Joseph Conrad said in the quotation with which we began, the artist's world "is fated to remain individual and a little mysterious . . . yet it must resemble something already familiar to the experience . . of the reader". Virginia Woolf states a very similar idea in her 1934 diary - admittedly quite late in her career, but her practice had already anticipated it in her best work:

> the play demands coming to the surface - hence insists upon a reality which the novel need not have, but perhaps should have contact with the surface, coming to the top. This is working out my theory of the different levels in writing and how to combine them : for I begin to think the combination necessary. 78

This is not a reaction but a refinement of her earlier more extreme rejection of the realistic fictional image in essays such as "Modern Fiction" and "The Art of Fiction", in which she was specifically concerned with the contemporary form of realism. In an essay on Proust, she exhibits further her belief in the need to combine levels of writing, imaginative with realistic. She writes that in Proust's novel,

78 Virginia Woolf, A Writer's Diary, p.215-6.

> the poetry comes, not in the situation, which is too fretted and voluminous for such an effect, but in those frequent passages of elaborate metaphor, which spring out of the rock of thought like fountains of sweet water and serve as translations from one language into another. It is as though there were two faces to every situation; one full in the light so that it can be described as accurately and examined as minutely as possible; the other half in shadow so that it can be described only in a moment of faith and vision by the use of metaphor. 79

She admires Proust's ability to use objective situations and to turn them into a springboard for a deeper imaginative level. The imaginative presentation is based upon and drawn out of a fictional image which has a definedly concrete and even realistic actuality. Virginia Woolf's statements here and Lawrence's suggestions in his admiration of Melville point to the same basic principle: the poetic novelist must be careful that, in his adoption of a non-realistic, imaginative presentation of life, his fictional image does not become too far removed from the world to be unsharable by the reader. The most obvious and, indeed, the most successful solution is to base the imaginative presentation of life on a fictional image which is capable of sustaining both levels - the dramatic level of realistic fiction and the imaginative level of poetic fiction. Just such a balance often accounts for the appeal of the most successful poetic fiction of both writers.

This discussion of Virginia Woolf's ideas about non-realism takes the argument of this thesis as far as it need to go in theory, at least. We have seen how both Lawrence and Virginia Woolf desired a new kind of fictional presentation of life, from a disillusionment with contemporary practice of realism and from a wish to introduce a more general and more universal level of reference into the novel. To do this they proposed a new kind of fictional world - a fictional image which worked imaginatively as well as dramatically,

79 Virginia Woolf, in R.A. Brower (as in n.61 above), p.243-4.

and which had a wider reference to life by virtue of having a symbolic or imaginative level of meaning in addition to a dramatic level. In the next chapters we shall examine the resulting forms of fictional world and elements which compose them. Chapter Two discusses some of the different kinds of fictional images of life to be found in the works of our two authors. The third chapter considers how they treat the concept of character as an element of their non-realistic fictional worlds. The fourth chapter draws some wider implications from the study, by way of conclusion; whilst the two appendices serve to demonstrate the effects of this form of fiction upon the medium of prose.

Chapter Two : THE POETIC FICTIONAL WORLD

i : The Poetic Fable.

From approximately 1920 onwards, D.H. Lawrence constantly turned to a fictional world akin to fable [1] as the most viable short form for his imagination. The Man Who Loved Islands, The Man Who Died, The Man Who Was Through With The World, The Woman Who Rode Away - all of these strange little tales by their very titles invite us to think of them as fables or fairy tales. These works are perhaps the most interesting point at which to begin this discussion in which we shall be examining some of the different kinds of imaginative representation to be found in the works of D.H. Lawrence and Virginia Woolf. Lawrence's poetic fables epitomise one kind of poetic fictional image of life.

What Lawrence does in such fable tales is to re-create the atmosphere, the pervading unreality of fable and fairy tale in such a way as to isolate the fictional construct from the demands of realism and realistic presentation. These tales are not fables in that they have any exemplary moral function. They are fables in the

[1] The epithet "fable" has often been used previously to describe some of the tales under consideration. Julian Moynahan has discussed The Man Who Loved Islands as "A Modern Fable" (Modern Fiction Studies V, Spring 1959, p.57-64); F.R. Leavis considers the same tale as a "marchen" (D.H. Lawrence : Novelist, Penguin (1964), p.280); Keith Sagar makes the analogy between various of these tales and myth (The Art of D.H. Lawrence, Cambridge University Press (1966), p.147); whilst R.E. Pritchard uses the term fable in the derogatory sense of them being "fantastic and unhappy. . .isolated fantasies" (D.H. Lawrence : Body of Darkness, Hutchinson University Library (1971), p.164.)

sense that they share the simplification of action, story and character, and the element of fantasy which we associate with fable. By adopting this form, and thus being freed from the conventions of realistic representation, Lawrence is free to create whatever fictional world he wishes: he can invent any situation he likes in which to embody the idea in his imagination without any regard for the credibility or authenticity of it in terms of the actual world. What Lawrence attempts is fantasy or romance - romance in Nathaniel Hawthorne's sense of the word. In his Preface to The House of the Seven Gables, Hawthorne suggests that the Novelist is presumed to aim at "a very minute fidelity, not merely to the possible, but to the probable and ordinary course of man's experience", whereas the writer of Romance is not bound at all by the necessity to imitate life in a credible and authentic illusion of actuality: the writer of Romance, whilst he must not swerve from "the truth of the human heart", "has fairly a right to present that truth under circumstances, to a great extent, of the writer's own choosing or creation." [2] The fictional image may, if necessary, be entirely divorced from the actual world, a product of the writer's imagination and fantasy. The implication of this is that the fictional image of "the truth of the human heart" is free to function entirely in its own terms, whatever terms the author creates for it. The relationship between the fictional world and human experience (i.e. the meaning of the fiction) is free to be placed upon a level other than the imitative; and hence our perception of that relationship will be of a different nature: we will apprehend the fictional image as an imaginative representation of human experience. This is what happens in Lawrence's poetic fables.

[2] Nathaniel Hawthorne, The House of the Seven Gables, Dent Everyman (1967), p.xi.

The tales I would describe as poetic fables are The Fox (1918), The Captain's Doll (1921), The Ladybird (1921), The Woman Who Rode Away (1924), St Mawr (1924), The Princess (1924), The Virgin and the Gypsy (1925), The Man Who Loved Islands (1927), The Man Who Was Through With The World (1927), The Man Who Died (1928), The Flying Fish (1928), and Lady Chatterley's Lover (1928) among the novels. [3] What these works have in common is a more or less radical attempt to turn entirely away from realism, and a focusing of attention upon the imaginative significance of the action. This is done specifically in order to embody the universal dimension of human experience, defined by Lawrence in the letter to Lady Ottoline Morrell quoted earlier as "creation, good, evil, life, death, resurrection". [4] By adopting the fable form Lawrence aims at avoiding the specifically personal level of human experience implicit in realistic representation, and creating viable fictional worlds which function as imaginative vehicles for what are essentially universal dramas. The poetic fables are invented fictional constructs, bearing little relation to the actual world, functioning as imaginative representations of universal experiences. Behind each fable is some central action or drama which embodies a universal conflict of life and death. For example, there is the confrontation between the central figure of a fable and some vivifying life-force, resulting in the release of the figure from a state of symbolic death or anti-life. This resurrection fable can be found in The Man Who Died, The Fox, The Virgin and the Gypsy, Lady Chatterley's Lover, The Flying Fish - each of them different fictional embodiments of the same fable. Alternatively, there is the confrontation between a central figure and some destructive anti-life force, as in The Man Who Loved Islands or The Woman Who Rode Away.

[3] The dates refer to the actual completion of the tales.
[4] See above, Chapter One, p.33.

In each of these cases the central figure of the fable enacts a drama which, at its furthest, can be seen as a life/death battle on a universal level. It is such a battle that the fictional worlds of the poetic fables attempt to represent. This is the level on which they function as images of human experience; and the way in which they function is imaginative, non-realistic.

So far it has been suggested that Lawrence's aim in the poetic fables is to create a viable fictional construct which functions imaginatively as a vehicle for a universal drama. Before corroborating this view with a discussion of some individual examples, it is necessary to allay some misapprehensions which may have arisen. "What," the reader may be asking, "has happened to Lawrence the great realistic novelist, the Lawrence in touch with the actualities and particularities of human relationships and human experience? Surely this fable-making Lawrence is a mis-representation?" These doubts are entirely valid; and to allay them we should notice two things. Firstly, I am not suggesting that Lawrence is <u>simply</u> a fable-maker: he is obviously much more than this; and I can only lay claim to the tales already specified. Secondly, there is no reason why the kind of fictional image described above cannot (in some cases at least) function in part realistically. The case put forward above is the extreme view of the poetic fable idea. It is not necessarily vital to sacrifice all the realistic actuality and dramatic appeal of a fictional image in order to create a viable poetic fable. Indeed, this is at times Lawrence's great strength: in certain tales like <u>The Virgin and the Gypsy</u>, <u>The Fox</u> and <u>St Mawr</u> he creates fictional worlds which function in part as realistic images of life and in part as poetic fables enacting a universal drama. Such a balance is a useful

quality, though again not absolutely necessary. It all hangs upon a vital word used in the above definition of the aims of the poetic fables: the aim is to create a viable fictional construct, one which is imaginatively acceptable to the reader. Thus, the writer of poetic fables may wish to follow Hawthorne's advice that "He will be wise, no doubt, to make a very moderate use of the privileges here stated, and especially to mingle the Marvellous rather as a slight, delicate and evanescent flavour, than as any portion of the actual substance of the dish offered to the public." After all, if a degree of realism balances the romance/fable element then the resultant fictional image will be, at least latently, viable on two levels. But such a balance is not necessarily essential - as Hawthorne says, "He can hardly be said, however, to commit a literary crime, even if he disregard this caution." [4] The fable-writer may wish to create a fictional image which is totally removed from the actual world, as is the case in some other of Lawrence's works in this vein. The success of such fables depends entirely upon the writer having created a situation which, although not necessarily credible or recognisably related to the actual world, is at least imaginatively convincing. As long as the imagined situation is given a vivid concrete embodiment and the fictional world is fleshed out with details in its own terms, then it is a latently viable vehicle as an image of human experience. This point is of no little importance. Since such a fictional world can no longer command our interest by its truth to life, it must convince and involve us in its own terms, otherwise there is a distinct danger that the fiction may simply become a self-enclosed fantasy meeting with no acceptance in the reader's imagination. Perhaps more important still, the fiction (fantasy though it may be) must have some direct relationship to human experience as a whole, outside the author's own imagination. It must, as Joseph Conrad said, "resemble something

[4] Nathaniel Hawthorne, as in n.2, above, loc. cit.

already familiar to the experience, the thoughts and sensations of his readers." [5]

What has so far been postulated is that in Lawrence's poetic fables the relationship between the fictional world and the actual world is of a different nature to a realistic representation of life. It is not directly imitative of actuality. It is distanced, removed from actuality and the imitation of actuality. The way we may test the nature of this relationship with regard to the poetic fables is by asking what is missing in them that one would normally expect in a realistic fiction that should lead us to describe these fables as non-realistic. What is essentially missing is the careful authentication of the fictional image in terms of its imitation of actuality. The fables are unreal as recognisably as fairy tale, myth and fable themselves are unreal. To substantiate the views put forward about the nature of these tales, the following discussion will deal with the two types of poetic fable. Firstly, the type which mixes fable with realism: for this, the short novel The Virgin and the Gypsy is an excellent piece to examine. Secondly, the type which is virtually pure fable; and for this The Woman Who Rode Away and The Man Who Loved Islands will be dealt with together. Following the discussion of these examples, we can then pursue an idea already latent in the forgoing suggestions - the idea of repeating fables and the implications of this in terms of Lawrence's fictional practice. Let us begin, however, with The Virgin and the Gypsy.

[5] See above, Chapter One, p.2.

At first glance the plot of The Virgin and the Gypsy appears remarkably credible in view of the ends to which Lawrence puts it. The revolt of the two sisters against a stifling and repressive home background, Yvette's reaction in her defiant relations with the Eastwoods, and her romantic challenge for freedom in her identification with the gypsy, are all credible and even familiar human responses to such a situation. Lawrence himself dreamed romantically of being "off with the raggle-taggle gypsys" [6] ; and except for the ending of the tale, Yvette's relations with the gypsy might be said to have no more foundation on her part than the fantasies of a frustrated young woman, and on his part the sexual opportunism of a passionate man. Noticeably, Lawrence is careful to keep to a credible plot level in character and action for most of his tale. Indeed, this is its virtue as a balanced poetic fiction. Yvette is given quite extensive individuality as a character through the detailed psychological background of the first section of the tale, and through the insight of the narrator as in the account of the girls on their return to England. [7] This individuality is also given dramatic portrayal, as for example in her relations with the Eastwoods. Here the interactions of the characters on a human level, which forms the surface of the narrative, creates that dramatic presentation of experience which we associate with realism. Eastwood's attraction to Yvette, the Jewess' "rather wan, and dumb" reaction to this [8] , and Yvette's sympathetic attempt to clear herself from the charge of trying to steal Eastwood, are dramatised with Lawrence's characteristically subtle and humorous insight into the realities of actual human contact:

[6] D. H. Lawrence, The Collected Letters, ed. H.T. Moore, Heinemann (1962), p.545

[7] D. H. Lawrence, St. Mawr and the Virgin and the Gypsy, Penguin (1967), p.173. (Henceforth referred to as The Virgin and the Gypsy)

[8] D. H. Lawrence, ibid., p.227

> 'But you don't know what love is?' cried the Jewess.
> 'No!' said Yvette. 'Do you?'
> 'I!' bawled the tiny Jewess. 'I! My goodness, don't I!' She looked with reflective gloom at Eastwood, who was smoking his pipe, the dimples of his disconnected amusement showing on his smooth, scrupulous face. 9

We get the full force of Yvette's naïvely ingenuous question showing up not only her own innocence, but also the Jewess' emphatic self-assurance - with the distinct additional hint that the kind of love she knows about is Eastwood's love of other women, as well as her own long-suffering love of him. There is so much dramatic economy in such passages and such control of dialogue that one feels the impact of the situation through the dramatic suggestions. We believe that the characters are real and responsive to one another. The illusion of reality through which a realistic novel works is quite clearly in evidence here, and Lawrence sustains this level throughout the tale most admirably.

However, as a whole the tale cannot be said to work simply through this kind of realism, or even to create an entire realistic surface. A number of the characters are not presented with this degree of realistic conviction. The poetic nature of the tale affords the same element of satiric caricature as in St. Mawr, and for the same purpose. Lawrence's brilliant satiric portraits of the rector and the rest of his family, especially the mater, make their effect as pure caricatures rather than as realistic figures. They are designed as an incisive, but much simplified, presentation of the sterile life from which Yvette is liberated in the main action of the tale. Minor characters, too, such as Leo, are much simplified type figures rather than solidly real characters. Leo is intended as an all-too-obvious and rather stiff contrast to Joe Boswell. But it is in the presentation of Yvette's relations with the gypsy that we see most clearly how much Lawrence's allegiance is to poetic rather than simply to realistic presentation in

9 D. H. Lawrence, The Virgin and the Gypsy, p.227-8

this tale.

The basic action of the plot is obviously a large part fantasy. Yvette becomes enamoured of a gypsy, is on the point of giving herself to him from halfway through the story onwards, and finally does so under highly remarkable circumstances. If we take this on a simply literal level we will obviously be dissatisfied with the unreality of the situation. Girls don't give themselves to unknown gypsies except in the romantic indulgences of women's magazines; and if they do, the result is certainly not the romantic fulfilment of this story. The realities of such a situation, if it occurred in real life, would be all too harsh. Thus, if Lawrence intended to use this plot as a purely realistic vehicle, he would have been at an obvious disadvantage. Such a sequence of events lacks that illusion of reality which we find in tales like Love Among the Haystacks for example (a tale which in many ways shares the same situation as this tale - the liberation of a repressed "virgin" [10], Geoffrey). And the very simplicity of the plot outline suggests that Lawrence did not intend to create a realistic fictional world. Lawrence has deliberately taken as the basis of this situation what amounts to a popular romance motif. The dark swarthy stranger entering uninvited into the life of a young girl and rousing her dormant womanhood is the foundation of some of the greatest romantic literature - Jane Eyre and Wuthering Heights - and of course some of the worst. The motif itself owes its allegiance to fairy tale and folklore themes such as the demon lover. Lawrence uses this basic situation as an imaginative vehicle for the symbolic drama of the tale: the underlying fable concerns the opening of what Lawrence describes as the "undiscovered doors of life" [11] in the form of the gypsy's effect on Yvette. The

[10] D.H. Lawrence, Love Among the Haystacks Penguin (1968), p.10.

[11] D.H. Lawrence, The Virgin and the Gypsy, p.181.

meeting between Yvette and the gypsy is not a personal or realistic one; it is poetically meaningful rather than dramatically meaningful. The confrontation between the dormant woman and the vivifying man enacts a drama which is universally representative in its import and which affects the reader like a fable. If we consider the actual meetings between Yvette and the gypsy we shall see that Lawrence does indeed create such a poetic perspective through his presentation of the action.

As a prelude to each meeting between Yvette and the gypsy the narrative noticeably undergoes a shift of perspective through a change of setting. The meetings take place in surroundings suitably removed from the "real"world, up on the "knuckle" of Bonsall Head - a bare free landscape "naked . . . as the back of your fist" [12] in direct contrast to the stultifying atmosphere of the rectory. The setting makes its point particularly when Yvette goes alone up to the gypsy camp: "The upland was very bare and clear, like another world. She had climbed onto another level." [13] The journey Yvette makes is not simply a change of location: we leave behind the realistic presentation of Yvette with the Eastwoods, and the caricature of life at the rectory and enter into a narrative which is primarily imaginative in its effect. This shift of perspective, from which a deeper narrative level emerges, occurs whenever Yvette comes into contact with the gypsy, even when the gypsy himself visits the rectory [14]. So that when the two characters actually do meet

[12] D. H. Lawrence, The Virgin and the Gypsy, p.184

[13] D. H. Lawrence, ibid., p.213

[14] D. H. Lawrence, ibid., p.202-3. The poetic nature of this meeting is apparent in the analogy between Yvette's waiting at the window and Tennyson's "Lady of Shalott". It is significant in a number of ways. Its very use, comic though it be, suggests how close to a romance this tale is: Yvette waits for her "someone" and the improbable event happens - the gypsy appears with his cart. In addition the analogy suggests that as with the Lady of Shalott, the man Yvette finally sees through the window is the reality and not the illusion of previous days. Typically, Lawrence ignores the curse and transforms Yvette's Launcelot into her means of liberation rather than her death.

we are prepared for their relationship to be presented in a different manner to the rest of the relationships in the tale, and to have an entirely different kind of impact.

This is exactly what we find. Their meetings together and their relationship as a whole work almost entirely in a non-realistic manner. The gypsy in fact never has a place in our imaginations as a believable human character: he remains throughout an impersonal and, until the end, nameless figure. Although Lawrence carefully clothes him, moves him about and makes him act in accordance with our expectations, we see him as an imaginative figure rather than as an individual person. He is representative of the gypsy race, which in turn is representative of the indifference and freedom of creative life. Thus he is described only in the most general terms. He is "handsome . . . pressing in his chin with the old, gypsy conceit" [15], and he has a "peculiar look, in the eyes that belonged to the tribe of the humble . . . who sneered at law-abiding men, and went his own way." [16] In her relations with the gypsy Yvette loses her carefully created dramatic individuality. She responds to him on a different level to the other characters, an ultra-realistic level. At the first meeting, for example, we can compare Yvette's response with Leo's impatient and contemptuous hostility when they meet the gypsy on the road, or with the complete lack of response from the other girls:

> "Get out o' the way then!" yelled Leo.
> For answer the man delicately pulled the horse to a standstill, as it curved to the side of the road. It was a good roan horse, and a good, natty, dark-green cart.
> Leo, in a rage, had to jam on the brake and pull up too.
> "Don't the pretty young ladies want to hear their fortunes?" said the gypsy on the cart, laughing except for his dark, watchful eyes, which went from face to face, and lingered on Yvette's young, tender face.
> She met his dark eyes for a second, their level

[15] D. H. Lawrence, The Virgin and the Gypsy, p.186
[16] D. H. Lawrence, ibid., p.188

> search, their insolence, their complete indifference to people like Bob and Leo, and something took fire in her breast. She thought: "He is stronger than I am! He doesn't care!"
> "Oh yes! let's!" cried Lucille at once. 17

Leo and the girls are presented quite credibly in their attitude to the gypsy, though always with a dramatic point made through Lawrence's artistry - in this example we take note of the contrast between Leo's nervous impatience in his civilised and conventional motor car, and the unconcerned ease of the gypsy in his "good, natty, dark-green cart". The whole of the fortune-telling episode is a brilliant and dramatically pointed sketch of the sophisticated sensation-seeking lives of a group of very normal and very bored gay young "things". By contrast, Yvette's response to the gypsy is of an entirely different order, this difference being the basis of the tale and the reason why Arnold Bennett, for example, could not have written a tale in this way. In Lawrence's hands Yvette is made to feel some connection between herself and the gypsy, a connection which none of the others feel, and which gives her part in the meeting an emphasis that takes it beyond the bounds of realistic presentation:

> . . . He looked at Yvette as he passed, staring her full in the eyes, with his pariah's bold yet dishonest stare. Something hard inside her met his stare. But the surface of her body seemed to turn to water. Never-the-less, something hard in her registered the peculiar pure lines of his face, of his straight, pure nose, of his cheeks and temples. The curious dark, suave purity of all his body, outlined in the green jersey: a purity like a living sneer.
> And as he loped slowly past her, on his flexible hips, it seemed to her still that he was stronger than she was. Of all the men she had ever seen, this one was the only one who was stronger than she was, in her own kind of strength, her own kind of understanding. 18

What the gypsy "doesn't care" about, the basis of his strength for Yvette, is his absolute indifference to all the ties of conventional life which are stifling Yvette herself. She feels his freedom, his natural ease, all the qualities of life which are associated with the

17 D. H. Lawrence, ibid., p.185

18 D. H. Lawrence ibid., p.189

gypsy race in its life as outlaw from society. The gypsy becomes the representative of the "other life" to be lived outside the restrictions of society (represented by Leo and the rest of the group, as well as the rectory family). Lawrence emphasises the connection between Yvette and the gypsy by making it apparent in her own dramatic figure. She begins to manifest the same indifferent and uncaring nonchalance that distinguishes the gypsy: "she paused and turned, debonair, to the others, saying in her naïve, lordly way, so off-hand: 'I won't let her be long.'" [19]

This episode initiates the impression that the relationship between Yvette and the gypsy is to be taken non-realistically. This is confirmed by the presentation that follows of the gypsy's effect on Yvette. In the midst of the Window Fund rumpus, Yvette's thoughts return to the gypsy, firstly on the basis of a pure dramatic contrast to the confining sterility of her home, and then in much wider terms:

> she lay and wished she were a gypsy. To live in a camp, in a caravan, and never set foot in a house, not to know the existence of a parish, never look at a church. Her heart was hard with repugnance against the rectory. She loathed these houses with their indoor sanitation and their bathrooms, and their extraordinary repulsiveness. She hated the rectory, and everything it implied. The whole stagnant, sewerage sort of life, . . . was foul. If gypsies had no bathrooms, at least they had no sewerage. There was fresh air. In the rectory there was <u>never</u> fresh air. And in the souls of the people, the air was stale till it stank . . .
>
> And the gypsy man himself! Yvette quivered suddenly, as if she had seen his big, bold eyes upon her, with the naked insinuation of desire in them. The absolutely naked insinuation of desire made her lie prone and powerless in the bed as if a drug had cast her in a new, molten mould. [20]

19. D. H. Lawrence, <u>ibid</u>. p.189

20 D. H. Lawrence, <u>ibid</u>., p.195-7

That last image of being transformed as if by a drug is particularly noticeable. It is as if the gypsy acted upon Yvette like a catalyst: he is the means by which she is freed from the sterility of her present life. Her response is presented in these ultra-realistic terms and it effectively makes the essential relationship between them imaginative in impact rather than realistic. The attraction between the gypsy and Yvette is entirely sexual, Lawrence leaves us in no doubt about that: "he had looked at her, and seen none of her pretty face and her pretty ways, but just the dark, tremulous potent secret of her virginity."[21] But this is presented in such an impersonal way that, as so often in Lawrence, sexual attraction (the absolute destruction of the conventional social values of Lawrence's time) is used as a basis for projecting an essentially imaginative character relationship around this idea of being freed from conventional life. Lawrence presents the urge to throw up conventional life and to do in some measure what he himself did with Frieda, "Escape, my dear, escape"[22] But the sexual basis is not in itself the main point of the tale. The drama between Yvette and the gypsy is symbolic rather than realistic: they enact a fable of the creative liberation from dead life into new life. In the meeting between the virgin and the gypsy Lawrence presents this universal theme through a fictional world which has the wider resonance of imaginative fable rather than the personal dimension of realistic fiction.

The resolution of the tale demonstrates the extent to which the action is to be understood in this way. Lawrence introduces an event which is purely and simply imaginative in effect. The flood has no real foundation in our minds as a credible occurrence. To some degree it is

[21] D. H. Lawrence, ibid., p.207

[22] D. H. Lawrence, The Letters of D.H. Lawrence ed. A. Huxley, Heinemann (1932), p.36

prepared for by the heavy rains mentioned throughout the tale, which cause the bursting of the dam. But in fact we do not question the event since its non-realistic significance is quite apparent. The parallel is with the effect of the gypsy on Yvette. The flood actualises the cataclysmic effect of the gypsy on her and on the suffocating life which she has so far been part of. It expresses dramatically the outpouring of creative new life which their relationship acts out imaginatively. But there is more implicit in the flood than this alone; and here we see clearly how Lawrence can use the events of a vividly created and sharply actualised poetic situation to great imaginative advantage. Yvette herself is caught up in the flood and threatened by it. It comes apocalyptically as a symbolic warning against holding life back, as Yvette herself has done despite her dissatisfaction. The narrowness of the escape shows how close she was, in the terms of the tale, to "death"; and of course it is the gypsy who saves her. In acting as an apocalyptic cleansing, the flood has an obvious precursor in the flood in The Rainbow: it gives Yvette her "baptism to another life" [23] through the gypsy; it sweeps away the sterile old order of life by destroying the Mater; and it even regenerates Aunt Cissie. [24]

Thus the flood, stands as the imaginative correlative in the action of the tale for the drama enacted by the gypsy and Yvette, without having any true realistic dimension. It is also a very useful point at which to end the tale. It brings the quality of fable, which characterises the main action, to a climax which releases Lawrence from any obligation to give an account in personal terms of the results of the relationship as far as Yvette is concerned. The fact that there

[23] D. H. Lawrence, The Rainbow, p.95
[24] D. H. Lawrence, The Virgin and the Gypsy p.251

is no such account again suggests how non-realistic Lawrence is in his treatment of the situation for the sake of the imaginative significance of the action. Typically, with a humour which evades any qualms on the part of the reader over the non-credibility of these events, Lawrence treats the finale of the tale very lightly indeed. When Yvette wakes after the flood she asks

> Where was the gypsy? This was the first thing in her mind. Where was her gypsy of this world's-end night?
>
> He was gone! He was gone! And a policeman was in the room! A policeman! [25]

The tone of amazed incredulity, and the absolute incongruity of this pillar of the Establishment, the Policeman, being in Yvette's room, is a piece of farcical humour characteristic of Lawrence. The rest of the finale maintains this note. The gypsy disappears "no one knew whither", like a spirit in a fable; Yvette, despite her grief, "practically. . .was acquiescent" to his disappearance; and Lawrence concludes with the nice little twist of the letter. In terms of the meaning of the tale, the letter brings home to Yvette the "reality" of her experience with the gypsy, with the possible suggestion of it having some decisive impact upon her. But what is interesting and comical about it is that an explanatory letter of this kind introduces in a semi-ironic fashion that very note of realistic authentication that Lawrence has so carefully avoided in the relationship between Yvette and Joe Boswell in the rest of the tale. It substantiates Yvette's experiences and it substantiates the figure of the gypsy into an actual individual. It is as if Lawrence, in a consciously wry mood, deliberately breaks the very convention he has chosen to establish in this tale by confronting fantasy with a possible reality in this way. The very phrasing of the letter is rather wry and comical.

[25] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.249.

After the image which we have had of the gypsy as the dark, mysterious stranger, Lawrence shows him in the light of day to be a rather deliberate and stolid sort of character - at least such is hinted at in the mixture of bravado and intimidation that we find in this little note: "'Dear miss, I see in the paper you are all right after your ducking, as is the same with me. . . I come that day to say good-bye! and I never said it. . .but I live in hopes. Your obdt. servant Joe Boswell.'"[26] Confronted with the everyday, the fantasy image deflates in a wry parody of the conventional "happy ending". Refreshingly, Lawrence never takes his fable form too seriously.

Thus, The Virgin and the Gypsy is a tale which, aware of its own conventions, mixes realistic elements with element of fantasy to create a fictional world which functions in a very balanced manner. Its relationship to the world of human experience is in part realistic and in part symbolic. In other of his fable tales Lawrence retreats even further from the imitation of the actual world: he relies almost entirely upon creating a viable fantasy situation as a fictional vehicle. As Keith Sagar points out, in these tales (which he describes as "myths") Lawrence "often withdraws from the immediate struggle into a distant, serene world in which to create his men like gods". Yet the resulting fictions "are in no sense romantic evasions of reality: they make incarnate what is only immanent in reality, bringing into sharp focus what is blurred there, penetrate behind the veil of naturalism."[27] Lawrence is quite conscious of the romantic nature of the form he is utilising, a consciousness which he communicates

[26] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.252.

[27] Keith Sagar, The Art of D.H. Lawrence, Cambridge (1966), p.226.

to the reader and which prevents us from thinking of these tales as romantic evasion. Thus, at the beginning of that most eminently fable-like of the fable tales, The Man Who Loved Islands, we have the same sense of Lawrence deliberately showing up the nature of his chosen fictional convention through his wry ironic deflation such as we had at the end of The Virgin and the Gypsy, but this time at the very opening of the tale:

> There was a man who loved islands. He was born on one, but it didn't suit him . . . [28]

The tone undercuts and breaks open the fable/fairy tale convention, allowing Lawrence to transform it into something else, an imaginative vehicle.

Much of the appeal of these fable tales lies in the way Lawrence takes one simple central action as the basis of the fable and turns it, seemingly effortlessly, into an imaginative situation. In The Man Who Loved Islands for example, the central action of the tale develops from Cathcart's propensity to "love islands": he is forced into moving to successively smaller islands in his search for one most suitable to him. The meaning of the tale lies in the imaginative significance of this action and its consequences. Lawrence presents a fable about the desire to avoid involvement in "life" (which he takes in its widest cosmic sense), to "love islands". The consequences of attempting to avoid being involved in life are, in terms of the fictional world of the tale, to become the associate and the victim simultaneously of the force lying behind this desire for isolation, i.e. the anti-life force, which Lawrence embodies in the tale in the form of the cold Northern forces of Nature (the snow, etc.). The fable enacts very clearly a battle of life against anti-life, and presents it imaginatively through the simple story-line of Cathcart's increasing

[28] D.H. Lawrence, The Man Who Loved Islands in Love Among the Haystacks and other stories, Penguin (1968), p.97.

misanthropy. Of course there is a realistic seed behind this situation. Cathcart's state of mind is psychologically very accurate; and indeed Lawrence had a perfectly real antecedent for his character in the figure of Alexander Selkirk. Lawrence in fact had a particular person in mind as a model for this tale in the form of Compton Mackenzie and his island of Capri.[30] But Lawrence's tale goes much further than psychology or satire. It transforms the realistic seed into a fable of universal import. Cathcart's growing isolationism is not simply presented in terms of his psychology. Lawrence projects it into the fictional world of the tale: he gives it actuality as a force which Cathcart provokes into hostility by his behaviour, and which finally destroys him. From the moment Cathcart isolates himself on the first island this elemental protagonist is present, encroaching upon him: the white flowers of the blackthorn, and the malignant wintry spirit of this first island already prelude the snow of the last island. The predator confronting Cathcart is not society, nor himself: it is Nature, come to take vengeance for his transgression of the "vast, unexplored morality of life"[31]; and once initiated, the drama moves inexorably on, like a miniature King Lear, until its chilling conclusion. Each island marks one stage in Cathcart's search for a pure "world of his own"[32], and one further stage in his process of stripping himself down to bare "unaccommodated man". The first island is his attempt at an ideal community, a miniature Utopia

[There is no footnote 29]

[30] H.T. Moore, The Intelligent Heart, Penguin (1960), p.433.

[31] D.H. Lawrence, "Study of Thomas Hardy", Phoenix, p.419. The passage from which this quotation comes is, I think, quite helpful for an understanding of this particular tale.

[32] D.H. Lawrence, The Man Who Loved Islands, p.97.

embodying man's belief in the material perfectibility of life. The second island is his attempt at an ideal relationship, refined onto the "rare, desireless levels of Time".[33] The third island is his attempt to purify his life of all these and to live the ideal life alone. Each stage is a failure because Cathcart makes the mistakes of believing in the possibility of perfection in life, and of neglecting the realities of human experience. Thus, each time his ideal is soiled and destroyed when it confronts the realities of life. On the first island his rudimentary communism is undermined by his basic ignorance of the weaknesses of human nature. He fails to realise or refuses to realise that the other islanders on his utopian island will and do take advantage of his naïvety. On the second island his perfect relationship is blighted by the inescapable facts of physical man-woman contact. On the third island his ideal life collapses from the inherent weakness of his own self. And underlying each of these is the even grimmer confrontation between man and the cosmos, man's idea of himself and the realities of Life around him, the sense of the "slippery, naked dark soul" confronting "the timeless world".[34] The progressive barrenness of each island and the disintegration of Cathcart's outer life come to a climax on the third island. In his ever more extreme attempts to purify life Cathcart purifies himself out of existence until he is left simply with his naked self incapable of surviving in the face of the "wilderness raging around".[35] Cathcart's final ideal, man and self, is shown to be the most fallacious of all: confronted

[33] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.114.

[34] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.99.

[35] D.H. Lawrence, Phoenix, p.419.

by the eternal realities, man is no more than a seed caught up in the flux of cosmic forces, at the mercy of life rather than controlling it. Cathcart, isolated on his hump of rock, is surrounded by all the hostile forces of life and death, dramatised by Lawrence by the natural situation - the declining sun, the ominous seagulls, the encroaching cold, and finally the snow. The snow is the final and fullest embodiment of the consequences of Cathcart's retreat from life. Personified as a white snow-leopard, its inhuman purity and perfection destroy him.

The suggestions and meanings we might read into the action of this tale are manifold. It is an attack upon idealisations of life at the expense of its actual realities - Lawrence is suggesting that life is far more complex than any ideals can admit. It is a grim warning against the impoverishment resulting from ideals, or from any abstraction of or isolation from life itself. It is a dramatisation of a cosmic confrontation between life and death forces. Whatever meanings we ascribe to the tale, its force comes from the purely poetic logic behind the action - the simplification of the story-line into a progress from island to island, and of the situation into a confrontation between a figure and elemental forces result in the action having an almost purely imaginative impact, which defies final elucidation. The tale is a fable about "loving islands".

The same transformation of a simple situation into an imaginative vehicle can be seen in <u>The Woman Who Rode Away</u>, a tale I would like to consider in a little more detail than the previous example.

The Woman Who Rode Away, like The Man Who Loved Islands, is based on a suggestion from reality, this time Mabel Dodge Luhan's exploits in Taos, Mexico. But the action of the Woman, riding off to find some new life with the Indians, is clearly intended to be read upon an imaginative rather than a literal level. Lawrence has again isolated and actualised one central simple action with the intention of making a poetic fable out of it; and necessarily he has again to simplify the fictional world in order to achieve this. This particular fable is ideal for demonstrating the kind of simplifications involved because the tale opens upon an ostensibly realistic note; and into the opening few pages Lawrence telescopes a whole wealth of realistic detail in order to set up the situation. He telescopes it in the sense that the realistic credibility of the situation is made implicit but is left unexplored, and also in the sense that he heightens the situation so that it becomes imaginatively significant as well as realistically credible. He sets the origins of the Woman's revolt in a vivid and fully acceptable

situation, providing a brilliantly compact and evocative summary of the Woman's relationship with her husband and her life up until the point when she rides away. This he does through purely imaginative means. The Woman's psychological state and her relationship with her husband are presented primarily through the setting. In a tight and incisive evocation of the house and the silver mines Lawrence tells us all we really need to know about how the woman felt towards her husband and his achievements :

> When she actually saw what he had accomplished, her heart quailed. Great green-covered, unbroken mountain-hills, and in the midst of the lifeless isolation, the sharp pinkish mounds of the dried mud from the silver-works, Under the nakedness of the works, the walled-in, one storey adobe house . . . And when you looked up from this shut-in flowered patio, you saw the huge pink cone of the silver mud refuse, and the machinery of the extracting plant against heaven above. No more. 36

The plant machinery stands like a totem or an idol to her husband's religion - the sterile, exhaustive process of the mines. Lederman himself, though he never acts in the drama, is evoked in a very sharp and very real thumbnail sketch. He is a "little, wiry, twisted fellow . . . a little dynamo of energy" [37], (the analogy with a machine is pointedly delivered), whose life is absorbed in his mines. His self involvement and lack of sensitive awareness make him equally ignorant of his wife as a person: "He loved work, work, work, and making things. His marriage, his children, were something he was making, part of his business, but with a sentimental income this time." [38] We are left to imagine for ourselves from this really condensed portrayal exactly what effect this had on the Woman. After the fifth page of the tale this entirely workable little sketch, which might have developed into a tale in itself, is dropped: Lederman departs with the young gentleman who is so usefully inquisitive about the Indians, and we see no more of him. The fact that

36 D. H. Lawrence, The Woman Who Rode Away and other stories, Secker (1929), p.57

37 D. H. Lawrence, ibid., p.57

38 D. H. Lawrence ibid., p.59

Lawrence can create and do away with characters so swiftly, having still established a rich and full situation, shows how telescopic the opening of this tale is. Lederman and his mines are used brilliantly to set up the initial situation from which the poetic drama develops :: this is the "deadness" from which the Woman "rode away".

From this point onwards, the simplification becomes even more drastic. Having once established the situation in this condensed form, Lawrence takes no pains to give it any further development, or even to make it credible for us. The Woman herself and her actions are not given any further basis in reality than is implicit in the opening few pages. Indeed, once she decides to "ride away" Lawrence abandons realistic presentation altogether and concentrates upon his main task of turning her action into an imaginative fable. Even before this, the Woman is much more shadowy as a character than her husband, deliberately so since Lawrence is interested in using her as a figure within an imaginative drama rather than a realistic drama. Much of what we know of her is to be derived only from the suggestions implicit in the evocation of the setting and of Lederman. Lawrence keeps any real characterisation to an absolute minimum: all we learn of her directly is that the circumstances of her marriage have thwarted her initial desire for life to be an "adventure" and that for ten years she has been confined in a "stupor of subjected amazement", from which she is only just rousing herself. [39] By thus simplifying her and her situation it is all the more easy for Lawrence to turn them into elements of an imaginative world, without contravening an already firmly established realistic perspective. Hence he is able to by-pass altogether any convincing explanation for her "riding away", and to present it as an event which has imaginative significance rather than

[39] D. H. Lawrence, ibid., p.58.

realistic significance. Through Lederman's talks with the young man, the Woman is suddenly faced with the possibility of some new kind of life outside of her present enclosed and sterile circle of existence:

> She was overcome by a foolish romanticism more unreal than a girl's. She felt it was her destiny to wander into the secret haunts of these timeless, mysterious, marvellous Indians of the mountains. [40]

To describe this, as Leavis does, as a "neurotic escapade" [41] is to see the inadequacy of trying to explain the events of this tale in terms of realistic presentation alone. Lawrence admits at various points to the Woman's idea being "foolish romanticism", "unreal", "crazy"; and the way he presents this plot makes the need for a realistic significance to the action quite unnecessary. Ultimately in these poetic fables the action of the narrative, like myth, has its own terms of reference. We are invited to find an imaginative level of relevance in the plot, and to view this as a poetic fictional image of life. Just so long as Lawrence renders the drama with a vivid imaginative actuality, and just so long as he maintains the sense in the reader that he is not simply talking about a literal woman who rode away or a literal man who loved islands, then the fictional world should make a convincing impact imaginatively. And this is exactly what we find in this particular tale. The Woman is presented simply as a figure: she is only ever called "the Woman"; and in the context of the tale she is "the Woman who rode away". Quite plainly, the imaginative basis of the tale lies in that phrase and in its significance within the poetic world of the tale. Her journey, inexplicable as it is, is quite acceptable within this non-realistic image which Lawrence has establish-ed.

[40] D. H. Lawrence, ibid., p.61

[41] F. R. Leavis, D.H. Lawrence : Novelist, Penguin (1964), p.286

Hence Lawrence effectively short-circuits any objections to his fable from the point of view of their non-credibility. Like figures from myth, the characters have no independent life apart from their role in the drama: there is no attempt to create the illusion of realistic fiction that characters are actual people with lives of their own. Lawrence makes the situation so acceptable by giving it a vivid and concrete actuality in its own terms. The Woman's journey is, to all intents and purposes, described as if it were actual, though the action itself is, as we have said, unreal. And at the same time, the narrative voice used to describe the journey has all the dream-like distance and transparency of fable, a simple, crystal-clear narrative which takes for granted that what is happening has a level of relevance usually accorded to legend. As the Woman rides through the strange other world of the mountains, we are untroubled by any real reference to her feelings. Instead, her progress is described in the vague drifting tone of romance, with little attempt to particularise: "she left the wide road and took a small trail to the right, that led into another valley, over steep places and past great trees".[42] This imagined journey is presented in such a lucid, almost documentary manner that it cannot fail to take hold of the reader's imagination.

However, the significance of the central action of this fable, the Woman's "riding away", is a little more difficult to grasp than that of The Man Who Loved Islands. At first Lawrence seems to suggest that the Woman is a resurrection figure, enacting a fable of rebirth. Her action of riding away from the "lifeless isolation" of her

[42] D.H. Lawrence, The Woman Who Rode Away, p.63.

previous existence would seem representative of a rebirth from sterility into new life, similar to The Man Who Died. The Indians, on whom she centres her hopes for being "free as she had been as a girl"[43], perform the role of the vivifying force which re-awakens her, rather like the gypsy in The Virgin and the Gypsy. Lawrence twice puts this emphasis on the narrative, both times suggesting that the Woman is undergoing a death from her old life into a new life: "She lay wrapped in her blanket looking at the stars. . . shivering, and feeling like a woman who has died and passed beyond." ; "All was silent, icy and eternal, and she aware that she had died."[44] Yet to regard her role as a female counterpart to The Man Who Died is unsatisfactory in view of the rest of the tale. As the Woman journeys towards the Indians a distinctly ominous fatalistic note is struck in the increasingly rarified bleakness of the surrounding scenery: "High up, the new snow had already begun to fall."[45] The Woman is swallowed up in the extreme impersonality of the mountains and the Indians. She loses her will power; her self disintegrates; and instead of being re-vitalised into new life, as she and perhaps we naïvely imagined, she becomes obliterated and made a sacrifice to the gods of that dark potency which she sought for herself. As Sagar suggests, this is not a "myth of resurrection"; it is a "negative fable like The Man Who Loved Islands".[46] In the terms of the tale the Indians are a destructive force in relation to the white races represented by the Woman. The Indians are destructive even whilst being representative of vital potency and creative life - destructive, indeed, for that

[43] D.H. Lawrence, The Woman Who Rode Away, p.62.

[44] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.64-5, 71.

[45] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.65.

[46] Keith Sagar, The Art of D.H. Lawrence Cambridge (1966), p.

very reason. In no other tale, except perhaps The Man Who Died, does Lawrence so clearly dramatise one of the paradoxes of his imaginative vision - the proximity of death and life. New life is created only through destruction of the old life: his characters have to undergo a "death" as a prelude to new life. In The Man Who Died the fable of death leading to life is actually enacted in full. Taking the Christian story of the Resurrection, Lawrence dramatises a positive fable of death and rebirth in such a way that we can begin to see the other "death" fables as only the first part of the process: when the Man leaves the tomb he leaves behind his old self for a new "aloneness" - "For in the tomb he had slipped that noose which we call care. For in the tomb he had left his striving self, which cares and asserts itself. Now his uncaring self healed and became whole within his skin, and he smiled to himself with pure aloneness, which is one sort of immortality."[47] The destruction of the self, which is the prelude to the "pure aloneness", is enacted by the Man Who Loved Islands and the Woman Who Rode Away. In the life-death-re-birth cycle of the fables, both of them are selves without any possibility of re-birth. In the case of the Woman, she is obliterated by the more powerful force of the Indians. She is the representative of the sterility of white civilisation even though she has ridden away from it. Thus her white deadness is negated and destroyed by the dark potency of the Indians - hence the terrifying submergence of the Woman into the hypnotic sensuality of the sacrifice ritual.

We can of course read specific suggestions into this situation. We might see it as enacting one of Lawrence's fundamental themes, the ascendancy of man's primitive sensual nature (the dark Indians) over

[47] D.H. Lawrence, The Man Who Died in Love Among the Haystacks, p.142.

the upper mental layers of his consciousness (the white Woman); the submergence of the Female principle into the Male principle.[48] Indeed, Lawrence invites us to see these specific meanings in the tale by introducing the speeches of the young Indian.[49] But, as with the other fables, the success of this tale lies in its wider suggestiveness which is not to be restricted to any one particular meaning. It enacts a basic universal conflict between life and death which we may interpret in whatever terms we wish. It is the imaginative resonance and allusiveness that is so remarkable about the poetic fables of Lawrence.

As a final indication of how the fable form allows Lawrence this kind of imaginative impact we may consider the way in which the tales end. In both The Man Who Loved Islands and The Woman Who Rode Away the action is left unfulfilled at the end of the tale, hanging in suspension. By the very nature of the treatment of the action, we are not interested in knowing "what happens"; and Lawrence exploits this freedom from having to fulfil the situation: he creates two very abrupt endings which each convey the maximum imaginative impact and ambiguity by compressing the whole action into a single suspended image or scene. In The Woman Who Rode Away the enactment of the ritual is delivered with a speed and economy which emphasise the fatally irreversible process in which the Woman is submerged. And at the height of the drama the action is suddenly curtailed: we are left with the scene of the priest, dagger raised over the

48 An interpretation offered by R.E. Pritchard, D.H. Lawrence - Body of Darkness, Hutchinsons (1971), p.163.

49 D.H. Lawrence, The Woman Who Rode Away, p.88-90, 93-5.

Woman, waiting "In absolute motionlessness. . .till the red sun should send his ray through the column of ice." [50] The same suspension occurs at the end of The Man Who Loved Islands. There, the acceleration of dramatic pace and the stark economy of the action are if anything more noticeable: we have already been through the situation twice before on the other islands, so that the third island is a much intensified re-run of the cycle. Then, abruptly, the action stops. We are left with the image of Cathcart as he hears "the mutter of unsatisfied thunder" which signals the final snow (personified as a snow-leopard): "He turned, and felt its breath on him." [51] Not only, is this kind of ending far more dramatic: it also telescopes in upon the basic drama or confrontation underlying the fable.- Cathcart and the snow, the Woman and the Indians - thus condensing the whole situation with great imaginative impact. In these tales the whole poetic fable form is handled with a stark, taut coherence perfectly attuned to their aim and nature.

[50] D.H. Lawrence, The Woman Who Rode Away, p.102.

[51] D.H. Lawrence, The Man Who Loved Islands, p.124.

In this section we have been concerned with one kind of poetic fictional world - the poetic fable. Our attempts to find the meaning of the tales discussed have also been attempts to demonstrate the nature of them as fictional worlds, as fictional representations of life. The conclusion we may come to is that these fables are attempts to break free from the realistic convention. They reject the attempt to create an illusion of the actual world: they even retreat from the real world into fantasy with a view to creating fictional worlds that function in their own imaginative terms independent of conventions and legacies of realism.

As a final suggestion with which to close this part of the discussion, a measure of the freedom which this fictional conception allows Lawrence can be gained from looking at the fables within the wider context of his work. The forgoing examination drew some correlations and links of theme and situation between the tales considered. Thus, The Man Who Loved Islands and The Woman Who Rode Away were seen to share the same basic fable, a fable of anti-life; whilst The Man Who Died and The Virgin and the Gypsy share the fable of regeneration and resurrection. We even postulated the idea of a thematic cycle - life-death-re-birth. What is intriguing about this is that Lawrence often seems to associate the individual parts of the cycle with particular situations or lines of action. He re-works the same thematic material through very similar situations in various fables. Thus, the resurrection fable that we find in The Virgin and the Gypsy takes the situation of a woman caught in a sterile situation meeting a man who acts as a vivifying force liberating her from her "death". The very same fable is expressed in the very same situation in Lady Chatterley's Lover. The male

counterpart to this is The Man Who Died, a fable which is worked through again in the unfinished fragment The Flying Fish. Then again, there are a group of fables which work through the anti-life/death part of the cycle, each sharing the same basic situation of a character driven into an extreme and hostile natural environment to face elemental forces - The Man Who Loved Islands, The Woman Who Rode Away, The Princess are such tales.

Perhaps even more interesting is the relationship between the cycles of experience expressed in the fables and the novel, especially Women in Love. We quoted in Chapter One Lawrence's desire to make "a statement of the whole scheme", "a whole conception of the existence of man - creation, good, evil, life, death, resurrection".[52] In many ways Women in Love represents just such an attempt. It fuses together many of the themes, situations, and lines of action to be found in the later fables; and gives them the form of a whole cycle of universal human experience through the symbolic level of the novel.[53] Indeed, the later fables can be seen as essentially re-working from the nove many of the situations and lines of action which Lawrence takes as representative of parts of his cycle. To substantiate these suggestions would take a great deal more space than we can allow in this present discussion: they are offered as an intriguing speculation rather than as a line of argument to be followed. But perhaps the following all-too-flimsy "evidence" will give some substance at least to these ideas.

We have suggested that Women in Love can be taken as an imaginative

[52] See above, Chapter One, p.33.

[53] This presupposes much of what we shall have to say about Women in Love as poetic fiction, and necessitates the reader's deference to this statement for the moment for the sake of a coherent argument.

cycle representing a whole cycle of human experience; and that the fables often take parts of that cycle and re-work them. One of the most obvious, but also most interesting, of such cases is the Gerald part of the cycle and Gerald's confrontation with the snow. It has been noticed by other critics that this situation shares a basic similarity with that of The Man Who Loved Islands: both Gerald and Cathcart are, in their different ways, negative anti-life figures (symbolically speaking), and both of them act out their dramas in a confrontation with the life-denying cold of the snow. But this imaginative situation is not confined to these two instances. We find elements of it occurring and being worked through The Captain's Doll, The Princess, The Man Who Was Through With The World, The Woman Who Rode Away and The Lost Girl. Each of these works have elements of this situation and its anti-life suggestions occuring in them to a greater or lesser extent.

It is not difficult to trace the basis and significance of this imaginative situation for Lawrence. It probably had its specific souce in his stay at Portcothan, Cornwall early in 1916. As the Portcothan letters show, Lawrence was deeply impressed by the haunting mid-winter greyness of the Cornish coastal landscape. It expressed for him the meeting place between primaeval darkness and the dawn of life, the "clash of two infinities".[54] At the same time he became intrigued by the literature arising from this environment, the mythology and poetry of the Germanic, Celtic and Scandinavian peoples.[55] He conjured up the race of people

[54] D.H. Lawrence, The Collected Letters ed. H.T. Moore, p.418

[55] For example, he wrote to Ottoline Morrell asking for books of "Anglo-Saxon ballads...on interesting Norse literature, or early Celtic", (D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.416).

inhabiting such hostile, elemental scenery, "the Vikings and sea-roving Danes who came in such quantities".[56] In particular he was fascinated by the outlook produced by the cold abstract landscape of Cornish winter, the fundamental fatalism found in the Germanic and Nordic races and exemplified in the elegiac poetry by the figure of the exile, the Wanderer and the Seafarer: The extremity of the environment, life clinging on in the face of the hostile cold; the outlook expressed by the Sagas and poetry, of fatalism and lack of positive faith - Lawrence took all these associations and, in his mythopoeic manner, made them into part of his own imaginative cycle. He made the northern environment, the northern races, the outlook and even the mythology, into a symbolic expression of anti-life. What we might call the Gods of the North are the balance to the positive force represented by the dark Gods of the South, so much in evidence in the Mexican stories, the gods of physical sensual warmth and contact. The Northern Gods are essentially malicious, vengeful, destructive. Lawrence himself expressed the duality in terms of his own life: "I want to go south, where the cold doesn't crouch over one like a snow-leopard waiting to pounce. The heart of the North is dead, and the fingers of cold are corpse fingers. There is no more hope northwards."[57] From the time of his Portcothan stay onwards, Lawrence returned again and again to this same imaginative situation of a character exiled into the extremities of snow and cold as expressive of an anti-life state - the conflict with the Gods of the North.

[56] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.934.

[57] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.812.

The primary embodiment of this situation is, of course, Gerald in Women in Love, around whom Lawrence creates the whole northern aura through associative imagery and through the final setting of the novel in Innsbruck. The later fable tales return to this situation and re-work the confrontation between the character and the northern forces in different ways. Thus, The Man Who Loved Islands is a virtual condensation of the Gerald story, given a much starker and more non-realistic treatment. In The Captain's Doll, by contrast, the northern manifestation of the glacier is used as a foil for the creative relationship developed between Hepburn and Hannele, in a regeneration fable which shares great similarities with the Birkin/Ursula situation in Women in Love. What is of interest in this re-working of the same motif, as far as we are concerned at least, is that it suggests a poetic approach underlying the nature of Lawrence's fictional method: lines of action or situations which are imaginatively expressive of some part of Lawrence's cycle of universal human experience, being represented in a number of fables. The fictional worlds of these fables by their very nature function poetically as imaginative representations of life.

ii : The Metaphoric Fictional World

In Virginia Woolf's novels we find a somewhat different kind of fictional image of life. As with Lawrence, Virginia Woolf conceives her fictional worlds in her poetic fiction as primarily imaginative vehicles rather than realistic imitations. It is the basis of her poetic fiction that distinguishes her from Lawrence. Often her fictional worlds function as metaphoric representations of "reality", in a manner quite different to Lawrence's symbolic fables. She invents a world or a situation which acts as a narrative metaphor for "life" as she sees it. We pointed out in the introduction that Virginia Woolf sought to capture a reality beneath reality, what she saw as the "essence" of reality, "a fin passing far out". [1]; and that this is basically what led her to explore ways of representation which fell outside the realistic tradition. Obviously this essence itself cannot be presented in its own terms - the result would be too abstract. Instead Virginia Woolf creates a fictional situation which is imaginatively analogous to her "reality", and which functions as a large-scale narrative metaphor: that is to say, the invented fictional world is the vehicle which transmits or suggests her vision of life. Intriguingly enough, this last statement could probably be applied to all fiction, realistic and poetic, in as much as all fictional worlds are invented images, vehicles for the presentation (in one way or another) of life. They are all inventions, working in terms of one illusion or another. The point is that in a realistic fiction the "vehicle" works through its close imitation of an assumedly objective reality: the illusion is one of a model of that

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[1] Virginia Woolf, A Writer's Diary, p.101.

objective reality. In the case of poetic fiction as represented by Virginia Woolf, there is no literal correspondence between the fictional world and an objective reality. There is little sense of the fiction working as an imitative model. Instead we feel it to be a total invention working in its own terms; and as with metaphor, we have to make an imaginative leap from this invented vehicle to the implied "reality".

At its best, this kind of conception can result in the brilliantly effective poetic invention that we find in Between the Acts. Other than Orlando, this is Virginia Woolf's only comic novel. It gives her the opportunity to probe lightly, delicately, but non-the-less seriously the various problems of human existence that perplexed her throughout her life. Along with To the Lighthouse, it affords the clearest and the most successful example of Virginia Woolf's metaphoric fiction.

To create her poetic world, Virginia Woolf effectively eliminates much of the scaffolding demanded by the traditional realistic presentation of life. The intricacies of plausible character portrayal, the use of a credible sequence of events, everything that Virginia Woolf saw as part of "this appalling narrative business of the realist" [2], are all either done away with or simplified. As an artist working in the medium of fictional representation, she is no longer interested in sustaining the illusion of authenticity and realism, or in drawing upon the dramatic suggestiveness afforded by that mode. She turns towards an essentially non-realistic fictional world which functions on an imaginative level. As with Lawrence, we must recognise that

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[2] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.139.

Virginia Woolf retains a dramatic dimension in the poetic worlds of her best fiction, in order to counteract the dangers of a purely imaginative presentation. The degree of simplification to be found in Between the Acts is nevertheless quite remarkable. It may be deduced from a short résumé of the basic plot of the novel.

Isa Oliver, wife of Giles Oliver, spends the day of the annual pageant at Pointz Hall in romantic pursuit of Rupert Haines - pursuit, that is, in her imagination, not in actuality. She sees in the gentleman farmer Haines all the qualities of active life which she admired at first in her own husband, Giles; but Giles has turned out to be a stockbroker, and not the active farmer which he desired to be. Meanwhile, Giles spends the day pursuing and being pursued by Mrs. Manresa, the "wild child of nature", and the embodiment of that wholeheartedly instinctive and sensual quality of life which Giles ignores in Isa. The relationship between Giles and Isa is one of blind inability to recognise the truth on both sides. The resolution of this seemingly inescapable situation comes at the very end of the novel when, having carefully avoided each other all day, Giles and Isa finally meet in order to 'have it out'.

This rather drastic abbreviation of an intricate narrative serves at least to illustrate a remarkable feature of this plot: its close affinities with the plots of Shakespearean comedy. We have the classic romance comedy situation: two lovers, Isa and Giles, entirely deluded about each other, are paired off with incongruous and yet somehow complementary partners, and are

led through various comic situations which act as a purge for their delusions, until their eyes are finally opened to the truth about themselves and each other. This plot, with the familiar theme of illusion versus reality and the "reintegration and completion"[3] achieved in the ending, is a formula well-known to us from Shakespearean romantic comedy. Indeed, the closeness of the analogy and the fact that Virginia Woolf was avidly reading Elizabethan plays at the time[4], argues that she perhaps consciously adopted this traditional comic situation as the basis for this poetic fiction. The result is that she curtails all the reader's involvement in the plot as a series of particularised events in the lives of a set of individualised characters, in the manner of realistic fiction.

Furthermore, the characters themselves are radically simplified by being deprived of much of their individuality. Whilst they do not, strictly speaking, have a symbolic role, they are arranged in balancing or complementary pairs, each having some representative imaginative role. This is clearly seen in the minor characters: Bart is representative of reason, Lucy of spirituality, Mrs. Manresa of instinct, Dodge of repression. With Giles and Isa the role is more complex: in their case it is the basic transformation which they undergo from delusion to reality that is representative. The character groupings too are upon a representative basis: Giles is paired off with Mrs. Manresa because she represents the physical sensuality which he ignores in Isa in whom it is left wasting on romantic dreams. Isa, on the other hand, is paired off

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[3] A.D. Moody, Virginia Woolf, Oliver and Boyd (1963), p.93.

[4] Virginia Woolf, A Writer's Diary, p.365

with Dodge since he represents the sterility of her relationship with Giles in its present state. Even the actions of the characters have a peculiar symmetry. When, for example, Isa takes Dodge to the greenhouse, Giles later also takes his companion, Mrs. Manresa, to the greenhouse - not because the greenhouse itself has any imaginative function; simply in order to take each character to the extreme of their delusion by being alone with their respective companions.

Even when we examine the characters in detail we find that they are in no sense full characters: but we find also that Virginia Woolf has not by any means done away entirely with their dramatic level. They retain their human appeal, and the illusion of being human beings, so that they work dramatically as well as imaginatively. Lucy Swithin, who we suggest was representative of spirituality, is a perfect example. Lucy is perhaps the most appealing character invention in the whole novel because she is the most demonstrably human. Her whimsicality, her weakness in the face of her brother's attacks on her faith, her stubborn, though somewhat vague, religious belief despite all Bart's rationality and, above all, her sympathy for William Dodge - all these qualities make her an endearing character, created, as Moody points out, with "tolerant detachment"[5] by an author whom one would not expect to be very tolerant of this emissary of conventional religion. In her role as representative of spirituality Lucy opposes Bartholomew's role as reason; and yet the conflict between them is anything but the abstract dialectic that one might expect from the polarisation of two

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[5] A.D. Moody, as in n.3 above, p.87

such themes. The conflict is made into a miniature human drama, effectively presented with all the dramatic appeal of realism, and treated with indulgent humour by Virginia Woolf. This friction between brother and sister, with its foundation as much in emotional and temperamental differences as in intellectual, is beautifully displayed in the passage where Lucy returns Bartholomew's hammer to his private cupboard. The appearance of Lucy "sidling"[6] as if not to be noticed up to the cupboard to return the hammer, and smiling "sidelong" at her brother perhaps in a half-pleading, half superior manner, perfectly instigates the unspoken quarrel between them. Bart gives that oblique warning of displeasure - "'Cindy - Cindy,' he growled" - which recalls their quarrels as children; and the rest of the argument is conducted on the level of sly digs and innuendos which are in perfect accord with the loving antagonism of brother-sister relationship; and with a comic twist too:

> 'It's very unsettled. It'll rain, I'm afraid. We can only pray,' [Lucy] added, and fingered her crucifix. 'And provide umbrellas,' said her brother.[7]

Lucy's silent outrage at this rebuke - "He had struck at her faith" - is in its exaggeration, entirely suitable to the occasion: Bart's jibe is not an attack on her faith, but simply part of the quarrel about the hammer; which, after one more cut by Bart, ends as it began - "Cindy," he growled. And the quarrel was over." The point is that the whole episode, whilst being part of the representative conflict, has this

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[6] Virginia Woolf, Between the Acts, p.27.

[7] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.31.

delicacy in its dramatic presentation. The two characters are in no sense stiff illustrative figures. Such delicacy would be absent if this were simply a display, as Moody sees it, of the "unfruitful and sterile" opposition between reason and faith in the modern world.[8] Virginia Woolf presents the imaginative roles of the characters within an appealing dramatic portrayal.

However, there is very little depth or complexity to the characters: in this sense they are not "full". There is a complete lack of any extensive human analysis and exploration. For example, there is no attempt to investigate Isa's infatuation with Rupert Haines. We simply have to accept this "crude Ethel M. Dell emotion", as Blackstone calls it,[9] as a necessary part of the plot. With the other characters, too, there is no attempt to fill them out or develop them even to the extent of To The Lighthouse. There, although the characters are not rich in the sense that nineteenth century fictional characters may be said to be, they at least have a firm realistic basis in the circumstances of Virginia Woolf's own family. In Between the Acts, although the treatment is delicate, the characters have only a veneer of reality with no attempt at the complexity of motive and desire that one finds in realistic fiction. Even Lucy is not in any sense a full character: she is appealing but still greatly simplified, a sketch rather than a portrait. The other characters are much less full. They respond to each other, but there is no attempt to explore their responses. Each is fitted with certain attributes none of which is developed any further. Mrs. Manresa

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[8] A.D. Moody, as in n.5 above, p.88

[9] B. Blackstone, Virginia Woolf - A Commentary, Hogarth (1949), p.236

is introduced as, and remains, "the wild child of nature". She is a truly comic invention, brimming over with vulgar extravagance and bawdy innuendo, - "'All I need", said Mrs. Manresa ogling Candish, as if he were a real man, not a stuffed man, 'is a corkscrew'"[10] Virginia Woolf delights in her creation of Mrs. Manresa, but the figure remains more a caricature than a character. She is so exaggerated as to be unbelievable, in the same way that Ben Jonson's characters are unbelievable. Mrs. Manresa is always kept predictably within her limits and is developed neither by the narrator nor by insights afforded through her dramatic interrelation with other characters. She is typical of the way in which characters are treated in general in this novel.

Thus the plot of this novel is radically simplified: the situation and events are generalised outside of all normal expectation in accordance with a comic formula, and the characters are representative rather than individual. This is all done for the sake of creating a purely non-realistic fictional world which can work imaginatively and can convey a universal level of significance without being subjected to the restraints of realism. The result is that some critics have complained of the seemingly complete curtailment of human interest in Between the Acts because of Virginia Woolf's aesthetic interests. Blackstone, for example, complains that "There is no depth of characterisation. In spite of their complexity, Mrs. Swithin, Mr. Oliver, Isa and Miss La Trobe are 'flat' figures. They do not live for us as individuals."[11]

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[10] Virginia Woolf, Between the Acts, p.51

[11] B. Blackstone, as in n.10 above, p.241.

From a different angle Louis Kronenberger objects that the novel "introduces us to people, some of them with frustrated and fractured lives, and, instead of exploring them, makes us sit with them while they watch a pageant. . . The book ends with two of the real people about to confront each other: it should, of course, have begun there." [12] But these objections merely demand of Virginia Woolf something that at this stage in her career she was obviously not attempting. As is evident from the simplification we have seen so far, Virginia Woolf was clearly sidestepping the demands of realistic tradition, - the tradition implicit in Blackstone's and Kronenberger's demands, that the actions and motives of the characters should be feasible and that this level of human significance should be the centre of interest. In this novel, she largely ignores the claims and effects of realism in order to present and explore experience imaginatively. Freed from the need to justify the narrative realistically, she can invent whatever situation she chooses with whatever characters she desires. Not being an imitation of the world, the plot becomes a non-literal artefact, designed as a poetic image with an underlying level of meaning. The surface narrative of events, actions and speeches is not meant to be taken simply at its face value - otherwise the world of Pointz Hall would indeed seem a rather puerile and pointless one. Virginia Woolf sustains a level of poetic significance beneath her invented situation; and in this is its life-blood, not in its success or failure as a realistic narrative.

We can demonstrate the way in which Virginia Woolf creates these two narrative levels by considering the part played by the central metaphoric basis of the novel, the pageant.

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[12] L. Kronenberger, 'Virginia Woolf's Last Novel', The Nation, Oct.11 1941, p.344-5.

In the narrative the pageant functions basically as a metaphor for life: it is there in the actuality of the fictional world simply as a pageant, but whenever it appears or is spoken of one feels that what is being said refers beyond the particular occasion, to life in general. The play itself is an image of life, a potted history of English civilisation, and it is from this that the poetic use of the pageant stems. Much of the effect is deliberately comic, but there is always a note of seriousness even about the most incongruous passages. We feel, for example, the entire comic incongruity of Miss La Trobe's patchwork play as an attempted representation of historical life, made up as it is of soap boxes and scouring swabs. Yet there is also a sense in which the seemingly inviolable past was only made up of such haphazard occurrences and characters as the play itself is; and this is the perspective in which Virginia Woolf uses the pageant imaginatively as a metaphor. Thus Eliza Cook, the village tobacconist, mounting a soap-box as Elizabeth I and forgetting her lines when the wind tugs off her head-dress, comically suggests not only that Elizabeth I was a queenly shop-keeper "licensed to sell tobacco",[13] but also that Elizabethan splendour was as much at the mercy of life's uncontrollable forces as the pageant's illusory glamour is at the mercy of the interfering wind. Indeed, the suggestion is that history is made up of the same unchanging humanity in different costumes - the same villagers take many different guises in the play. As Mrs. Swithin puts it "'I don't believe. . . that there ever were such people [as the Victorians]. Only you and me and William dressed differently.'"[14]

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[13] Virginia Woolf, Between the Acts, p.101

[14] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.203

The implication is clearly that the characters of the novel are themselves the same group of people - they are the present-day representatives of this 'life' that history disports so glamorously. In this sense the pageant, in its function as a metaphor for life, acts as a mirror for the events of the novel and gives them an imaginative perspective, an idea which is worth dwelling on a little.

Virginia Woolf instigates a deliberate parallel between the pageant and the events of the novel. We find, for example, the same situations in both novel and play. Isa associates herself with the love story of the Prince and Carinthia and does in fact play out part of the scene with Dodge.[15] There are two suggestions in this: firstly, that present life is unchanged from past life; and, secondly, that Isa's being "in love" with Haines, for whom Dodge is her poor substitute, is as unrealistic as a conventional Elizabethan love story. Virginia Woolf deliberately shows Isa's feelings to be romantic fantasy by mirroring her in the pageant. The parallels are not always so serious: if Isa and Haines are Corinthia and the Prince, Mrs. Manresa and Giles are Queen Elizabeth and a very uncomfortable Raleigh: "Mrs. Manresa applauded loudly. Somehow she was the Queen; and he (Giles) was the surly hero. 'Bravo! Bravo!' she cried, and her enthusiasm made the surly hero squirm on his seat."[16]

The importance of this parallel between pageant and novel is, however, much wider than simply the insight it affords into the

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[15] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.125-6

[16] Virginia Woolf, Between the Acts, p.112.

true state of the characters. Throughout the novel there are continual references to the idea of life as a play; and it is quite clear that Virginia Woolf intends us to see the whole idea of the novel - and hence of life itself, since the novel is an image of life - in terms of the play. Isa on two occasions, with a sense of futility, compares her life with Giles to the unchanging plot of a repeated play: "The plot was only there to beget emotion. There were only two emotions: love and hate."[17] "Love and hate - how they tore her asunder! Surely it was time someone invented a new plot, or that the author came out from the bushes. . ."[18] In terms of the whole novel the idea Virginia Woolf sets up is that ordinary life, love and hate, seen in the estrangement of Giles and Isa, are like a play. They are not "real" life. "Real" life comes "between the acts", when the plot is put aside for something really alive before again falling back into the play. In terms of Giles and Isa Virginia Woolf turns this back to front. As Joan Bennett suggests, the title of the novel refers in part to the interval between their true love for one another.[19] It is an interval which takes up the whole novel, an interlude of deluded and unreal infatuations between the acts of their true play. Seen from this point of view, the estrangement and final confrontation between Giles and Isa dramatises Virginia Woolf's major theme - that life, true reality, occurs only momentarily, between which moments lie intervals of the other life that forms everyday experience. This is the significance of the

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[17] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.109.

[18] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.252.

[19] Joan Bennett, Virginia Woolf - her art as a novelist, p.113.

ending of the novel; we leave Giles and Isa just at that moment when reality makes itself manifest:

> Before they slept, they must fight; after they had fought, they would embrace. . . It was night before roads were made, or houses. It was the night that dwellers in caves had watched from some high place among rocks.
> Then the curtain rose. They spoke.[20]

The point is made with tremendous artistic sufficiency. There would be no virtue in going any further, as Kronenberger demands.[21] This last touch consummates a perfect poetic fictional image of life as a continual sequence of reality and unreality which can never be overcome. There is a dual edge to this ending: for as soon as they speak they begin the "plot" again, and the reality which they have found is again on its way to being lost once more. At this point Giles and Isa are at their least individual: their part in the novel's fictional world becomes poetically representative of the ageless bare realities of life as Virginia Woolf saw them, hence the image of "dwellers in caves".

However, there is a further aspect of the pageant's role as a metaphor for life, besides its being a mirror for the narrative. This is seen particularly in the effect it has upon the audience. Within the basic metaphoric analogy between the play and life, Virginia Woolf invites us to believe that the reactions of the audience to the play enact in miniature the individual and general reactions of humanity to life. For example, as an individual William Dodge shows a naive enthusiasm about Miss La Trobe's ramshackled illusion,

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[20] Virginia Woolf, Between the Acts, p. 255-6.

[21] L. Kronenberger, as in n.12, above.

suggesting implicitly a great deal about his attitude to life as well: "It was a mellay; a medley; an entrancing spectacle (to William) of dappled light and shade on half clothed, fantastically coloured, leaping, jerking, swinging legs and arms. He clapped till his palms stung."[22] It is as if his attitude to the pageant, his inability to see through the illusion, shows us how he is forever being taken in by that, for Virginia Woolf, parallel illusion, life.

In general, the reaction among the audience is to try and make sense of what they have just seen. Virginia Woolf makes great use of this trait in an audience - that they try to find the meaning of the play before they leave. Implicitly it reflects the general attempt to find a meaning for life, an attempt which Virginia Woolf herself shared as much as any. Thus, for example, Etty Springett: "How difficult to come to any conclusion! She wished they would hurry on with the next scene. She liked to leave the theatre knowing exactly what was meant."[23] And thus the remarks of the whole audience as they disperse: "Oh my dear, I thought it utter bosh. Did <u>you</u> understand the meaning?" "He said she meant we all act. Yes, but whose play? . . . And if we're left asking questions, isn't it a failure, as a play?"[24] The analogy between the wish to understand the play and the wish to understand life is continued so lightly that it effectively presents in disguise some profound and thought-provoking questions about life without becoming at all artificial. Virginia Woolf's masterstroke

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[22] Virginia Woolf, <u>Between the Acts,</u> p.112

[23] Virginia Woolf, <u>ibid.,</u> p.192

[24] Virginia Woolf, <u>ibid.,</u> p.230 and 233

is in having the vicar, Rev. Streatfield, come forward at the end of the play and offer an interpretation. It is, of course, comically appropriate that the vicar should be the interpreter of the play, this being his role in life. The irony which objectifies this attack on religion, and implicitly on all summaries of life, arises out of the response created in the audience. Virginia Woolf mischievously hints at the ludicrous inadequacy of any interpretation once the experience of the "play" itself has ended: "As waves withdrawing uncover; as mist uplifting reveals; so raising their eyes. . . they saw, as waters withdrawing leave visible a tramp's old boot, a man in a clergyman's collar surreptitiously mounting a soap-box."[25] Rev. Streatfield stands, as he does in the pulpit, the self-appointed spokesman of the audience, and wonders what meaning this pageant was intended to convey; and Virginia Woolf provides the audience's silent comment, "If he did'nt know, calling himself Reverend, also M.A., who after all could?"[26] Virginia Woolf does not herself offer an "interpretation". Instead, through the narrative metaphor of the pageant, she shows a group of people faced, as she herself had always been faced, with the apparent meaninglessness of the "play", life; and faced also with the unfulfillable need to make it meaningful. That she could treat this problem, which she herself never solved to her own satisfaction, and which in all probability was a major cause of her ensuing madness and suicide during the chaos of the Second World War - that she could treat it comically shows a detached and mature artistic vision deserving full critical recognition.

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[25] Virginia Woolf, Between the Acts, p.221

[26] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.223

The comic irony of the situation reaches its height when the vicar looks around for Miss La Trobe to thank her. Throughout the novel Miss La Trobe is an entirely enigmatic figure - not because Virginia Woolf has failed to create a credible character, but because Virginia Woolf did not want a credible character. We are told little of her origins, are shown hardly anything of her personally through her relations with the other characters or through her own thoughts. We are, in fact, denied all realistic access to her. She is completely impersonal, and deliberately so: her role, after all, is as the author of the pageant; and since, as we have seen, the pageant is a metaphor for life, then Miss La Trobe functions as an archetypal God-figure, creating and controlling life. If this raises anxieties that the novel will sink under the weight of its own seriousness; if one doubts that the novelist could carry off such an idea or retain our interest having abandoned the human appeal of the character, then the critic must swiftly reassure the reader with a guarantee that he will not be subjected to a narrative burdened by over-indulgence either in theology or Jung. Instead, much to her credit, Virginia Woolf evokes Miss La Trobe's role as "God" amid much playfulness. To the actors she is a tyrant, "'Bossy' they called her privately"[27], an Old Testament God if anything, forcing the life she creates into a pattern through fear: "Over there behind the tree Miss La Trobe gnashed her teeth. She crushed her manuscript. The actors delayed. . . 'Music!' she signalled."[28] But her all-powerful nature is quite definite: "she was one who seethes

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[27] Virginia Woolf, Between the Acts, p.78

[28] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.145

wandering bodies and floating voices in a cauldron, and makes rise up from its amorphous mass a recreated world."[29] In this role she is also clearly the archetypal human artist figure, very similar to Lily Briscoe in To The Lighthouse; and from this point of view her attempt to create the pageant, like Lily Briscoe's painting, is a metaphor for the human attempt to create an ordered and meaningful whole out of the experience around one. As with Lily the attempt is forever thwarted by the intrusion of actual reality into the understanding of life. Again the metaphor clearly presents Virginia Woolf's sense that life defies any meaning in the final analysis.

The problem for Miss La Trobe, as both God-figure and artist-figure, is her material - the actors. Her creation of the predetermined plan is incongruously haphazard, as, for example, with the Victorian Age:

> Down among the bushes she worked like a nigger. Flavinda was in her petticoats. Reason had thrown her mantle on a holly hedge. Sir Spaniel was tugging at his jack boots. Miss La Trobe was scattering and foraging.
>
> 'The Victorian mantle with the bead fringe. . . Where is the damned thing? Chuck it here. . .Now the whiskers. . .' [30]

The suggestion of a back stage to life, in which the various phases of life are hurriedly assembled by an omnipotent but flustered Being is comic but also meaningful: Virginia Woolf's conception of life is that it is sporadic, fleeting and only momentarily successful. So,too, Miss La Trobe's attempt to create a meaningful artistic whole is only momentarily successful. The audience are

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[29] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.180

[30] Virginia Woolf, Between the Acts, p.176

another inevitable stumbling-block for Miss La Trobe - the mass of mankind, over whom she has no influence for good or ill, and whom she must suffer to misinterpret the meaning of her play entirely:

> 'Hear!' Hear!' said an old man in a white waistcoat briskly. 'Bravo! Bravo!'
> 'Blast 'em!' cursed Miss La Trobe, hidden behind the tree. [31]

To the audience, of course, Miss La Trobe remains hidden from view. Thus, when Rev. Streatfield looks around for the author of the play, "'To propose a vote of thanks to the gifted lady. . .' He looked round for an object corresponding to this description. None such was visible. '. . . who wishes it seems to remain anonymous.'" [32], the author remains hidden in the bushes; and it is as if at this critical moment God and the meaning of life evade even the vicar, leaving him entirely without a suitable source for the entertainment.

Whilst there is a great deal more we might say about Between the Acts, the basic point has been demonstrated. This fictional world functions as an essentially poetic conception, an imaginative invention with little mimetic correspondence to actuality. Its meaning does not arise from its imitation of life. It arises instead from the poetic analogy underlying the narrative, an analogy between the fictional image and life in general. It is a work which reflects Virginia Woolf's deep involvement with the problems of life and human experience through the medium of an imaginative conception. This method is fundamental to all Virginia Woolf's poetic fiction; but the success of Between the Acts lies in its comedy, the presence of a certain playfulness which shows that although she is never flippant, she is not being too

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31 Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.94.

32 Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.227.

serious. If one's heart sinks at the thick poetic texture of The Waves, which Virginia Woolf herself called "difficult grinding stuff"[33], it is uplifted by the lightness of Between the Acts into a belief that poetic fiction is possible for her without necessarily eliminating liveliness and human appeal. Virginia Woolf entirely avoids the temptation to sink this novel beneath an overbearing aesthetic concern for language or form: she blends her uncompromising seriousness with a playful ease - something she had always aimed at[34] - and this reprieves her from the dangers of abstraction in her attempt to catch the essence of existence. As Joan Bennett points out, "without loss of depth, Between the Acts has greater width of interest and greater variety of effect"[35] than the other novels. Virginia Woolf evidently felt the same. When she completed the novel she recorded in her diary,

> I am a little triumphant about the book . . . I think it's more quintessential than the others. More milk skimmed off. A richer pat, certainly fresher than that misery The Years. I've enjoyed writing almost every page. [36]

[33] Virginia Woolf, A Writer's Diary, p.175.

[34] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.139.

[35] Joan Bennett, Virginia Woolf - her art as a novelist, p.131.

[36] Virginia Woolf, A Writer's Diary, p.359.

iii : The Symbolic Fictional World - D.H. Lawrence

So far we have examined two kinds of fictional world in the works of D.H. Lawrence and Virginia Woolf - the poetic fable, working primarily via a symbolic line of action, and the metaphoric narrative, working primarily via a sustained metaphoric analogy. We now turn to a type of poetic fiction which is shared by Lawrence and Virginia Woolf. This is the symbolic fictional world, defined as far as we are concerned by the presence of a symbol at the centre of the fiction, acting as a focus for the imaginative significance.

The use of a symbol as the central principle of a fictional world is an almost definably "modern" practice. The basic method associated with realistic representation we might see as the biography or autobiography - the adoption of a central character and the presentation of an account of his or her life. This was a favourite method with novelists of the realistic tradition undoubtedly because this kind of fictional biography or autobiography carries with it that illusion of authenticity and actuality upon which realism depends. With writers who are not working primarily in the realistic mode, the central character can give way to an imaginative centre for the fiction - i.e. a central symbol. Both Lawrence and Virginia Woolf utilise this method as an extension of the basic nature of their poetic fictional worlds examined earlier: Lawrence often uses a symbol as the centre for an imaginative line of action or a fable; Virginia Woolf often uses a symbol as the centre for her metaphoric narrative.

The aim behind organising a fictional representation of life around a symbol is basically the same for the two novelists. The symbol provides an escape from realism into non-realism: it creates an imaginative dimension of meaning for the fictional world by invoking an immediate level of reference beyond the realistic. Through their relationship with the symbol, the events, actions and characters of the fictional situation can be transposed and given a level of significance beyond the literal, placing at the disposal of the writer a universal level of significance.

Lawrence's attitude to symbol is revealing for the kinds of symbol that he chooses for his fictional worlds. He is what we may define as an avowed "archetypalist". He believes that "No man can invent symbols", that symbols are the legacy of man's archetypal imagination. As such true symbols cannot have any fixed meaning: they have layers of imaginative appeal which are inexhaustible and ultimately indefinable -

> You can't give a great symbol a "meaning", any more than you can give a cat a "meaning". Symbols are organic units of consciousness with a life of their own, and you can never explain them away, because their value is dynamic, emotional, belonging to the sense-consciousness of the body and soul, and not simply mental. [1]

This belief has a direct effect upon Lawrence's fictional practice. In his best symbolic fiction Lawrence avoids building up any definable contextual "meaning" for the symbol. Though his symbols have a definite rôle to play in the imaginative drama, they usually elude any specific meaning. He manages to do this by virtue of the kind of symbol chosen and the kind of relationship it has to the rest of the fictional world. Often we find him utilising an

[1] D.H. Lawrence, "The Dragon of the Apocalypse, by Frederick Carter", Phoenix, p.295-6.

animal or other naturalistic symbol which already has an archetypal suggestiveness, and which, moreover, he can use as an actual dramatic constituent of the fictional world. The advantages of this are the latent imaginative power of the symbol, and the natural relationship created between the symbol and the rest of the fiction. An animal may be an actual dramatic actor in the narrative, naturally present in the situation, and thus avoiding the sense of it having an inflexibly symbolic rôle: it is both real and symbolic. Two of the best examples are The Fox and St Mawr, which we may take for detailed discussion, whilst the symbolically-centred chapters of Women in Love may provide us with an insight into Lawrence's most concise developments of this mode of fiction within a larger structure.

In The Fox the whole fictional world is tightly focused upon the symbol which gives the work its title. This is achieved by virtue of the tale being short and restricted to one central action - the abduction of March by Grenfel. The strict working out of the action in terms of the symbol imposes a firm control which creates a powerful dramatic and imaginative impact. Baldly stated, the imaginative significance of the action may be summarised thus: the fox, and Henry Grenfel by identification with the fox, symbolises the devil-may-care force of positive life which liberates March from sterility by undermining and destroying her relationship with Banford. The drama enacted in The Fox is, as so often in Lawrence, a confrontation between creative life and anti-life. The distinction between this fictional world and those found in the tales treated earlier is that here Lawrence

injects this imaginative level into the invented situation through the presence of a central symbol.

The outer setting for the drama is the farm, within which the fox has a natural, dramatic place. As the tale opens, emphasis is laid upon the struggling farm venture and the vain attempts of the two women to make it a viable enterprise. The failure of cattle, the sick and obstinate hens, the time-consuming nature of farm-work which prevents the girls living, and most of all the raids of the fox - all these are symptoms of the fact that, as Lawrence wryly puts it, "Unfortunately, things did not turn out well." [2] The farming experiment is compromised, gradually forced back in the struggle against the encroaching natural elements. Reflecting upon the relation of this to the rest of the tale we realise that the slow erosion of the farm by wild, implacable Nature is not simply a literal fictional situation. It has an imaginative significance. The failure of the farm reflects the deeper creative failure of the March/Banford relationship: it is a miniature of the sterile thwarted life represented in March's relationship with Banford, and which is preventing March from fulfilment..

In this setting the fox has an undisputably dramatic role to play as an actor in the drama on both the realistic and symbolic levels. On one level he is simply a fox attacking a vulnerable farm. On another level the fox's attacks represent life destroying sterility in a grim but positive battle. It is characteristic that Lawrence should use this wily scavenger as his symbol for the

[2] D.H. Lawrence, The Fox in The Short Novels Vol. 1, Heinemann (1968), p.3.

positive instinctive life. Lawrence's fox is not the demoralised animal of Aesop's fable. The fox is one of Nature's most tenacious creatures, subtle, sly, and grimly determined to survive at all costs. He is the symbol of a rich instinctive life, hunted out of England (as far as Lawrence is concerned) by the sterility of modern life. These suggestions are conveyed in the tale by the evocative power with which Lawrence renders the animal, and the ultra-realistic effect which it is shown to have upon March. In March's early confrontation with the fox, for example, we can see quite clearly the way in which Lawrence uses her response to give the animal the dimension of symbol.

March stands one evening with her gun, guarding against the fox, though with little care or attention. We are given precise details of the actual location and the mood of the character to satisfy our need for conviction. Suddenly, enter the protagonist. His dramatic appearance is as startling to us as it is to March. We see little enough of him, Lawrence's description paralleling the illusive nature of the animal. The important point about this scene is the effect of the animal upon March. Her response is the medium for the fox's symbolic dimension. She responds to the animal as something more than an actual fox; and by this means Lawrence establishes the fox as the representative of a disturbing regenerative force acting on March - "She did not so much think of him: she was possessed by him. She saw his dark, shrewd, unabashed eye looking into her, knowing her. She felt him invisibly master of her spirit. . . So she went, with her great startled eyes glowing. . ." [3] This is very similar to the effect

[3] D.H. Lawrence, The Fox, p.7.

of the gypsy upon Yvette in The Virgin and the Gypsy; but by virtue of the very fact that this is an animal rather than a man (albeit a rather indistinct man in Joe Boswell's case), it is enough to transmute the animal into a symbol and, by association, transmute the fictional situation as a whole into a symbolic situation. The relation between March and the fox is imaginative rather than literal. The fox symbolises that quality of unrestrained life which is to raid the stores of repressed life in March in the form of Grenfel. Yet the whole situation is quite natural. Far from having any static meaning, the fox's "meaning" is a natural outcome of his part in the action.

Henry Grenfel is inescapably involved with the fox and its rôle as a symbol, and here again dramatic interaction is basic to Lawrence's symbolic method. The fox is Grenfel's symbolic counterpart, and we understand his actions in the tale through the parallel with the animal. When March sees the fox it is personified with all the attributes later found in Grenfel. During his original writing of the tale, Lawrence introduced the element of personification into his descriptions of the animal as an afterthought. For example, the manuscript shows the following phrases describing the fox scored out and more clearly human characteristics substituted: "soft, undulating jumps" is replaced by "slow, impudent jumps"; "his look" becomes "his knowing look"; "contemptuous and cold" is changed to "contemptuous and cunning".[4] The human qualities introduced here all help to throw light on the fox's symbolic connection with Grenfel; and, noticeably, all of them are familiar as qualities Lawrence associates with spontaneous life, as for example with the gypsy in The Virgin and the Gypsy. The symbolic identification also works in reverse, for

[4] D.H. Lawrence, A D.H. Lawrence Miscellany, ed. H.T. Moore, Southern Illinois University Press (1959), manuscript facsimilie, p.4-5.

Grenfel has many of the qualities which we would associate with the fox. There is his coldly calculated decision to hunt March down and marry her. [5] There are even physical characteristics suggestive of a fox, as in "The youth broke into a sharp yap of laughter" [6] - in the first version this read "clap of laughter". In addition, the parallel between Grenfel and the fox is made on the dramatic level. Grenfel's first entry into the house is a careful echo of the preceding sequence concerning the fox. Grenfel enters the house very much as a fox enters a coop, as a sly intruder and a disruptive force. March is even stood ready against him with her gun, as she did against the fox; whilst Banford significantly cringes away from Grenfel behind March. March's response is also of interest: she stands on the defensive, but she is already "spellbound" by Grenfel as she was by the fox. [7] The identification is completed when March realises that "the boy was to her the fox, and she could not see him otherwise." [8]

We are thus deliberately invited to make the imaginative parallel between Grenfel and the fox symbol. The effect of this is to give Grenfel's relationship with March a degree of impersonality necessary to impart a wider imaginative significance to the situation. We see Grenfel deliberately break up the relationship between March and Banford in order to have March himself. He destroys Banford in order to free March. The presence of the fox symbol as a parallel to this action takes our attention

[5] D.H. Lawrence, The Fox, p.20.

[6] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.14

[7] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.7, 10.

[8] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.11.

away from the possible significance in purely realistic terms. We are led to see the action of the tale in imaginative terms, as a battle of life against sterility.

The foundations for this imaginative drama are the relationships between the three characters; and these Lawrence treats in a true and sympathetic manner, not allowing the simplifications demanded by the symbolic method to subvert his insight into the intricacies of human behaviour and relationships. Lawrence takes a very vividly actualised and convincing human situation as his springboard for this symbolic fable. At the opening of the tale March's portrait is a psychologically convincing analysis of a woman striving to repress all her feminine attributes in a falsifying relationship with another woman. March has the air of being a manly woman, "like some graceful, loosebalanced young man". [9] All her energies are directed to conveying an impression of manly independence and self-sufficiency. Lawrence is, however, emphatic on one point: "her face was not a man's face, ever." This strange mixture of masculine and feminine qualities, "shy and sardonic at once", bespeaks a nature which has both a great reservoir of passive womanly inclinations, and yet a hard surface of distrust and disbelief in her own capacities as a woman. March's refuge from her true womanly nature is to hide behind the assumed self-assurance of her rôle as a man, and to enter into the relationship with Banford in which she can actively play out a self-submerging rôle to compensate for her failure as a woman. All this is implicit in Lawrence's initial characterisation of March. The outcome of this situation results

[9] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.4.

in the rest of the drama: in realistic human terms, the arrival of Grenfel is an event which disturbs March into an acute, though unconscious, awareness of her womanhood. By his appeal to her femininity, Grenfel forces March into an acceptance of her true nature: he compels her to break her rôle and realise herself. As soon as he enters, Grenfel sets up a conflict in March between her assumed rôle and the demands now made upon her as a woman. She tries desperately to retain her position, and yet recognises the appeal of Grenfel's stare: "She primmed up her mouth tighter and tighter, puckering it as if it were sewed, in her effort to keep her will uppermost. Yet her large eyes dilated and glowed in spite of her; she lost herself." [10] She becomes conscious of her bare legs in her manly puttees. Finally she gives up the struggle for the time being, and hide in a corner letting Grenfel's presence absorb her. [11]

As a human drama this is entirely convincing. Lawrence sacrifices none of the complexity of human relationships in using his symbolic method. The effect of Grenfel on March is as vivid as the effect of Walter Morel on Gertrude Coppard. In The Fox, however, there is not the entire commitment to a realistic presentation of life such as we find in Sons and Lovers Part One. The human level in The Fox is there as a vehicle for an additional level of meaning. The presence of the fox symbol

[10] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.11-12.

[11] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.15. In the revisions between the first and second versions of this scene, Lawrence deliberately emphasised the brightness of Grenfel seated next to the lamp in contrast to the shadowiness of March seated in the corner. The revision is of interest in that Lawrence is clearly giving a symbolic significance to the actualities of the dramatic situation: the suggestions are possibly that March has not yet emerged fully into the light as a whole self unlike Grenfel; or that she is retreating into a dark instinctual world as a result of Grenfel, hypnotised by his brightness.

universalises March's rôle-playing into an image of thwarted life being liberated from its sterility. March's relations with Grenfel become as imaginatively significant as her relations with the fox. In each crucial meeting between March and Grenfel the fox symbol is introduced in some context either by suggestion or directly, in order to give their relationship an imaginative rather than simply a literal significance. Indeed, it would be difficult to accept their relationship simply on the literal level, credible as its psychological basis may be. In Lawrence's simplified fable treatment, so much is left unexplained and unaccountable about Grenfel's decision to marry March and about his character as a whole. F.R. Leavis' suggestion that this is "a study of love" exhibiting a naïveté "direct and untouched by convention" is an appealing and undoubtedly true insight into the rather strange bleak relationship between Grenfel and March. [12] But it is difficult on this reckoning alone to account for the character, or non-character, of Grenfel. Whatever we may say of March and Banford, Grenfel has very little realistic actuality at all. From the outset he seems to work almost entirely as a poetically representative figure. Lawrence makes no attempt to humanise him [13]: his psychological reality and even his ordinary responses are either glossed over or missed out completely. All we are told when he is introduced into the tale is that "If he had any expression, besides a slight baffled look of wonder, it was one of sharp curiosity". [14] He is remarkably unaffected by the news of his grandfather's death: "He did not seem sad, not at all -

[12] F.R. Leavis, D.H. Lawrence,- Novelist, Penguin (1964), p.272, 275.

[13] K. Sagar, The Art of D.H. Lawrence, Cambridge (1966), p.117.

[14] D.H. Lawrence, The Fox, p.10.

only rather interestedly suprised." [15] (It was Grenfel's father in the first version of the tale - no doubt that was too unreal even for Lawrence's purposes). Altogether Grenfel is given a very nominal realistic covering; rather like the gypsy in The Virgin and the Gypsy he is deliberately kept shadowy so that his imaginative rôle should not be in conflict with any sense of his needing to be a credible character. Lawrence is not interested in Grenfel from a realistic point of view: he is interested in his rôle as a catalyst disrupting and transforming March's life. Thus Lawrence curtails our interest in this character as a human character, and replaces it by the symbolic associations of the fox motif. The result is that March's internal change is given an imaginative significance extending from its realistic foundations by being associated with the poetic figure of Grenfel.

Thus, Grenfel's decision to marry March is acted out imaginatively as a hunt. Grenfel is like a fox stalking its prey, controlling it with a hypnotic power. [16] The power which Grenfel has, the quality which makes him seem "to burn with a curious heat of life" and which Banford significantly finds so offensive [17], is stressed throughout our view of his relations with March. He has the same quality of burning vitality which March felt in her dream of the fox's brush burning her mouth. [18] The imaginative transference between Grenfel and the fox brings the vital life force, which is symbolically latent in the animal, into the dramatic actuality of the situation.

[15] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.11.

[16] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.19-21.

[17] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.25.

[18] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.16.

Grenfel's hunt is not, however, completely straightforward. At first, when he asks March to marry him, the sardonic manliness in March's nature reacts against the swooning femininity which is giving way to Grenfel's demands:

> March felt rather than heard him. She was trying in vain to turn aside her face. A great relaxation seemed to have come over her. She stood silent, her head slightly on one side. He seemed to be bending towards her, invisibly smiling. It seemed to her fine sparks came out of him.
> Then very suddenly she said:
> "Don't try any of your tomfoolery on me."
> A quiver went over his nerves. He had missed. [19]

Wilfully, she destroys the passive and natural "relaxation" which Grenfel's presence brings to her by asserting her unnatural rôle as a self-sufficient man-woman. What beats Grenfel finally in this confrontation is Banford's interference, the natural extension of March's assumed unnatural rôle. March might have given way but for Banford's plaintively dependent cry for the logs.

After this first engagement in battle, the seed of the imaginative situation is planted and begins to flourish. Grenfel's potent maleness, and its association with the fox symbol, defines him as the representative of a vitalising force in his active male appeal to March's feminine nature. March is the object for regeneration, dying out of her old life under Grenfel's influence into natural, passive womanhood: "his voice had such a curious power over her; making her feel loose and relaxed. She struggled somewhere for her own power. She felt for a moment that she was lost- lost - lost. The word seemed to rock in her as if she were dying." [20] Like the Woman who rode away, March is being submerged into an unconscious instinctive state of being, in which her own

[19] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.22.

[20] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.22.

will and self are obliterated. But in this tale there is an obstruction blocking the total fulfilment of this process - Banford. As Grenfel increasingly realises, she must be removed.

In the next confrontation between March and Grenfel we find the same impersonality and the same dramatic interaction with the fox symbol. When Banford goes to bed, March falls under Grenfel's spell again; and this time she is caught by a "brushing kiss" which "seemed to burn through her every fibre" [21] - the correlative of the fox's tail in her dream. She is inoculated with Grenfel's vital life, and acquiesces with a perplexed submission to his demand for marriage. When told, Banford stands out hard and fixed in opposition to Grenfel. Her reaction to the news of the marriage is both dramatically and symbolically appropriate: "'No, I simply couldn't stand it. I should be dead in a month.'" [22] The effect on the boy of Banford's hostility is to drive him out into the night "looking for something to shoot." He goes out in search of the fox overcome by a feeling that "England was little and tight. . . He felt the fox didn't have a chance." [23]

We can see the death of the fox in a number of ways. It is possibly a power-transference from the fox to Grenfel: he is the only one to track down and catch the animal; and thus he has a control over it,and what it represents, that March and Banford could never have. It might also signify a symbolic release of the fox from the ties of the stultifying, sterile society on which it at present depends - Grenfel shoots the fox whilst it is engaged in scavenging the sterile homesteads for its sustenance. Whatever suggestions we do see in the event it should be recognised that

[21] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.30.

[22] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.34.

[23] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.35-6.

it does not call for any specific meaning. The action is too convincing and too evocative for us to define it in terms of any one meaning. Instead, it casts an imaginative aura on the fictional situation. The pelt brings home to March the reality of the fox. She has the dream of covering Banford's dead body with the fox skin - an ironic inversion of the true fox symbol, since Banford can only accept a dead fox when she herself is dead. In addition, the dialogue about the dead animal is full of playfully significant innuendos:

> "Have you seen the chickens when they smell him, how frightened they are?" he said.
> "Yes, aren't they!"
> "You must mind you don't get some of his fleas."
> "Oh, fleas!" she replied, nonchalant. 24

as if even the fleas of the fox were a potential danger to the two women.

The human hunt continues, meanwhile, with Grenfel trying to draw March out of the cover provided by Banford and into a new life. The climax comes when Grenfel takes March into the barn, away from Banford; and she has her first full realisation of Grenfel, as she has just had of the dead fox. Unlike Elizabeth Bates in Odour of Crysanthemums, she does not wait until her man is dead before realising his "otherness": "she felt the deep, heavy, powerful stroke of his heart, terrible, like something from beyond. It was like something from beyond, something awful from outside, signalling to her." [25] The situation is invoked by Lawrence with his remarkable sense for the wonder and reverence of deep human contact. March is awakened to Grenfel's male power and to the new life to which she is called; Grenfel is awakened to a sudden responsibility for March's "strange vulnerability" as a woman. They

[24] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.39.

[25] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.50.

both realise and respond to the essential nature of the other. This is Lawrence at his vital best.

By this stage in the tale, the fox symbol has done its work. The rest of the tale brings the drama to its fulfilment in the realistic and imaginative terms already established, but without the symbol itself. When Grenfel goes, March lapses for the last time into her old life. She lacks a sense of reality with the physical absence of Grenfel: "it seemed as if everything real in life was retreating as the train retreated with his queer, chubby, ruddy face". [26] The old relationship with Banford reasserts itself: the strange unknown "love" for Grenfel is replaced by the known and fixed "love" for Banford. [27] The resolution is inevitably the destruction of Banford, leaving March free. Characteristically, it is only a half resolution: March is like "a woman who has died in the old way of love, and can't quite rise to the new way." [28] Lawrence confines the bounds of the tale to one part of his cycle: March makes the vital break for freedom and life, but fails to undergo the full regeneration. The impasse breaks the tale off on the verge of a new tale altogether.

What we see in The Fox is a true and reverently drawn human situation being created with Lawrence's best insight into complex relationships and being transposed into a universally significant fable through the imaginative action of the central symbol. Before we leave the tale, however, we should consider one point at which Lawrence might be accused of subverting his sympathetic presentation of the human drama to the demands of his symbolic method. Of necessity Banford's role in the drama is as the scapegoat representative of repressive anti-life sterility. The question is whether Lawrence

[26] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.54.

[27] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.55-6.

[28] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p. 60.

distorts his presentation of Banford for the sake of her rôle in the symbolic drama. At first sight Banford might seem undeserving of the treatment she receives: her character undergoes what is tantamount to a degradation in the eyes of the reader. Our initial impression of her is quite favourable: "though nervous and delicate" she is a "warm, generous soul".[29] After her initial fright, the appearance of Grenfel demonstrates her best qualities: she attends to him with "sisterly attention" and "natural warmth and kindliness".[30] After being told this, it therefore might seem strange that Lawrence should suddenly make her irritated with Grenfel so that she speaks to him "spitefully"[31] for no real reason, and that she should suddenly take a dislike to him: "She did not like to look at him. . . his ruddy skin that was quite dull and yet seemed to burn with a curious heat of life. It made her feel a little ill to look at him."[32] The imaginative significance of this is obvious: Banford is the antithesis of all Grenfel represents; her sterility is shown up by the contrast of his vital life. But is Lawrence conveying these symbolic suggestions at the expense of Banford as a semi-realistic creation? We notice, for example, that Lawrence begins to emphasise Banford's physical weaknesses, her ageing , her bad eyes - again in deliberate contrast to Grenfel, the life-giver. These details are symbolically very significant, but they seem to be so at the expense of Banford's dramatic character. Lawrence seems to be channelling our sympathies by putting his "thumb in the pan". Perhaps more damning still is Lawrence's seeming to side with Grenfel's antagonistic attacks on Banford , the bitterness and cynicism of which seem to have no dramatic justification in what we

[29] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.5.

[30] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.16.

[31] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.24.

[32] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.25.

have been shown in the tale. Lawrence actually steps in and calls Banford "a queer little witch". [33] It seems that to accord with Banford's symbolic rôle Lawrence has discounted the earlier sympathetic portrayal of her, ignored her good qualities and reduced her to a pathetic and rather contemptible figure in the eyes of the reader, but with no dramatic justification. If this were the case then Lawrence would quite clearly be distorting the dramatic level of his fictional world for the sake of the symbolic significance. I have postulated this in order to demonstrate an inherent danger of the symbolic method. In this instance, however, it is possible to justify Lawrence's treatment of Banford if we follow the implicit dramatic subtleties of Lawrence's presentation. For example, in Banford's relations with Grenfel we noticed that her first reaction was kindheartedness: she acted towards him as towards a brother. Quite soon, noticeably after the proposal scene in the wood-shed, she becomes antagonistic. This is not an inconsistency - far from it. Banford is kindhearted and sisterly only so long as she feels Grenfel will not interfere in her own relationship with March. Thus, when Banford knows Grenfel is leaving and she thinks she has won March back completely, she immediately retracts her antagonism and again treats Grenfel kindly. [34] Lawrence's very concentrated character sketching shows Banford to be a very weak personality, dependent entirely on the support of March: in her determination not to lose her only aid, Banford fights the intruder (Grenfel) like a cornered animal with fair means or foul - and she really does use some foul means for getting her own way. There are her insulting insinuations when she first hears of the proposed marriage: she

[33] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.53.

[34] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.47.

says she cannot believe March would marry Grenfel -

> ". . .she can never be such a fool. She can't loose her self-respect to such an extent." Her voice was cold and plaintive, drifting.
> "In what way will she lose her self-respect?" asked the boy.
> "If she hasn't lost it already," she said.
> He became very red, vermilion, under the slow, vague stare from behind the spectacles. 35

Lawrence gives a perfectly dramatic rendering of this conflict: we feel the nasty, insulting suggestiveness behind Banford's words, hinting that Grenfel has already tried to seduce March into a sexual loss of self-respect - the vagueness of the suggestion from behind the blank stare of the spectacles is all the more offensive. Banford also deliberately plays March and Grenfel off against each other in a very underhand way [36] ; and there is also her cunningly plaintive wailing to March when they are alone. [37] Altogether, these purely dramatic details hint at Banford's underlying nature with sufficient force for us not to be surprised by Grenfel's calling her a "nasty little creature". [38] Yet this does not prevent Lawrence from appealing to our sympathies for this character on a number of occasions, most notably in the scene with Banford crying pitifully when March goes out with Grenfel. [39] All in all we may accept the portrayal of Banford as implicitly accurate and not distorted by the necessities of the symbolic level. Lawrence very brilliantly avoids the danger of dramatic distortion attached to the symbolic method.

The Fox shows a poetic fictional world being created out of the dramatic actualities of character and situation by the action of the central symbol, a symbol dramatically active and elusive rather than

35 D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.32.

36 D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.41.

37 D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.34, 43-4.

38 D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.43.

39 D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.49.

fixed and definable, one which interacts with the dramatic situation to create its symbolic suggestions. The result is a fictional world which works on two levels with equal ease and force: we perceive a dual relationship between the fictional image and the world of human experience, one semi-realistic, the other symbolic, and both being generated from the same situation.

The Fox is a small-scale symbolic fiction, tightly ordered around the central symbol. St Mawr is rather different in the way it utilises a symbolic centre. The differences lie mainly in the structural organisation of the fictional world around the symbol, rather than in the essential nature of the symbol itself.

As a symbol St Mawr, like the fox, has the tremendous advantage of being an actual dramatic part of the action rather than something extraneous. The result is, as in The Fox, that the symbol interacts with the rest of the narrative with great flexibility and natural ease: the characters can respond to the horse as almost another character, whilst the horse's symbolic dimension simultaneously imparts an imaginative significance to the character situations. In its essential nature, the horse is a great archetypal symbol with an immense wealth of latent imaginative power [40], and as we would expect Lawrence's use of the symbol accords with its

[40] The horse is one of the principal fertility symbols (M. Leach, A Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend, New York) expressive of intense desires and instincts, and pertaining to the natural unconscious instinctive zone (J.E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, Routledge, 1962). Among the associations of this symbol listed by Jobes as: fertility, force, freedom, lust, triumph (G. Jobes, A Dictionary of Mythology, Folklore and Symbol, New York Scarecrow Press, 1962). Lawrence's own view of the horse symbol is to be seen in the letter to W. Johnson, 9th January 1924, (The Collected Letters, ed. H.T. Moore, p.767-70).

archetypal significance. Lawrence makes St Mawr's activities as horse and as symbol entirely interdependent. No scene is more important in this respect than that in which the horse makes his first appearance, for it is here that the symbolic and the dramatic levels meet.

Until this point in the tale there has been no noticeable imaginative level to the action. We have had a brilliantly incisive picture of Lou Witt's relationship with Rico Carrington and of the world which they inhabit, portrayed through Lawrence's best social satire. Reading the tale for the first time we might easily mistake this for one of Lawrence's purely satiric tales. The whole ethos of this fictional world is so assured in its satiric purpose and sets off with such momentum that it seems exclusive of anything else. Lawrence seems to delight in a tone of wry irony and bathos in his satire, which he gives full rein to in St Mawr's opening pages:

> Mrs Witt hated Paris: "this sordid, unlucky city", she called it. "Something unlucky is bound to happen to me in this sinister, unclean town," she said. "I feel contagion in the air of the place. For heaven's sake, Louise, let us go to Morocco or somewhere."
> "No, mother dear, I can't now. Rico has proposed to me, and I have accepted him. Let us think about a wedding, shall we?"
> "There!" said Mrs Witt. "I said it was an unlucky city!" 41

Even in such a minor episode there are a number of implicit satiric viewpoints. Mrs Witt is an ideal social commentator and purely comic character; and serves as one of Lawrence's best mediums for satire directly aimed at the surrounding world. In addition, there is the unspoken satire present in Lawrence's portrayal of Mrs Witt and Lou: the affectation of the elder woman, the free and easy independence of the younger woman (one of Lawrence's continuing

41 D.H. Lawrence, St Mawr in St Mawr and The Virgin and the Gypsy, Penguin (1967), p.13.

targets for satire), and the sterile rootlessness with which the American nouveaux riches wander aimlessly around Europe. Lawrence's characteristic humour is in full swing in passages like this, and also in the typically wry exaggeration of phrasing that marks his satiric style: "[Rico] reappeared in Paris, wanting to paint his head off, terribly inspired by Cézanne and by old Renoir." [42] Fundamentally serious as it is, the satire seems to have too much of an infectious grip on the narrative to allow any other note to be sounded. Into this situation Lawrence introduces the symbol of St Mawr, yet without any sense of discord. Indeed, once the central symbol is established the two levels, satiric and poetic, fall into a mutually helpful relationship: the biting picture of the social "pantomime" [43], in which Lou and Mrs Witt are involved, dramatises the sterile life which St Mawr contrasts and opposes as a symbol of creative life. The satire complements the meaning of the symbol, while St Mawr plays the part of being a foil for the barren society. In this tale satire and symbolism go hand in hand as realism and symbolism do in The Fox.

The ostensible reason for buying St Mawr is a purely social one and as much a satiric comment as anything else: "Rico dear, you must get a horse.", so that Rico can join the beau monde on Rotten Row. [44] When the horse does make his first appearance, however, the satiric note abates momentarily to allow the integration of the symbol into the dramatic actuality of the tale. This Lawrence does with consummate skill and natural ease, replacing the satire by a characteristic insight into the animal purely as an animal without any obtrusive symbolic intention:

[42] D.H. Lawrence, St Mawr, p.13.

[43] D.H. Lawrence, St Mawr, p.36.

[44] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.17.

> In the inner dark she saw a handsome bay horse with his clean ears pricked like daggers from his naked head as he swung handsomely round to stare at the open doorway. He had big, black brilliant eyes, with a sharp questioning glint, and that air of tense, alert quietness which betrays an animal that can be dangerous. 45

Lawrence's insight into the horse is so intense and evocative that, as in all his best symbolic writing, the symbolic import rises quite naturally and unobtrusively from the actual physical reality of the animal. As P.K. Garrett points out, Lawrence's "concentrated attention. . .exceeds the apparent requirements of the narrative and thus lends [his symbolic objects] intensity, making them seem to mean more than they ordinarily would." [46] The symbolic rôle of St Mawr slips in almost unnoticed in the intensity of the description: before we realise it, the horse is established as representing the instinctual qualities which "civilised man" bridles but cannot master - "a dark invisible fire seemed to come out of him. . . He looked like something finely bred and passionate, that has been judged and condemned." [47] The suggestiveness which Lawrence injects into his descriptions of the animal draw to a large extent upon the latent archetypal nature of the horse as a symbol for instinctive forces. Lou's fear at realising St Mawr is a stallion, and her astonishment at feeling "the vivid heat of his life come. . .through the lacquer of red-gold gloss. So slippery with vivid, hot life!" are both reactions drawn from the inherent symbolic appeal of the horse and the inherent nature of the horse as a real thing (the two levels,being, of course, intimately connected). And as in The Fox, the symbolic level is being brought out through the dramatic response of the character.

[45] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.19.

[46] P.K. Garrett, Scene and Symbol from George Eliot to James Joyce, Yale University Press (1969), p.11.

[47] D.H. Lawrence, St Mawr, p.20-1.

Similarly, as in The Fox, when we come to ask "what does St Mawr mean as a symbol?" we begin to realise how well Lawrence integrates the symbolic, dramatic and satiric levels of his fictional world. Like the fox, St Mawr has no objective or definable "meaning" outside of his activities in the tale. The archetypal suggestions of the symbol interact with the dramatic context and impart an imaginative significance to the situation. For example, Lou's decision to buy St Mawr, ostensibly for Rico but in reality for herself, is a simple dramatic action. But we have an immediate sense of a symbolic significance because the simple action is associated with the horse. It suggests that Lou is trying to regain the "vivid, hot life" which her own life lacks because of its superficiality and hollowness. It also suggests that she is trying to give this potency to Rico, though there is a definite ironic note about this, which Rico's response to the gift of the horse makes clear: "'For me? Darling? . . . He may not be in the least attractive to me. As you know, I have hardly any feeling for horses at all. . . Honestly, I prefer a car.'" [48] At this level, the suggestions are light, even playful. Even more amusing is the relationship between the symbol and his groom, Lewis. This is evidently a miniature self-portrait by Lawrence; and, as usual, he is not past making fun of himself. Lewis is "a little scrub of a fellow. . .the attendent shadow of the animal". It is as if Lawrence were satirising himself as the appointed protector and champion of the instincts represented by the horse. as Lou says, "'If we buy St Mawr we get the man thrown in.'" [49]

Lightness such as this is welcome; but of course the symbol does not simply have this localised effect. The presence of St Mawr

[48] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.24.

[49] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.25.

transforms the situation of Lou and Mrs Witt, giving an imaginative level to them and to the action as a whole. Both Lou and Mrs Witt are changed as a result of St Mawr's presence: stated crudely, they are both forced into a realisation of the sterile nature of their present existence, and are turned towards the hope of a new life through a creative relationship with a "pure animal man". [50] The effect of the symbol is to make their situation into a fable of regeneration.

In Lou's case, her response to St Mawr has a great deal in common with March's response to the fox. Like March she reacts to the animal as both actuality and symbol, thus giving herself and St Mawr a symbolic level; and, also like March, the animal has a disruptive effect upon her, showing her the possibility of some other kind of life:

> now, as if that mysterious fire of the horse's body had split some rock in her, she went home and hid herself in her room, and just cried. The wild, brilliant, alert head of St Mawr seemed to look at her out of another world. [51]

We can see very clearly in this example how the symbol interacts with the characters: it calls an ultra-realistic response from them, which shifts the perspective so that the dramatic situation of the character has an imaginative significance as well as a realistic one. Lou's desire to escape from her sterile life with Rico is understandable on the realistic plane; but she sees the solution in St Mawr. We have an actual dramatic presentation of the barrenness of Lou's life with Rico, but the other creative life is simply represented by the horse, a symbol:

[50] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.57.

[51] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.22.

> A curious deadness upon her, like the first touch of death. . . She wanted to escape this battle of wills.
>
> Only St Mawr gave her some hint of the possibility . . . she seemed to hear the echoes of another darker, more spacious, more dangerous, more splendid world than ours, that was beyond her. And there she wanted to go. 52

Such a situation clearly delineates the ultra-realistic appeal of this symbolic fictional world. Lou is turned into one of Lawrence's resurrection figures, like March, struggling against impending "death" in the hope of new "life", liberated by the influence of St Mawr. But already we begin to notice certain differences in approach when compared with The Fox. For one thing, in St Mawr the imaginative significance of the actual drama is much more explicit (as the above examples indicate), whereas The Fox works far more dramatically, leaving the significance of the action to be deduced. This is simply the result of a far more basic difference in approach between these two tales in their use of the central symbol. In The Fox, the fox symbol works on the limited scale of paralleling an actual character in the tale, Grenfel, with the positive result that the qualities of the symbol are given a concrete dramatic form - i.e. March's relationship with Grenfel. In St Mawr by contrast the qualities of the "other life" which Lou aspires to are never made actual in any form other than the symbol. Though we see its opposite, we never see what this "other life" is in human terms. The result is that the tale is finally unsatisfactory with regard to Lou; and we are left, as we shall see, with a rather inconclusive ending.

The opposite to the "other life" is shown perhaps a little too clearly. Through his association with the horse, Rico too adopts an

52 D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.33-4.

imaginative rôle. By the contrast with St Mawr (and the horse's associates, Lewis and Phoenix), Rico is made representative of the life-denying qualities pervading the society around Lou. He is one of the "empty dangerless men" [53], the antithesis of everything St Mawr embodies. In Rico's case, however, we may feel that Lawrence has dangerously oversimplified the character for the sake of its symbolic rôle in the fiction. Rico is such a statically representative figure, almost allegorically so, At the beginning of the tale Lawrence directly identifies Rico with a horse that is completely "mastered" [54], no longer lively or exciting. The hint makes the contrast with St Mawr inevitable. Again, immediately after the passage outlining the effect of St Mawr on Lou, the contrast with Rico returns even more explicitly:

> [Rico], too was rather like a horse - but for ever quivering with a sort of cold, dangerous mistrust, which he covered with anxious love. . . now, since she had seen the full, dark, passionate blaze of power and of different life in the eyes of the thwarted horse, the anxious powerlessness of the man drove her mad. [55]

The relation between Rico and the horse lacks that complex interaction of symbol and character that we find with Lou and March. Rico is developed no further than this: he remains throughout the tale statically representative of anti-life, whereas Lou's rôle, like March's, is one of change and development on both the dramatic and imaginative levels. Even with Grenfel and Banford, Rico's closest counterparts in The Fox, there is not this same limitation of character within the symbolic rôle: Grenfel is representative like Rico (though of the opposite qualities), but his dramatic and imaginative rôle in the tale has an elusiveness

[53] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.58.

[54] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.11.

[55] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.23.

and complexity, particularly in his relations with March, which avoids entirely the kind of static figure found in Rico. Banford, on the other hand, has a quite complex psychological actuality as the basis for her poetic rôle, as we noticed in our examination of her. With Rico we find neither of these: he is neither psychologically actualised, nor is he a mysteriously evocative figure. He remains statically defined as "one of mankind's myriad conspirators, who conspire to live in absolute physical safety, whilst willing the minor disintegration of all positive living." [56] ; and his dramatic rôle in the tale is simply as an imaginative foil for the central symbol. In part this is done playfully enough through Rico's unconscious faux pas in connection with the horse. When, for example, Rico remarks that if he is ever made a lord he shall be Lord St Mawr, this draws from Mrs Witt the retort "You mean. . . his real lordship would be the horse?" [57] – the irony being, of course, that Rico is the very last person who should be lord of the qualities symbolised by St Mawr. Dramatically, too, Rico's rôle as a foil is brought out in a lively way. There is the sharply realised scene in the Row when Rico rides St Mawr for the first time, and Phoenix has to take over; or there is the scene when Rico argues with Phoenix over the servant girls. In both cases Lawrence uses his dramatic art to actualise the symbolic significance of Rico's relationship to the horse. Rico just cannot control St Mawr in the Row, and in his ineffectual way he tries to fight to master the perverse power of the animal: "He hated his horse, and viciously tried to force him to a quiet, straight trot." [58] The effect is to unleash St Mawr's passionate energy upon the civilised atmosphere of the city: "Up went St Mawr on his hind legs, to the terror of the Row." Rico

[56] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.81.

[57] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.31.

[58] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.32-3.

is forced to dismount in favour of Phoenix who can control the animal with his primitive and powerful will. All the time Lawrence is playing the imaginative aura of the symbol upon the dramatic circumstances, giving each detail its significance: Rico tries to constrain St Mawr to a quiet trot - he, the society of the Row, and even the policemen who come comically "to save the situation", are divorced from St Mawr and all he represents. Thus "Rico was requested not to ride St Mawr in the Row any more, as the stallion was dangerous to public safety."

Lively as such episodes are, however, their significance is rather too apparent by virtue of Rico's statically representative rôle. The rather drastic simplification of character found in Rico is not in itself a weakness or fault. It is simply a result of the general explicitness to be found in this tale in Lawrence's use of his symbol - an explicitness, that is, not in the sense of the symbol itself having a defined meaning, but in the way Lawrence defines and makes explicit the symbolic significance of the actual action of the tale. Whereas in The Fox Lawrence used the symbol within the dramatic actuality of the tale and allowed the significance to speak for itself, in St Mawr we find him defining the imaginative significance of the episodes involving the horse for us. Perhaps this is a necessary result of the much larger scope of this tale when compared with the restricted range of The Fox. At times we may have the distinct feeling that Lawrence's original idea in St Mawr ran away with him, that he could not contain the manifold possibilities opened by this tale within the symbolic framework he had established. Part of the vitality of this tale is that it is bursting with powerful and wide-ranging imaginative vision, which Lawrence probably would not discipline with the strictness and economy

found in The Fox. We can see this most clearly in the excursion to Devil's Chair.

This episode is perhaps the central event in the whole tale with regard to St Mawr's symbolic rôle. It opens with marvellously actualised dramatic gusto, as a balance to the later symbolic intensity. The destination of course has a distinctly symbolic ring to it - "two old groups of rocks, called the Angel's Chair and the Devil's Chair" [59] - but the implications are submerged in the dramatic actuality for later use. The seeds are set for Rico's later fight with the horse in his difficulty mounting at the outset. But eventually, after Rico is seated on St Mawr and sets him "bouncing down the road in the wrong direction", the party are ready - and then Lawrence takes us off full swing into a brilliantly realised English summer-time outing, full of dramatic and imaginative suggestiveness. The trip through the English countryside in summer bloom is described with Lawrence's characteristically powerful and sharp precision, which seems to hint at things beyond the immediate concerns of the scene:

> The Needle's Eye was a hole in the ancient grey rock, like a window, looking to England; England at the moment in shadow. A stream wound and glinted in the flat shadow, and beyond that the flat, insignificant hills heaped in mounds of shade. Cloud was coming - the English side was in shadow. Wales was still in the sun, but the shadow was spreading. [60]

This captures the immediate circumstance perfectly; but also the recession of brightness seems suggestive of a recession of life from the modern world, particularly coming as it does after Lou's lament that people today are not alive in the sense that our ancestors were alive. It hints that the potency implicit in St Mawr is being lost

[59] D.H. Lawrence, St Mawr, p.64.

[60] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.72-3.

from modern life. The talk, too, which is so perfectly desultory in its manner and which captures so well the tone of such a gathering, is dramatically and poetically right. As is often the case in Lawrence's poetic fiction, the dialogue explores and develops the latent imaginative themes of the tale whilst also encompassing the dramatic situation. There is Lou's lament for lost life, just mentioned, which shows up the puerile state of modern living explicitly - "'We're not really alive, in the sense that they were alive.'" - whilst Lawrence's dramatic presentation and dialogue show up the same theme implicitly:

> "But look here, do you mean they were any better than we are?" asked the fair young man.
> Lou looked at him quizzically.
> "We don't exist," she said, squinting at him oddly.
> "I jolly well know I do," said the fair young man.
> "I consider these days are the best ever, especially for girls," said Flora Manby. "And anyhow they're our own days, so I don't jolly well see the use of crying them down."
> They were all silent, with the last echoes of emphatic joie de vivre trumpeting on the air, across the hills of Wales.
> "Spoken like a brick, Flora," said Rico. [61]

The pure comic bathos of Rico's last remark and the whole portrayal of the group indicate the wry dramatic irony behind this mock pilgrimage to the Devil's Chair - it would be difficult to imagine a group of people with less in them of what Lawrence means by the "devil", the "old Pan".

The central significance of the expedition, and in some ways of the whole tale, suddenly explodes on our attention with St Mawr shying "as if a bomb had gone off", and falling back on top of Rico. [62] This is a great symbolic event, rising quite naturally out

[61] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.72.

[62] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.73-4.

of the actuality of which it is so much a part. It is rendered with superb drama, and occurs just as Rico reaches the depths of his complacent superficiality:

> Lou, from a little distance, watched the glossy, powerful haunches of St Mawr swaying with life, always too much life, like a menace. The fair young man was whistling a new dance tune.
> "That's an awfully attractive tune," Rico called. "Do whistle it again, Fred, I should like to memorize it."
> Fred began to whistle it again.
> At that moment St Mawr exploded. . . 63

The description which follows of Rico fighting viciously to control the horse, and of the curved belly and flashing hooves inverted on top of the rider is so dramatic that it generates of its own accord a symbolic power in the context of what has gone before. Simplistically stated, the revolt of the horse at the dead snake and the inversion of the rider symbolically dramatise the death of the old intuitive potency (the dead snake as a dead phallus) through the modern restraint and repression of the instinctive life in man. The vital instinctive elements of life are, like St Mawr, frustrated by an attempted control and impotency. The result is the possibility of a dangerous reaction (the inversion of rider and horse). These, or similar, suggestions are implicit in the dramatic action of this scene since the horse is itself already charged with imaginative power. But, as is generally the case in this tale, Lawrence is not content to allow the symbol to interact dramatically with the situation and create its own imaginative significance. He follows the event with a long passage designed to interpret and explore the symbolic associations of St Mawr's falling back on Rico. As Lou rides away to fetch the brandy she becomes the vehicle for this explication, which Lawrence excuses by saying (without sounding too convinced himself) that "she had a vison, a vision of evil. Or not strictly a vision." [64] The purpose

[63] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.73.

[64] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.76.

of the passage is quite clear: as Dr. Leavis points out, "It brings to explicitness significances that the action, the symbolism, and the poetic means in general of the tale have intimated." [65] In itself there is no particular fault to be attached to this intrusion. We might have prefered it if Lawrence had kept to the dramatic symbolic method of The Fox in which the symbolism speaks for itself; but, as we have already mentioned, it seems characteristic of the way Lawrence uses symbolism in this tale in general that he should feel the need to be so explicit. We may notice that he has already done something very similar to this "vision of evil" passage earlier in the tale: Lou had a "vision" after seeing St Mawr for the first time [66], and again it was designed to explicate the symbolic identity of the horse. The explicitness perhaps arises because this situation did not have the potential for an economical and purely dramatic use of symbol such as we find in The Fox. Nor does it have the restricted range of that tale. Lawrence possibly felt, then, that there were more associations implicit in this central symbolic event than a dramatic presentation alone could convey, and thus felt warranted in changing his method. We would perhaps not have seen quite so many suggestions behind Rico's falling off St Mawr had we not had the accompanying "vision". Certainly the scope of the indictment of mankind and the suggested salvation, to "fight, fight, fight", would have been lost. The actual method itself is not under question. What we may feel a little uneasy about is the way this explicitness manifests itself on this particular occasion. We notice first of all - and this is a purely aesthetic objection - that Lawrence goes a long way outside the

[65] F.R. Leavis, D.H. Lawrence - Novelist, Penguin (1964), p.250.

[66] D.H. Lawrence, St Mawr, p.22.

contexts of the tale for his symbolic associations, even so far as the recent political events of his time. But this outburst from such a wealthy mind is welcome, if not aesthically correct, because it is so significant. The real objection to be made is one of presentation: the passage is too repetitiously explicit and is written in such an awfully heavy manner - points which are self-evident. The effect is to disrupt the narrative balance, to dislocate the integration between symbol and dramatic actuality which is so brilliantly maintained in the rest of the tale.

The lack of discipline and aesthetic control to be found in this passage are characteristic of the tale as a whole. It lacks entirely the taut coherence of The Fox. The wide-ranging nature of the satire and symbolism lead Lawrence to organise his fictional world in a rather weak manner around the central symbol. The tale is made up of a straggling series of episodes linked around the horse symbol, but often with little dramatic relation to one another. St Mawr lacks the dynamism of The Fox, and yet fails to achieve the careful integration of episodes into a whole structure as in Women in Love. The action is conducted with a curious inconsequence. We shift between scenes of vivid symbolic power which have an unequivocal imaginative significance, and scenes of a peculiar naturalism in which not only the poetic impact seems lacking but also the satiric importance, and even at times the dramatic relevance.

The clearest example of this feature is the long sequence with Lou in the garden.[67] Lou wanders into the garden thinking vaguely, whilst Phoenix weeds the onions. Lewis appears, and after a slight tête-à-tête, introduces a visitor. There then follows the

[67] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.45-54.

curious episode with Mr Jones from the post office. This in turn is followed by the equally curious episode with Phoenix, the only conceivable explanation for which is as a precedent for the otherwise unexplainably sudden developments later in Lou's car ride with Phoenix. After this Mrs Witt appears, and we have the hair-cutting scene. This admittedly has a degree of relevance: it demonstrates Lewis' "queer male rebellion", a small parallel to the main action concerning St Mawr; and we also see a brilliant little sketch of Mrs Witt "in her element".[68] But these meandering ten pages do little more than evoke the atmosphere of desultory activity, the "peaceful indolence"[69], which characterises a hot summer's day in England. If this is their sole purpose they do it perfectly. Perhaps Lawrence was simply enjoying the activities of his characters, lingering in the appeal of this imagined world; and our criteria of relevance are too harsh and unresponsive. The sequence is certainly not uninteresting. But what a curious companion it makes to the symbolic and dramatic power of the Devil's Chair episode which follows. It is possible that Lawrence felt the need for periodic relaxations in the intensity of his narrative, since comparable passages occur throughout the tale. If so, then the result is a little incongruous. The narrative balance is lost and we are conscious of "an uneasy relationship between symbolic action and realistic surface".[70]

The looseness to be found in St Mawr is to some degree typical of Lawrence's use of a central symbolic focus for a fiction, particularly in a large-scale work. We find a continuous refusal to

[68] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.52-3.

[69] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.50.

[70] R.E. Pritchard, D.H. Lawrence - Body of Darkness, Hutchinson University Library (1971), p.157.

totally integrate the fictional world into the terms dictated by a central symbol. This is true even of The Fox. Ultimately, Lawrence always finds the use of a central symbol too restricting; and he often abandons the symbol at some point in the fiction because he refuses to falsify the experiences for the sake of a satisfying aesthetic unity. This is especially noticeable in the ending of both The Fox and St Mawr. Both tales share a similar inconclusiveness since neither of them retain their central symbol to the end. St Mawr will serve to illustrate this point.

Undoubtedly we expect the escape from England which sounds the conclusion of St Mawr. In terms of the drama so far this is a very satisfying development. Lou and Mrs. Witt save the horse, and by implication themselves, from the destructive designs of Rico, Flors Manby and Dean Viner, by carrying him off to the "New World". The imaginative significance of this step crudely stated is that they become saviours of the instinctive/creative life implicit in St Mawr: their action constitutes the first step in their own regeneration. So far so good. But after the strange interlude preceding their arrival in Texas, during which Lawrence seems determined to show up the "New World" as even "worse than Europe" [71], there follows the curious abandoning of the central symbol in Texas: the last we see of St Mawr is him following "almost slavishly" the ranch-owner's long-legged Texan mare; and at this point we may begin to ask with Lou "What, in heaven's name, was one to make of it all?" [72] Even if the idea of the powerful St Mawr as a slave seems rather incongruous, there is a clear reason why Lawrence should abandon the central symbol in this way. After Lou's escape from England and her break

[71] D.H. Lawrence, St Mawr, p.139.

[72] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.138.

for a new life, there is no real need for St Mawr: his symbolic rôle was to epitomise the possibility of a new life, and Lou's development takes her beyond the scope of the symbol. It seems that Lawrence takes the initial, even the major, impulse for the drama from the horse symbol; but he obviously refuses to be constricted by any obligation or need to complete the tale in terms of the symbol for the sake of aesthetic unity. By breaking away from the symbol, just as he does in The Fox, Lawrence retains an allegiance to life as it is rather than as the aesthetic vision makes it. What he sacrifices is the possibility of resolving his tale at all in the terms in which he has so far conducted it. He can only reach an impasse.

First of all, he plays out the minor drama between Lou and Phoenix in order to clarify what Lou does not want as her new life: she does not want the male sexual domination proffered by the degenerately instinctive Indian, counterpart to Romero in The Princess. Then Lawrence introduces the ranch, Las Chivas, as a brilliant half-resolution. The ranch is the only concrete manifestation in the tale of the "other world" which St Mawr seemed to inhabit and offer Lou as a possible new life. The ranch provides the oportunity to live the free instinctive life of "aloneness", symbolised earlier by the horse. In effect Lawrence has simply shifted his meaning evasively from one symbol to another. The position Lou reaches is of discovering her central dilemma - "either my taking a man shall have a meaning and a mystery that penetrates my very soul, or I will keep to myself." [73] - but not being able to solve it. Though it lacks synthesis, the effect of this ending is dramatic in its note of question, and is typical of the way Lawrence ends his fictions. In terms of the cycle of life and death which Lawrence plays out in terms of kinds of human relationships,

[73] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.164-5.

Lou is on the verge of a new stage: she has escaped the sterile "death" of her relationship witn Rico, and come to the realisation that the new "life" lies in a certain kind of relationship with a certain kind of man. She reaches the stage of the Priestess of Isis in The Man Who Died, waiting for the touch of the "mystic new man" [74], but meanwhile suspended virginally alone. When we come to this point we are on the verge of another tale altogether.

Such a dramatically inconclusive ending has the open-endedness of life, and is the perfect note for Lawrence to end upon. Aesthetically, however, it is possibly something of an anti-climax, and this point demonstrates how entirely different Lawrence is in his use of the symbolic fictional world when compared with Virginia Woolf. As we shall see, Virginia Woolf's symbolic fiction is an attempt to synthesize and relate the whole fictional world to the central symbol. In Night and Day, To The Lighthouse, The Waves and The Years, the symbol is the central point around which the whole narrative moves and to which it is strictly, even stiffly, related. The culmination of the meaning is presented entirely through the symbol and resolved in terms of it. Virginia Woolf can achieve this because she chooses a static, non-dramatic symbol. Lawrence cannot synthesize in the same way partly from choice and partly from the necessity of the kind of symbol he chooses. The meaning of St Mawr is not that life is like a horse, whereas the meaning of The Waves is, to some extent at least, that life is like a series of waves. From the aesthetic point of view Lawrence faces a disadvantage in that he must always finally abandon a dramatic symbol like St Mawr or the fox, and let the tale stand on its own, conclusive or inconclusive. The point here is that Lawrence would probably have thought Virginia

[74] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.146.

Woolf's kind of symbolic synthesis far too artificial. He would prefer the intense dramatic power of The Fox, with its own kind of dynamic coherence despite the inconclusive ending; or he would prefer the relaxed association of episodes in St Mawr, with intense symbolic concentrations whenever necessary.

But to say that Lawrence prefers a loose symbolic ordering is not to imply either than he could not control a symbolic fiction or that he did not realise the possibilities for economy inherent in the method. When he can order a limited area of experience around one symbol without necessarily restricting the range of his whole work, then he can synthesize his fiction with a symbol as fully and as finally as Virginia Woolf or Henry James. The work in which he finds most scope for this is Women in Love. In this novel the symbolic method is used to build up the larger structure by a series of episodes, each centred upon an isolated symbol, but each relating to the wider imaginative framework of the novel. Of the thirty-one chapters, some fifteen are based upon a central symbol or image.[75] Each is designed to focus the significance of a limited part of the whole action of the novel. This limitation allows Lawrence to exercise tremendous economy in the separate incidents, giving him an outlet for his gifts of powerful symbolic evocation and dramatic inter-relation, whilst it also releases him from the fear of restricting the whole work to one symbolic centre. Each symbolic episode has the effect of being entirely self-sufficient, whilst they are clearly parts of a larger whole. One effect of this is that the plot, the traditional linear and temporal progression of events in the narrative, is replaced by

[75] Allowing necessarily for possible disagreement, the fifteen chapters using a central symbol are: "Diver", "Totem", "Coal-Dust", "Sketch-Book", "An Island", "Mino", "Water-Party", "Rabbit", "Moony", "Gladiatorial", "Threshold", "Excurse", "Death and Love", "A Chair", "Snowed Up".

a sequence of inter-related episodes which might be placed in any order excepting those which contain distinct developments in character relationships.[76] The conduciveness of this method to Lawrence, and the flexible control which it asserts on his gifts, account in part at least for the particularly fine aesthetic unity of Women in Love. It is almost like a sequence of Lawrence's best short stories welded together into an overall design.

The arrangement and build up of the episodes is worthy of note. Often Lawrence deals with the different couple-relationships in separate, often balancing, episodes, each time making some dramatic and symbolic point which furthers the argument of the novel. When Gudrun and Gerald confront each other in Chapter 10 "Sketchbook", Ursula has meanwhile drifted off into a separate chapter with Birkin, Chapter 11 "An Island". Again, at the centre of the novel we find two balancing symbolic chapters which dramatise the relationships between the two main couples - Chapter 18 "Rabbit" for Gudrun and Gerald; Chapter 19 "Moony" for Ursula and Birkin. The danger of this isolated and episodic progression is that it might limit the human variety achieved by larger groups of characters meeting, and thus miss the epic sweep of a really great novel. Lawrence counteracts this by a number of chapters on a really grand scale. At periodic intervals, carefully spaced in the narrative, Lawrence widens his concerns to centre around some social occasion at which all the major groups of characters meet and interact, thus allowing full rein to Lawrence's powers of dramatic portrayal and social observation. We find this occurring in Chapter 2 "Shortlands", Chapter 8 "Breadalby", Chapter 14 "Water-Party", and Chapter 29 "Continental". Each of these is of direct dramatic and imaginative relevance to the four characters and the symbolic fabric of the novel, yet each of them has

[76] This point is mentioned by P.K. Garrett, Scene and Symbol from George Eliot to James Joyce, Yale University Press (1969), p.205.

a much wider scope than the more restricted symbolic chapters. We should never forget that Lawrence gives us a novel of society and of human relationships in Women in Love, a really wonderful picture of actual life, as well as a great symbolic novel.

The brevity of the chapter as a fictional unit compels Lawrence to rely in his use of symbol upon a concentration of dramatic and imaginative power as in The Fox, rather than upon the more explicit symbolic method of St Mawr. The result is that he creates very strong, self-sufficient symbolic episodes which have tremendous dramatic an imaginative power concurrently. They work equally well as realism and symbolism. Characteristically, the symbolic power is derived most frequently from the archetypal nature of the chosen symbol, whilst the realistic power is derived from the dramatic nature of its portrayal. In Women in Love Lawrence relies heavily upon his ability to present a scene or event with such intensity that it adopts the dimension of symbol of its own accord - in many ways the basis of his symbolic art. As P.K. Garrett points out, in Lawrence's work "the symbolic significance of the scene is not so much different from its literal import as it is greater. Analogical symbolism . . . is less important than the symbolism of the universal within the particular." [77]

Perhaps the most famous symbolic chapters in Women in Love are Chapter 18 "Rabbit", which we considered partially in Chapter One above, and Chapter 19 "Moony". Both owe their power to the evocative drama of Lawrence's writing. There is such dramatic and poetic intensity in the description of Birkin shattering the moon that the symbolic meaning rises quite naturally out of it. Many readers of this episode, in their search for an understanding of the scene, take its specific meaning in the context of Birkin's exclamation, "Cybele - curse her!

[77] P.K. Garrett, ibid., p.193.

The accursed Syria Dea!" [78] They refer the symbol back, because of this hint, to Birkin's earlier meditation upon woman as the Great Mother; and interpret the "Moony" episode simply in this light, as Birkin attacking in Ursula the impulse of the Syria Dea by stoning the archetypally female moon. This is a pity, since this interpretation limits the symbol to the direct context; and surely the power of the scene suggests a much wider reference than this. Birkin's references to the "accursed Syria Dea" are somewhat misleading: they might be what he understands as the significance of his stoning the moon, but this is not necessarily all that Lawrence intends to imply. The power with which the scene is evoked and the dramatic situation within which it is set create meanings outside of Birkin's interpretation of his action, meanings which we can best appreciate by examining the episode itself in some detail.

The dramatic situation encompassing the episode is worthy of note. Birkin is down by the shore of the reservoir, stoning the moon. Ursula is up on the bank, watching him. They have not met since the failure of Chapter 15 "Sunday Evening", and they are really estranged. Their actual separation now at the outset of this episode is a dramatic echo of their emotional separation. They are united only in watching the quiverings of the shattered moon.

Lawrence builds the scene up very carefully. Ursula watches Birkin walk by the water, half afraid of her own intrusion into his privacy. Birkin begins to pick up dead husks of flowers and toss them onto the lake. It is these dead flowers tossed at the moon which call forth his exclamation against the "accursed Syria Dea!" - the dead flowers are an evocative little detail. His action of throwing stones develops from this, perhaps as an outlet for bitter feelings against Ursula. Thus the episode starts on a definite note of hostility and

[78] D.H. Lawrence, Women in Love, Penguin (1965), p.278.

separation. But whilst Birkin is busy attacking Ursula in the form of the moon, Lawrence is showing us something quite different beneath the surface situation through the dramatic and symbolic power of his writing.

Birkin throws four times before Ursula breaks in to preclude any more. Each time the pattern is the same. Lawrence describes the shattering of the moon, and then the gradual return of the complete reflection as the turmoil subsides. Each description is of growing poetic intensity. What do the two lovers, separated both actually and emotionally, see as they watch the stones explode the moon, unconsciously together? Firstly, there is the dispersal of the reflection: "Rapidly, like white birds, the fires all broken rose across the pond, fleeing in clamorous confusion, battling with the flock of dark waves that were forcing their way in." Then they see the reflection trying to re-assert itself and regain its harmony:

> But at the centre, the heart of all, was still a vivid, incandescent quivering of a white moon not quite destroyed, a white body of fire writhing and striving and not even now broken open, not yet violated. It seemed to be drawing itself together with strange, violent pangs, in blind effort. It was getting stronger, it was reasserting itself, the inviolable moon. And the rays were hastening in in thin lines of light, to return to the strengthened moon, that shook upon the water in triumphant reassumption. 79

The pattern is repeated, this time with the heart of the moon like a blown rose, with petals intertwining back around the "heart of the rose". Finally Birkin shatters the moon with stone after stone,

> till there was nothing but a rocking of hollow noise, and a pond surged up, no moon any more, only a few broken flakes tangled and glittering broadcast in darkness, without aim or meaning, a darkened confusion,

and he stands apparently satisfied at this seemingly final destruction of the unified image. Then again as they watch the moon begins to

79 D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.278.

re-form:

> in the darkness was a little tumult of ebbing flakes of light, a cluster dancing secretly in a round, twining and coming steadily together. They were gathering a heart again, they were coming once more into being. Gradually the fragments caught together reunited, heaving, rocking, dancing, falling back as in panic, but working their way home again persistently, making semblance of fleeing away when they had advanced, but always flickering nearer, a little closer to the mark, the cluster growing mysteriously larger and brighter, as gleam after gleam fell in with the whole, until a ragged rose, a distorted, frayed moon was shaking upon the waters again, reasserted, renewed, trying to recover from its convulsion, to get over the disfigurement and the agitation, to be whole and composed, at peace. 80

Ursula now comes down from her isolation and joins Birkin, asking him not to throw more stones; and gradually they break down their estrangement, overcome their agitation with each other, and reach a state of peaceful balance and coexistence. The symbolic episode, coming as it does within the midst of this dramatic situation of the estranged lovers, seems to have a great deal of relevance to it. The shattering of the moon into fragments and the gradual "coming once more into being" seems to reflect something about Birkin and Ursula's relationship, and something about human relationships in general. The continual disruption from a state of coexistence, which Birkin achieves with his ideas as effectively as he does with his stones, and the slow but certain return to composure and fulfilled peace is something that Lawrence continually dramatises in the relationship between Birkin and Ursula (here, or in Chapter 23 "Excurse", for example); and which he here portrays as the essential nature of life and human relationships through this symbol of the shattered-recomposed moon. All the time that Birkin is actually stoning the moon (and, in his own mind, Ursula) Lawrence is symbolically dramatising the gradual and inevitable coming together unconsciously

80 D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.279-80.

at work between Birkin and Ursula through the actual recomposing of the moon itself. Seen in this light the details of the vivid descriptions quoted from the episode have an extraordinary suggestive power: the fragments which flicker nearer whilst seeming to flee suggests the tentativeness and unsurity of a human coming together as we see it dramatised immediately afterwards in the meeting between Birkin and Ursula. The symbolic art of the scene illuminates that level of human relationships beneath the exterior behaviour, which asserts itself unconsciously despite surface differences. Thus with Birkin and Ursula, in the midst of their agitated discussion "Gradually, the stillness and peace came over them." [81]

Yet, so powerful is the suggestiveness of this symbolic episode, we feel that there is a further level to the meaning of the scene evoked particularly in the second occasion of Birkin's stone-throwing. The description of the influx of waves of darkness into the heart of the moon and the dispersal of the waves of light seems to suggest the disruption of the individual's wholeness of being, the continual attacks by life upon integrity of being, and the struggle to retain at the centre something "not quite destroyed. . .not yet violated". [82] This suggestion is drawn from one major theme of the novel, the individual struggle for a positive state of being against "dissolution" - dramatised later in this very chapter by Birkin's struggle in his meditation. It is also a suggestion concurrent with Lawrence's use of two major symbols throughout this novel - dark and light as symbols of death and life; and water as a symbol for states of being (we may think of Gerald's submergence in this very lake in Chapter 14 "Water-Party"[83]).

Both these two major symbolic meanings are evoked from the intensity

[81] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.283.

[82] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.278.

[83] D.H. Lawrence, ibid.,

of the dramatic presentation purely of their own accord, without any hint of explicitness. The whole chapter centres on the moon image: the problems of Birkin's relationship with Ursula, their continual struggle with one another, the true and peaceful attachment growing up beneath, Birkin's struggle to retain his integral being - all the parts of the chapter have a distinct relation to the symbol but without any feeling of direct restrictive correlation. It marks the flexibility of Lawrence's symbolic method that he should be able to create such a wide dramatic and symbolic inter-relation in this chapter and such a concise inter-relation in the previous one, Chapter 18 "Rabbit". In this case the fictional unit is ordered around the symbol with remarkable economy [84], and creates as a result a sense of tremendous pace and drama. Once the relevant link between Gerald and Gudrun has been established through the rabbit symbol, the chapter breaks of with startling suddenness. It ends with Winifred creeping towards the rabbit in a rather obscenely sensual way, murmuring softly "'Let its mother stroke its fur then, darling, because it is so mysterious - '".[85] "Mysteriousness" of this kind is in many ways the key to the significance of the chapter; whilst Winifred's behaviour has a sharp dramatic bearing upon what we have seen of Gerald and Gudrun.

Such economy and starkness of presentation is characteristic of much of the symbolic method of Women in Love. Both the moon and the rabbit symbols achieve their effect through their dramatic presence and implicit symbolic power. At times Lawrence can be more direct in his method without any detrimental effects. Chapter 13 "Mino"

[84] For some discussion of this chapter see Chapter One above, p. 19-25.

[85] D.H. Lawrence, Women in Love, p.274.

uses a symbol in a slightly different way, rather more direct, but nonetheless effective. This is one of the chapters concerning Birkin and Ursula alone, chapters which are perhaps the most appealing in the novel. Lawrence dramatises their relationship with a delicately playful humour which is necessarily lacking in the often menacing confrontations between Gudrun and Gerald. We have a real insight into the bewilderment and uncertainty of a new deep attachment, and the growing intimacy and warmth of a really creative relationship beneath a surface of often comical antagonism and hostility. In this particular chapter, "Mino", Lawrence conveys this complex situation through the symbol of the cats.

The chapter opens with the continuation of the battle between Birkin and Ursula over the terms of their relationship. The argument wavers, as always , between the sublime and the ridiculous. It is perhaps alright for Birkin to theorise to Gerald in the train about his ideas for the "ultimate marriage" [86] ; but when he tries to convince Ursula , he undoubtedly puts his philosophical foot in it. Lawrence's brilliant self-parody shows Birkin torn between ideals and realities: as soon as Ursula arrives he sets off on his theoretical hobby-horse, telling her he doesn't want love, he wants something beyond love, something impersonal. Ursula replies with truly feminine vanity and defiance in a half-hurt, half-mocking tone, inciting Birkin on to even greater enormities. She tries to be objective, but there are some things no woman can stand:

> "But don't you think me good-looking?" she persisted in a mocking voice.
> He looked at her, to see if he felt that she was good-looking.
> "I don't <u>feel</u> that you're good-looking," he said.
> "Not even attractive?" she mocked, bitingly.
> He knitted his brows in sudden exasperation.
> "Don't you see that it's not a question of visual appreciation in the least," he cried. "I don't <u>want</u> to see you. I've seen plenty of women, I'm sick and

[86] D.H. Lawrence, <u>ibid</u>., p.64.

> weary of seeing them. I want a woman I don't see."
> "I'm sorry I can't oblige you by being invisible," she laughed. 87

The portraits are beautifully done, with a comedy which evokes the best of Lawrence's reverent insight into human responses. He doesn't simply dramatise the relationship, however. Two cats appear on the scene, one a finely aggressive male, the other a rather scruffy stray female - both are rendered with the same evocative detail that we found in the case of the fox and St Mawr:

> He, going statelily on his slim legs, walked after her, then suddenly, for pure excess, he gave her a light cuff with his paw on the side of her face. She ran off a few steps, like a blown leaf along the ground, then crouched unobtrusively, in submissive, wild patience. 88

Never the master of compliment, Birkin takes them and their behaviour as a moral lesson to Ursula on the nature of the man/woman relationship. We might suspect Lawrence at this point of taking liberties with his symbol, of not allowing it to speak for itself; but we would be entirely wrong. Lawrence intends Birkin's interpretation to be seen as almost purely ironic. Birkin interprets the action of the two cats in terms of his own ideas about human relationships: the Mino's cuffing of the stray female is "the desire to bring this female cat into a pure stable equilibrium". Ursula's response to this is to accuse Birkin of preaching male superiority again (which of course he is): we sense the blow to her emancipated female ego in Birkin's implicit comparison between herself and the scruffy stray wild cat, whilst he himself is of course the superior and stately Mino. The interpretation is entirely Birkin's and it backfires as another <u>faux pas</u> on his part. So, off the two of them go again, the quarrel renewed; whilst in the midst of the comedy of Ursula's tirade against

87 D.H. Lawrence, <u>ibid</u>., p.163-4.

88 D.H. Lawrence, <u>ibid</u>., p.165.

Birkin's male chauvinism, Lawrence suggests the true significance of the cat symbol through purely dramatic artistry:

> ". . . There - there - you've given yourself away! You want a satellite, Mars and his satellite! You've said it - you've said it - you've dished yourself!"
> He stood smiling in frustration and amusement and irritation and admiration and love. She was so quick, and so lambent, like discernible fire, and so vindictive, and so rich in her dangerous flamy sensitiveness.
> "I've not said it at all," he replied, "if you will give me a chance to speak."
> "No, no!" she cried. "I won't let you speak. You've said it, a satellite, you're not going to wriggle out of it. You've said it."
> "You'll never believe now that I haven't said it," he answered. "I neither implied nor indicated nor mentioned a satellite, nor intended a satellite, never."
> "You prevaricator!" she cried, in real indignation.
> "Tea is ready, sir," said the landlady from the doorway.
> They both looked up at her, very much as the cats had looked at them, a little while before. 89

From the humour of their absurd argument, the perspective suddenly shifts, and we see the pair of them as two quarrelling cats. With delicate, humorous insight we are shown beneath the surface antagonism to the deeper contact which ties them together in this loving hostility, and also the complexity of that contact - "frustration and amusement and irritation and admiration and love". Ironically, what Birkin desires - "a pure balance of two single beings" - , and what he is here trying to bring about consciously in his fight with Ursula, is already present in their relationship as naturally as in the relationship of the two cats. This symbolic parallel is beautifully done through the purely dramatic interaction of situation and symbol. Women in Love demonstrates Lawrence's symbolic art at its best.

This discussion of The Fox, St Mawr and Women in Love shows Lawrence constructing fictional worlds around a central focus which is ultra-realistic in nature: the fox, the horse, the moon, the rabbit,

89 D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.167-8.

the cats - they are all basically symbolic in nature and give the fictional world a distict imaginative significance. But we also have noticed that the symbol itself and the fictional world as a whole both have a realistic level, a dramatic actuality; and that the symbol functions through its interaction with this dramatic level. Thus the fictional world acts simultaneously as a mimetic and a symbolic representation of life. The invented world has more than one possible relationship to the world of human experience, and Lawrence sustains this multiple relationship through a natural and mutually enriching integration of realism and symbolism.

iv : The Symbolic Fictional World - Virginia Woolf

Virginia Woolf's symbols tend not to have any dramatic presence within the fictional world. Usually they are fixed objects (the lighthouse) or governing metaphoric ideas (the waves) which take no active dramatic part in the action of the narrative. Hence, unlike Lawrence's symbols, they tend to be more static in their nature, and the kind of inter-relationship with the dramatic actuality of the narrative tends to be more formal, more of an aesthetic unity, perhaps more artificial by comparison. Certainly this is the case in an early work like Night and Day, in which the imposition of a highly artificial poetic design (night and day) clashes so obviously with the rather weak and conventional realism of the actual story. But one can only admire the success of the impulse which, in To The Lighthouse, drove Virginia Woolf to seek out the symbolic design which would "net the fin in the waste of water" [1], embody for her the universal truth about life, and allow the reader to see beneath the surface down to the deepest levels. Symbolism is an essential part of her search for the kind of fictional world which could achieve these things.

The choice of the lighthouse as a symbol provides an immediate contrast with Lawrence's symbolic practice. In this respect its inanimacy is of less significance than the fact that it is a very personal symbol in many ways. It belongs quite specifically to Virginia Woolf's own personal past, rather than the archetypal past. The lighthouse is taken from Virginia Woolf's memories of the eighty-six foot high Godrevy Island lighthouse set in St Ives bay, where the Stephen family spent many holidays when Virginia was a child. Yet because the symbol is a personal one, this does not

[1] Virginia Woolf, A Writer's Diary, p.169.

necessarily invalidate it on the grounds of its being an invented esoteric emblem. Ursula Brumm condemns Virginia Woolf's lighthouse as the feeble result of "private symbol making", an invention "without a mythological past" which "cannot be counted on to affect our imagination". [2] But Miss Brumm's objections are somewhat unfair. The lighthouse is an unusual object to use as a symbol (being for one thing the product of civilised society and not of nature); yet it has still gathered around it undisputably traditional, even archetypal, associations, Lighthouses have, after all, been in use since ancient times: the earliest recorded ones were built by the Libyans and the Cushites in Lower Egypt before Christ; and the idea of the beacon fire on a cliff-top is much older. Thus the lighthouse has had the centuries needed, according to Lawrence, to create "a really significant symbol" [3]. It has a past in the human imagination as firm as any comparable natural symbol. It evokes suggestions of a message, a warning against possible danger, of guidance through perilous circumstances; and, ultimately, if the message is heeded, of salvation. In addition, we think of the isolation of the lighthouse, and of its stability, founded as it usually is upon rocks off a headland. All these are unavoidably part of the traditional idea of a lighthouse, and Virginia Woolf does not ignore them by turning the lighthouse into a private symbol. The meanings which accrete around the symbol through the contexts of the novel have their roots in these traditional associations. Thus, although it is a personal symbol for Virginia Woolf, the lighthouse does have a wider appeal which we can readily share.

The quality about this symbol which perhaps prompted Miss Brumm's remark probably lies in the kind of lighthouse used. When we think of

[2] Ursula Brumm, "Symbolism and the Novel", tr. W.R. Trask, Partisan Review, 25 (1958), in P. Stevick, The Theory of the Novel, New York : The Free Press, (1967), p.362.

[3] D.H. Lawrence, Phoenix, p.296.

Virginia Woolf's lighthouse almost inevitably we think of that peculiarly modern manifestation of a stone tower, tall or squat, wearing a black-and-white striped tee-shirt, and with a bulbous head which emits a flashing electric signal. It is the modernity of the form of the symbol which perhaps disturbs Miss Brumm. Yet this very quality is of great use to Virginia Woolf in the novel. It is this modernity which allows her to incorporate personal imaginative suggestions into the symbol without clashing with the more traditional associations. The symbol thus becomes highly flexible in its possible range of meanings. Thus, for example, we do not generally think of a lighthouse as "something to be reached". [4] It is something to be avoided. But Virginia Woolf incorporates her basic idea of "going to the lighthouse" by giving the symbol a personal touch: she emphasises the traditional associations of stability, guidance and salvation in the lighthouse symbol, and uses them in conjunction with a symbolic motif - the motif of a journey to a place where the place in question is a symbol of fulfilment. [5] Thus, Virginia Woolf's lighthouse is "something to be reached", something to aspire to, whilst retaining the more traditional lighthouse associations of the dangers to be faced in accomplishing the journey.

In this connection the absence of the lighthouse from the dramatic actuality of the narrative is a necessary prerequisite of its role as a symbol. The lighthouse is the centre to which the whole fictional world is referred, but it is finally outside the experience of all the characters - (the novel ends just as Mr Ramsay lands). From its very nature as a symbol for the "meaning of life" [6], it is something towards which the characters look, something about which they concern themselves and to which they aspire, but which remains finally outside their actual experience. Virginia Woolf creates a symbolic situation

[4] M. Leaska, To The Lighthouse - A Study in Critical Method,

[5] As, for example, in The Cherry Orchard, or Grapes of Wrath.

[6] Virginia Woolf, To The Lighthouse, p.

which acts as the perfect fictional image for her quasi-philosophical explorations of life and its meaning. The lighthouse acts as the focus for each of the fictional characters. Their views of the lighthouse are as varied as their views of life. Indeed, this is partly the point: their views of the lighthouse in some way are their views of life. Virginia Woolf explores life through the various characters in their relationships to the central symbol of this fictional world. It is from exactly the opposite quality to Lawrence, the very lack of dramatic presence, that Virginia Woolf draws a great deal of the meaning and imaginative effect of her symbol.

Without being constantly refered to, the lighthouse is ever present in the first part of the novel - in the thwarted trip supposed to take place the following day, which causes a division between Mr and Mrs Ramsay(used as the dramatic and poetic basis of the book by Virginia Woolf); as a light playing across the house at twilight whilst Mrs Ramsay sits knitting; as a subject of conversation at the dinner table, when Tansley brings up the sore question of the abandoned trip. Though it is outside their physical knowledge, the lighthouse is ever present in the lives of the characters as an idea or an acknowledged fact: it exists across the bay and can be easily seen if they walk over the lawn by the hedge and look out to sea. It is integral to the success of Virginia Woolf's fiction that we should be kept continuously but almost unconsciously aware of the lighthouse as it exists for the characters as an essence which is intangible, ineffable, but ever present. Quite naturally within the dramatic situation of the novel the lighthouse adopts a symbolic dimension - not one which is imposed, but one which grows out of the dramatic circumstances so as to create a multiplicity of suggestions.

The basic dramatic situation is the division of opinion between Mr and Mrs Ramsay over the proposed trip. Through the different eyes

of the two characters we come to see the lighthouse as symbolic of two very different views of life. In connection with Mrs Ramsay the lighthouse comes to signify an unshakable and central harmony in life despite the seeming chaos of experience: the lighthouse becomes a symbol of faith, of positive certitude that there is a meaning to be reached in life, and that life is not simply haphazard storms and calms. These suggestions are particularly apparent in the scene in which the lighthouse beam plays over Mrs Ramsay as she sits knitting. She sits thinking about her experience of life, and the lighthouse beam which interrupts her reflection becomes an expression of her conception of life. The broken but repeated beams of the signal suggest the intermittent but always returning sense Mrs Ramsay has of a "platform of stability" beneath the "fret, the hurry, the stir":

> there rose to her lips always some exclamation of triumph over life when things came together in this peace, this rest, this eternity; and pausing there she looked out to meet that stroke of the Lighthouse, the long steady stroke, the last of the three, which was her stroke. . . [7]

A few moments later we are led a little further to realize that this is no misty-eyed idealism: Mrs Ramsay's intuitive conception of life as composed of moments of coherence implies a corollary - that between these moments her triumph is lost, her flash of light disappears into the dark once more. Thus, when, a few moments later, she looks at the light again, we feel a certain starkness about her faith: "With some irony in her interrogation. . . she looked at the steady light, the pitiless, the remorseless, which was so much to her, yet so little to her, which had her at its beck and call. . ." As her moment of faith returns, however, her criticisms of life's meagreness evaporate, and "she felt, It is enough! It is enough!" [8]

In this instance the symbol derives its suggestions from the

[7] Virginia Woolf, To The Lighthouse, p.73.

[8] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.75-6

immediate context, from the feelings and attitude of the character. Indeed, the symbol is being given associations which are essential to its aesthetic rôle in the novel, but which are not inherent in its nature as a traditional emblem. The lighthouse beam is a quite personal feature of the symbol elaborated by Virginia Woolf to signify a momentary revelation. What Virginia Woolf has done is to take a traditional feature of the lighthouse and give it a personal presentation: the lighthouse as a solid stone tower founded on a rock platform but surrounded by turbulent changing seas, the only fixed object within the seeming chaos of nature, could easily be representative of the stable centre which Mrs Ramsay sees in the midst of turbulent experience. But there are no such associations implicit in the lighthouse beam itself. Very flexibly, Virginia Woolf is using traditional associations and personal associations together in her symbol, drawing them out through the context of the novel.

This connection between Mrs Ramsay and the lighthouse is maintained throughout the first part of the novel; and unless we are intent upon finding definable and fixed meanings for the symbol and not upon catching the true flavour of this novel, we will realize the flexibility and even playfulness with which Virginia Woolf uses her symbol. The dinner-party scene is a good example. The dinner-party itself is one of Mrs Ramsay's attempts (for which she is later remembered by Lily Briscoe) to enact her vision, to create a momentary harmony out of the chaotic fragments of life by synthesizing the disparate characters of her guests into a unity. In its way, the dinner-party too is something of a symbol; and within this situation the lighthouse is naturally present as a strand of the imaginative significance. Mrs Ramsay has a difficult task on her hands in creating a unity from

this group of guests, as we may gather from the conversation between Lily and Tansley (who do not get on very well at all). Lily asks rather sarcastically,

> "Oh, Mr Tansley, . . . do take me to the Lighthouse with you. I should so love it."
> She was telling lies he could see. She was saying what she did not mean to annoy him, for some reason. She was laughing at him . . . she didn't want to go to the Lighthouse with him; she despised him 9

"she did not want to go to the Lighthouse with him" suggests not only Tansley's basic isolation, but also his inability to draw anyone into the mutual effort of creating a working relationship. In this context, the conversation about going to the lighthouse begins to reflect the dramatic circumstances of the dinner-party itself - the collective effort needed to create a successful occasion, the submergence of individual ego necessary for the fragile boat of social intercourse to land without any drastic upset. The suggestions are unmistakably there, but done so lightly by Virginia Woolf that this interpretation seems heavy-handed. A few moments later, when Tansley, with his negative attitude to human relations, is about to put an end to the success of the evening, at a call from Mrs Ramsay Lily abandons her hostility to Tansley and asks again; and we again see how playfully the symbol is used within the dramatic circumstances of the situation:

> "Will you take me, Mr Tansley?" said Lily, quickly, kindly, for, of course, if Mrs Ramsay said to her, as in effect she did, "I am drowning, my dear, in seas of fire. Unless you apply some balm to the anguish of this hour and say something nice to that young man there, life will run on the rocks - " . . .
> - when Mrs Ramsay said all this, as the glance in her eyes said it, of course for the hundred and fiftieth time Lily Briscoe had to renounce the experiment - what happens if one is not nice to that young man there - and be nice. 10

The significance of the dinner-party is interplayed with its dramatic actuality by this very light usage of the symbol: we see it as both an actual event (with all Virginia Woolf's delicate insight into the

[9] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.99-100.
[10] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.106.

fine details of human intercourse), and as a symbol of Mrs Ramsay's outlook - a point of communion and harmony, a lighthouse achieved. This last suggestion is conveyed primarily through Mrs Ramsay herself. As she watches the guests seated around the dinner table, she again experiences a momentary sense of coherence. The group around the table seem suspended in a "profound stillness":

> There it was, all round them. It partook, she felt, carefully helping Mr Bankes to a specially tender piece, of eternity; as she had already felt about something different once before that afternoon [i.e. 'the lighthouse beam]; there is a coherence in things, a stability; something, she meant, is immune from change, and shines out (she glanced at the window with its ripple of reflected lights) in the face of the flowing, the fleeting, the spectral, like a ruby; so that again tonight she had the feeling she had had once today already, of peace, of rest. Of such moments, she thought, the thing is made that remains for ever after. This would remain. [11]

Rather comically, it is as if Mrs Ramsay were portioning out eternity to each of the guests as she serves out the Bœuf en Daube. Her mind refers her unconsciously back to the lighthouse beam as she searches for an expression for this moment as it "shines out. . . in the face of the flowing, the fleeting, the spectral". Again the symbolic associations of the lighthouse as seen through Mrs Ramsay's eyes float to the surface.

Mr Ramsay's view of the lighthouse (and implicitly his view of life) is the opposite to Mrs Ramsay's; and here is the source of the division of opinion which they spend the rest of part one of the novel trying to reconcile. Mr Ramsay's view of the lighthouse, like his view of life, is as an objective fact. The novel opens with Mrs Ramsay's belief that the trip will be possible being crushed by Mr Ramsay's objective statement of rational fact, "'it won't be fine.'" [12] Mr

[11] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.121.

[12] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.6.

Ramsay views life as a bare stark fact, with no magic, no "moments", and no faith in any deeper meaning or coherence. When he reaches the lighthouse he stands to meet it "very straight and tall, for all the world . . . as if he were saying, 'There is no God,'". [13] For Mr Ramsay there is no revelation other than

> that life is difficult; facts uncompromising; and the passage to that fabled land where our brightest hopes are extinguished, our frail barks founder in darkness (here Mr Ramsay would straighten his back and narrow his little blue eyes upon the horizon), one that needs, above all, courage, truth, and the power to endure. [14]

In Mr Ramsay's case, rather than any explicit links, his connection with the lighthouse is made implicit by the subtle suggestions conveyed through the metaphoric hints at the lighthouse and journey symbols. Thus, he thinks that "he would not die lying down; he would find some crag of rock, and there, his eyes fixed on the storm, trying to the end to pierce the darkness, he would die standing." [15] He sees himself as "a stake driven into the bed of a channel upon which the gulls perch and the waves beat [inspiring] in the merry boat-loads a feeling of gratitude for the duty it has taken upon itself of marking the channel out there in the floods alone." [16] In both extracts there is the implicit suggestion of the lighthouse as a symbol of isolation and of the stark bare finality of a life in which there is no salvation amid the storms. In the face of his view of life Mr Ramsay adopts the stoical resilient rôle expressed by the image of an isolated lighthouse "trying to the end to pierce the darkness". But just as Mrs Ramsay's view of life has a strangely pessimistic turn to it, so Mr Ramsay's apparent acceptance that "we perish each alone" has a twist to it. The stoicism which surrounds him is to some extent a façade, only a rôle. There is a note of self-dramatisation and, often, self-pity about his conception

[13] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.236.

[14] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.6.

[15] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.41.

[16] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.52.

of himself. He accepts that "we perish each alone", but his fate is much harder than the rest - "I beneath a rougher sea Was whelmed in deeper gulfs than he". [17] He sees himself, in a characteristically self-dramatic manner, as a hero whose fate is to "come out thus on a spit of land which the sea is slowly eating away, and there to stand, like a desolate sea-bird, alone." [18], or as "the leader of the doomed expedition" going heroically through life, doomed to endure and finally to die with no hope of salvation. [19] Behind the resolute acceptance of the courageous agnostic, as Mr Ramsay sees himself, there is a weakness. His acceptance of life in these terms is dependent entirely upon the support of his wife: "who shall blame the leader of the doomed expedition, if, having adventured to the uttermost, and used his strength wholly to the last ounce . . . [he now] requires sympathy, and whisky, and someone to tell the story of his suffering to". [20] Mr Ramsay is a brilliant portrait in self-delusion: for to face a hostile reality with his stoical endurance he relies upon Mrs Ramsay as something stable and permanent, which remains immune to the facts of the outer life. Mr Ramsay would laugh at his wife's faith in her "moments" as a delusion incompatible with the facts, invented as a comfort and shelter against a harsh reality. He would crush her belief in being able to go to the lighthouse (which Mrs Ramsay, with her understanding that people matter more than ultimate truths, says only in order to save James' feelings). Yet he himself faces that reality which he inflicts upon others safe in the shelter and comfort of his wife. Hence Mrs Ramsay's perplexity, because "with all his gloom and desperation he was happier, more hopeful on the

[17] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.189.

[18] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.51.

[19] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.40-2.

[20] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.42-3.

whole, than she was."[21] Thus, when Mrs Ramsay dies and (for the moment) Mr Ramsay's view of life seems to triumph, the tragedy is undiminished. The death of his wife seems to prove the truth of Mr Ramsay's pessimistic view, but the tragedy is that he himself could only support that view with the strength gained from his wife's presence. Ironically, her death at once proves him right and takes away the means by which he could accept life in those terms - and thus we have the sudden, moving picture of Mr Ramsay "stumbling along a passage" stretching his arms out for emptiness, realizing for the first time the true implications of that truth he had accepted all those years.[22]

The fullest presentation of Mr Ramsay's view of the lighthouse and of life comes in the powerful second part of the novel, "Time Passes". The beam of the lighthouse reigns over the changing circumstances of the Ramsay house and looks as "lovingly" upon the empty, decaying rooms as it did upon Mrs Ramsay.[23] The indifference of the beam and the symbolic decay of the house in the grips of a hostile, chaotic world (paralleling the erosion of the Ramsay family itself), shows us to be in a world governed by Mr Ramsay's vision beneath which Mrs Ramsay's vision is subsumed: there is no permanence; and men, whether heroes or not, are victims of an uncompromising and indifferent change which we call life. In this the individual is like the lighthouse, isolated at the mercy of hostile seas.

The opposition of these two views of life centred around the symbol of the lighthouse is the skeleton of the novel. In the third part of the novel Virginia Woolf takes her use of the symbol one stage further to bring the two views of husband and wife into a resolution which effectively represents the two correlating sides of her own artistic vision.

[21] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.69.

[22] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.146-7.

[23] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.151.

This resolution is achieved through the journey motif which is implicit in Virginia Woolf's symbol. The journey to the lighthouse becomes a metaphor for the search for meaning in life; and the actual dramatic enactment of the journey in the third part of the novel is made the imaginative correlative of this search in a number of ways.

The resumption of the journey is loaded with a great deal of significance through the time structure of the novel. It is the fulfilment of what was proposed on the first page - that they might make a trip to the lighthouse tomorrow after "a night's darkness and a day's sail". [24] As if it were the following day, the third part of the novel fulfils the hopes of the first: the Ramsay children go to the lighthouse; Lily finishes her painting. But the "night's darkness" in between the two days is ten years in length and contains the deaths of Mrs Ramsay and two of the children. The juxtaposition is a masterpiece of structural simplicity and gives a profound meaningfulness to the journey itself.

Dramatically, we feel the resumed journey is like a gesture on the part of Mr Ramsay - a gesture of obeisance to his wife to allay his guilt at hurting her that particular time over the trip to the lighthouse; a gesture, also, of defiance in the face of all that life has done to him over the last ten years. And at the opening of the morning we feel the haunting loss of Mrs Ramsay, needed to reassure Mr Ramsay; needed, too, to smooth the way and settle such seemingly unsolvable questions as Nancy is faced with, who asks "in a queer half dazed, half desperate way, 'What does one send to the Lighthouse?' as if she were forcing herself to do what she despaired of ever being able to do." [25] The perplexity of the

[24] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.5.

[25] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.166.

characters conveys what is at the heart of this section of the novel - the absence of Mrs Ramsay and the implications of her absence. The fact that she is not there takes away the order she created out of life, takes away the point behind everything. The fact that she is not there is the inevitable fact of time, change and death given tangible form. Despair invades the house: "What does one send? What does one do? Why is one sitting here after all?" But as Lily asks this question she remembers the unfinished painting, "as if the solution had come to her: she knew now what she wanted to do." [26] A correlation is made between the resumption of the journey and the resumption of the painting; and from this point onwards the two are played against each other as metaphors for the attempt to find meaning in life, to achieve a harmony or wholeness of vision (the painting), to achieve a stability (the lighthouse). We shall be considering the rôle of Lily's painting in a later section. What is of interest here is the way the journey itself brings into resolution Mr and Mrs Ramsay's opposing views of life through a complex symbolic dénouement.

This is achieved through James' view of the lighthouse as he approaches it in the boat with his father and Cam. As they approach James considers the building now as a reality in contrast to his memories of it as a child. He remembers it particularly in the context of that day (the day in the first part of the novel) when his childish anticipation of the trip was shattered by his father's tyranny "smiting through the leaves and flowers even of that happy world and making them shrivel and fall." [27], when Mr Ramsay said "It will rain. . . You won't be able to go to the lighthouse." [28]

[26] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.168.

[27] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.211.

[28] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.211.

The bitterness of this experience has remained with James, and not going to the lighthouse has become exaggerated to the proportions of a symbol as it would in a child's mind. Mr Ramsay's infliction of bare truth irrespective of other people's feelings (which we have already seen the irony of) James feels still to be a "tyranny" which he would "stamp out". [29] What this signifies is that James would like to stamp out Mr Ramsay's view of reality as harsh and uncompromising: he refuses as yet to accept that life can be cruelly indifferent to people's feelings. The irony now is that when James looks at the lighthouse he sees the objective reality of it, an unromantic fact bare and stark as Mr Ramsay might see it. Yet he remembers it as something quite different:

> The Lighthouse was then a silvery, misty-looking tower with a yellow eye that opened suddenly and softly in the evening. Now -
>
> James looked at the Lighthouse. He could see the white-washed rocks; the tower, stark and straight; he could see that it was barred with black and white; he could see windows in it; he could even see washing spread on the rocks to dry. So that was the Lighthouse, was it?
>
> No, the other was also the Lighthouse. For nothing was simply one thing. The other was the Lighthouse too. It was sometimes hardly to be seen across the bay. In the evening one looked up and saw the eye opening and shutting and the light seemed to reach them in that airy sunny garden where they sat. [30]

He looks at the lighthouse as it was in the past as a child. Then he looks at it as it is at the moment, a stark reality which seems to destroy the past vision. But James refuses to give up his vision of it in the past with his mother, whilst being unable to avoid his view of it now in the present with his father. The lighthouse is both things at different times, "For nothing was simply one thing." Not only are we being shown the disillusion of youth's eager anticipations of life when confronted with the reality; but also, in his double attitude to the symbol, James brings his mother's and father's

[29] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.209.

[30] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.211.

opposing views into a resolution in which they are no longer opposite but complementary. Life is at times the harsh unavoidable reality of Mr Ramsay's objectivity; whilst at other times it is glowing and magical as Mrs Ramsay's romanticism saw it. The lighthouse is both a tower on white-washed rocks with washing spread out to dry, and it is a "silvery misty-looking tower" whose "light seemed to reach them in that airy sunny garden where they sat." The combined vision makes up Virginia Woolf's own religious pessimism, and this balance of feeling gives the novel its distinct poignancy and power.

The whole attempt of To The Lighthouse is to create a fictional world which will act as a vehicle for Virginia Woolf's exploration of "the old question which traversed the sky of the soul perpetually ; . . What is the meaning of life?" [31] What she does is to construct a fictional situation which functions as a poetic representation of this question through its use of a central symbolic focus - the lighthouse symbol. The symbol is not intended to offer a defined meaning, a solution to the question "what is the meaning of life?" Instead it acts as the focus of an imaginative presentation of our perplexity when faced by such a question, a presentation achieved through the inter-relationship between character and symbol.

[31] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p. 183.

v : Summary

Throughout the four sections of this chapter we have been concerned with various kinds of fictional worlds which might be described as poetic fictional images in that they share one basic quality: they all function as imaginative representations of life. We have examined examples of Lawrence's poetic fables, Virginia Woolf's metaphoric narratives, and of symbolic fictions by both authors. What we have seen in many ways is a transmutation of the dramatic fictional world associated with realism through the integration of an imaginative dimension; and the resulting formation of a kind of fictional representation which may be related to life in a number of ways rather than exclusively in one way (either literally or imaginatively).

There is, however, one element of the realistic fictional world which of its very nature might be seen as directly antithetical to this attempted imaginative transmutation. That element is Character; and it is to an examination of Character that we now turn.

Chapter Three : CHARACTER IN POETIC FICTION

1 : The Symbolic Rôle - D.H. Lawrence

Character and the treatment of character are aspects of fictional convention which are paramount to this discussion. We are concerned with the representation of life in fiction. People and characters are implicitly preconceptions of mimetic representation since people and characters are perhaps the most obvious aspect of actual life that the fictional artist might imitate. The realistic novelist very often bases the authenticity, and indeed the central interest, of his novel upon character portrayal. As readers, our interest is caught by the novelist's having created the illusion of a convincing person, an illusion which can command the involvement of those faculties of human sympathy and judgement that we exercise, or fail to exercise, in our everyday intercourse with actual people. The very nature of the realistic fictional world invites us to accept it as a mirror image of actual life through which we can take time to reflect and consider people and human behaviour in a way which is difficult to achieve in life itself. However, in our discussion we are concerned most immediately with novelists who have , at least to some degree, broken with the conventions of realistic presentation; novelists who are attempting to create a different kind of fictional image. What place, then, does the implicitly realistic convention of character have in their poetic fiction? If the narrative mode is changed then character itself and the treatment of character will

also change. Yet, if the poetic novelist creating an essentially non-realistic fictional world still utilises character as an element of that world, then he is faced with something of a problem. The very idea of character in itself assumes a degree of mimetic representation, and if this is forsaken then the "character" may easily assume the artificial air of the caricature, the type figure, or the allegorical figure. The realistic authenticity of character may be lost or contravened by the underlying imaginative or symbolic mode of presentation to be found in the kinds of fictional worlds that we examined in the last chapter. Thus, if the poetic novelist is to utilise character as an element of his fictional representation, then either he will have to find some way of resolving the mimetic preconceptions of character with his symbolic presentation, or he will have to tolerate a certain inevitable sense of artificiality inherent in his works.

The question of how to resolve these two factors manifests itself in a particularly intriguing way in the case of D.H. Lawrence. We have already touched upon his attitude to characterisation in Chapter One above, in his references to the practice of past novelists.[1] It is worthwhile recalling certain of his ideas - for example, his attitude to Flaubert and Verga and his belief that realistic characters are not big enough or heroic enough to sustain a large artistic vision.[2] Or again, there is his attraction to the monumental characters of Shakespeare, and his recognition that at times the artistic vision demands an ultra-realistic representation.[3] Such ideas certainly suggest that Lawrence's conception of character within the fictional image may

[1] See Chapter One above, p.14-15, 29-30.

[2] <u>ibid</u>, p.14.

[3] <u>ibid</u>., p.15.

well be one which goes further than convincing mimetic representation. In fact, during the re-writing of Sons and Lovers and the undertaking of The Rainbow, Lawrence's attitude to and treatment of character in his own work underwent a radical transformation which accommodates this wider conception. In Sons and Lovers, Part One at least, we find a novelist treating character in the familiar terms of realistic fiction and doing so in a brilliantly convincing and vital way. But in The Rainbow the treatment of character has undergone a change; and this change of treatment we may claim to be the outward manifestation of a wider change - a shift away from pure realism towards a different kind of fictional representation.

Lawrence himself noticed the change in method between Sons and Lovers and The Rainbow. In a letter to Edward Garnett of March 1913, he described the early version of The Rainbow as "all analytical - quite unlike Sons and Lovers, not a bit visualised". [4] In a letter late in 1913 again to Garnett, he wrote that the new novel "is very different from Sons and Lovers : written in another language almost . . . I shan't write in the same manner as Sons and Lovers again, I think - in that hard, violent style full of sensation and presentation." [5] The word "style" may be taken to refer to the whole method of the novel, which Lawrence went on to describe in a letter to Garnett dated one month later: "I have no longer the joy in creating vivid scenes, that I had in Sons and Lovers. I don't care much more about accumulating objects in the powerful light of emotion, and making a scene of them. I have to write differently." [6] Lawrence is quite obviously conscious of a change in his artistic method, a change which he was eager to defend from

[4] D.H. Lawrence, The Collected Letters, ed. H.T. Moore, p.193.

[5] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.259.

[6] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.263.

Garnett's criticism "about the artistic side being in the background" [7] - a probable reference to Garnett's disappointment at the lack of dramatic actualisation and the emphasis on anlysis in the new novel in comparison to the dramatic realism of Sons and Lovers. Garnett's reservations define the very point at which Lawrence was departing from the conventions of realistic representation; but it was not until mid-way through a new version of The Rainbow that Lawrence actually articulated his change in attitude towards characterisation, in such a way as to highlight quite clearly his movement away from realism towards an ultra-realistic treatment of character. The letter to Garnett of 5th June, 1914 is sufficiently important to warrant close attention; and for this purpose it is worthwhile quoting the main section of the letter in full:

> . . . I don't agree with you about the Wedding Ring. You will find that in a while you will like the book as a whole. I don't think the psychology is wrong; it is only that I have a different attitude to my characters, and that necessitates a different attitude in you, which you are not prepared to give. As for its being my cleverness which would pull the thing through - that sounds odd to me, for I don't think I am so very clever, in that way. I think the book is a bit futuristic - quite unconsciously so. But when I read Marinetti - "the profound intuitions of life added one to the other, word by word, according to their illogical conception, will give us the general lines of an intuitive physiology of matter" - I see something of what I am after. I translate him clumsily, and his Italian is obfuscated - and I don't care about physiology of matter - but somehow - that which is physic - non-human, in humanity, is more interesting to me than the old-fashioned human element - which causes one to conceive a character in a certain moral scheme and make him consistent. The certain moral scheme is what I object to. In Turgenev, and in Tolstoy, and in Dostoievsky, the moral scheme into which all the characters fit - and it is nearly the same scheme - is, whatever the extraordinariness of the characters themselves, dull, old, dead. When Marinetti writes : "It is the solidity of a blade of steel that is interesting by itself, that is, the incomprehending and

[7] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.263.

inhuman alliance of its molecules in resistance to, let us say, a bullet. The heat of a piece of wood or iron is in fact more passionate, for us, than the laughter or tears of a woman" - then I know what he means. He is stupid, as an artist, for contrasting the heat of the iron and the laugh of the woman. Because what is interesting in the laugh of the woman is the same as the binding of the molecules of steel or their action in heat : it is the inhuman will, call it physiology, or like Marinetti - physiology of matter, that fascinates me. I don't so much care about what the woman feels - in the ordinary usage of the word. That presumes an ego to feel with. I only care about what the woman is - what she IS - inhumanly, physiologically, materially - according to the use of the word : but for me, what she is as a phenomenon (or as representing some greater, inhuman will), instead of what she feels according to the human conception. That is where the futurists are stupid. Instead of looking for the new human phenomenon, they will only look for the phenomena of the science of physics to be found in human beings. They are crassly stupid. But if anyone would give them eyes, they would pull the right apples off the tree, for their stomachs are true in appetite. You mustn't look in my novel for the old stable ego of the character. There is another ego, according to whose action the individual is unrecognisable, and passes through, as it were, allotropic states which it needs a deeper sense than any we've been used to exercise, to discover are states of the same single radically unchanged element. (Like as diamond and coal are the same pure single element of carbon. The ordinary novel would trace the history of the diamond - but I say, "Diamond, what! This is carbon." And my diamond might be coal or soot, and my theme is carbon.) You must not say my novel is shaky - it is not perfect, because I am not expert in what I want to do. But it is the real thing, say what you like. And I shall get my reception, if not now, then before long. Again I say, don't look for the development of the novel to follow the lines of certain characters : the characters fall into the form of some other rhythmic form, as when one draws a fiddle-bow across a fine tray delicately sanded, the sand takes lines unknown. [8]

[8] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.281-2.

First of all we need to notice what it is Lawrence is turning away from in his new conception of characterization. He is trying to transcend the "old-fashioned human element", "the old stable ego of the character". Now, admittedly Lawrence is in part rejecting what he sees as the limitations of vision which restrict Turgenev, Tolstoy and Dostoievsky when they refer characters and behaviour to the human societal level alone, the human moral scheme. Lawrence wants to go behind the morality of society to the deeper morality of life itself, the universal and "inhuman" morality described in the "Study of Thomas Hardy". He wants to do what he saw Hardy as having done, to "[set] behind the small action of his protagonists the terrific action of unfathomed nature; [set] a smaller system of morality, the one grasped and formulated by the human consciousness within the vast, uncomprehended and incomprehensible morality of nature or life itself". [9] But implicit in this desire to move beyond the "ego of the character" to capture "another ego", the ego of life, is the necessity to turn away from the objective outward view of character which had been the province of realism - the conception of character as stable, consistent within a stable social framework; and the representation of character primarily through outer action in terms of this framework. The whole tenor of Lawrence's letter suggests a shift away from outer action as an expression of character; and towards inner action as an expression of character, and of the wider unseen forces effecting character - the inner action of the character's psyche and its struggles within the "inhuman will" which cannot be shown in terms of dramatic realism.

[9] D.H. Lawrence, "Study of Thomas Hardy", Phoenix, p.419.

Lawrence's first step, then, is to start "putting all the action inside" [10] (an idea which owes much to George Eliot, as Jessie Chambers' record suggests). But we need to go further than this and define exactly what Lawrence's new conception of characterization entails in the terms of the letter. Undoubtedly he is saying that he is interested in the unconscious life of the characters. This may of course be interpreted as an interest in the psychology of the characters. Perhaps this is indeed so. But from the way in which Lawrence articulates his ideas in the letter one would certainly not think that he implied psychology simply in the ordinary usage of the word. Indeed, Lawrence seems more concerned with transcending the individual and personal, rather than with presenting the individual through a more sophisticated form of realism like psychological analysis. He states quite firmly that he is no longer interested in "the old-fashioned human element" and that the "human conception" is inadequate for his purposes. For him this method of presentation is redundant since he is interested in "that which is non-human in humanity". The idea of the self-sufficient individual character (and by implication the psychology of the individual character) is no longer a workable element of a fictional world since Lawrence wishes to portray the individual as subsumed within the "non-human". Hence he is no longer interested in personal feelings (emotional or psychological): "I don't so much care about what the woman <u>feels</u>. . . I only care about what the woman is - what she IS - inhumanly, physiologically, materially . . . what she <u>is</u> as a phenomenon (or as representing some greater, inhuman will)". If we understand the implications of the terms of this statement it will be clear why a psychological reading of Lawrence's

[10] Jessie Chambers, <u>D.H. Lawrence - a personal record</u>, Frank Cass (1965), p.105.

character presentation is inadequate and often very confusing. What psychological reading of character could adequately explain the description in The Rainbow of the battle between Ursula and Skrebensky, in which Ursula is turned into a pillar of salt and Skrebensky is fused into a bead? Psychologically this kind of analysis is confusing precisely because Lawrence is trying to go beyond the individual or the individual's psychological state. The basic importance of Lawrence's letter is to warn Garnett and us not to refer this kind of analysis to the individual ego of the character. We must refer it instead to the other inhuman ego. We must realize that Lawrence aims at describing what the characters are in inhuman terms: he describes their natures, and moreover their natures with reference to the whole stream of life of which they are part - their natures "as representing [my emphasis] some greater, inhuman will".

Thus it seems that Lawrence aims at conceiving character in terms of an impersonal, universal level, which necessitates going beyond the limitations of a realistic presentation of character. If we are still in doubt that this conception of character goes beyond realism then we should be resolved by the treatment which Lawrence envisages giving to his characters in order to portray this new dimension. Not only do the terms of Lawrence's letter extend to describing character "inhumanly". They also extend to describing character "physiologically, materially . . . as a phenomenon". We notice that Lawrence sees his analytic method as describing the "carbon" of the characters, the other ego "according to whose action the individual is unrecognisable, and passes through, as it were, allotropic states". It appears that Lawrence is trying to describe the action of the other inhuman will upon the individual; and, as Keith Sagar has pointed out, he uses scientific analogy to do this: he uses a figurative analogy with a material

phenomenon (in this case carbon) "to try to indicate. . . the very substance of the soul". Sagar hits the nail on the head when he says "At times [Lawrence] writes of his people as if they were, literally, material phenomena".[11] This is the whole gist of the letter to Garnett. For Lawrence, characters are material phenomena which are part of and represent the wider cosmic drama of life - the transcendent, non-human forces of life itself. His characters are people, but they are no longer simply people: they are representatives of life on the cosmic, universal level. And to convey this dimension Lawrence describes the characters as if they were material phenomena undergoing catalytic changes as they meet and operate upon each other. He turns quite naturally to the kind of figurative analysis mentioned in the Ursula/Skrebensky example, the use of material phenomena like iron, steel, coal, flame and salt as metaphors for the various allotropic states of being which the characters pass through as they are subjected to the action of the non-human forces of life. The implication of this kind of figurative description so much in evidence in The Rainbow and Women in Love is that Lawrence's treatment of character is essentially imaginative in nature: to convey the wider dimension he has recourse to an imaginative presentation which carries the character beyond the literal level and into the realm of symbol. In the following extract from a letter, we find him elaborating two of his central images for character analysis - coal and steel - in such a way as to leave no doubt that they are for him imaginatively representative of universal qualities to be found in the human soul: "When we get inside ourselves and away from the vanity of the ego then things are symbols. Coal is a symbol of something in the soul, old and dark and silky and natural, and matrix of fire : and steel is symbol

[11] Keith Sagar, The Art of D.H. Lawrence, Cambridge (1966), p.43.

of something else in the soul, hard and death dealing, cutting, hurting, annihilating the living tissue forever." [12] It is through this kind of material analogy and imaginative description that Lawrence transcends realism and elevates character to the universal level of symbol.

This brings us to an intriguing point in Lawrence's treatment of character in his poetic fiction, from which we can go on to discuss the actual manifestations of his practice. The point concerns the possible clash between the implicit mimetic nature of character as a fictional concept, and Lawrence's attempt to enlarge the dimensions of the concept. The kind of treatment Lawrence outlines in the letter is basically non-literal: by adopting it he will impute to the characters far more than they could literally feel or be aware of consciously. He evades this in part of course by utilising the unconscious levels; but even so the result is something of a paradox. Lawrence's characters often seem to be too intense to be real - because of course they are conceived as ultra-real. Yet they still maintain the guise of being real, and a very convincing guise at that. Lawrence's great triumph in his best poetic fiction is that he creates characters which have a universal dimension and function on a symbolic level, and yet which are still convincing and living as individuals with unique personalities and with the power to draw upon our sympathetic responses. He creates a perfect balance between realism and symbolism in his treatment of character at its best. And even when the two levels seem to clash, Lawrence is ready with a characteristically mischievous justification. Thus, after a particularly extreme and unbelievable analysis in Aaron's Rod of Aaron's state of being at a moment of crisis, Lawrence (perhaps sensing

[12] D.H. Lawrence, The Collected Letters, ed. H.T. Moore, p.852.

that he might be going a little too far) steps in in true omniscient fashion and delivers the following expostulation worthy of Fielding:

> In his own powerful but subconscious fashion Aaron realized this. . . If I, as a word-user, must translate his deep conscious vibrations into finite words, that is my own business. I do but make a translation of the man. . .
>
> Don't grumble at me then, gentle reader, and swear at me that this damned fellow wasn't half clever enough to think all these smart things, and realize all these fine-drawn-out subtleties. You are quite right, he wasn't, yet it all resolved itself in him as I say, and it is for you to prove that it didn't. 13

Aware of the inherent paradox of his method - the sustaining of a realistic illusion whilst at the same time going beyond the limits of the illusion - Lawrence is nevertheless able to control the balance in his best work with absolute conviction. At which point we may turn to the works themselves for some verification of the points discussed so far.

*

The Rainbow is the obvious place to begin, for it is in this novel that the full effects of the new attitude to character are most clearly felt. [14] What we need to take note of in particular is the

[13] D.H. Lawrence, Aaron's Rod, Penguin (1968), p.199.

[14] There are many clear examples of this new character conception manifesting itself in Sons and Lovers Part Two and in The Prussian Officer volume, but in this respect these works are transitional. Lawrence was using his new method for some time in a primitive, confused form before he actually became aware of its potential. The letter to Garnett probably marks the maturing of the method into full artistic control, being worked out in practice in the re-writings of The Rainbow versions. The chronology is of interest because the tales of The Prussian Officer volume can be seen as forming a transitional bridge: many of the tales had been written some time earlier, and their first versions as published in The English Review often work entirely in terms of dramatic realism. When Lawrence came to collect the tales for the 1914 volume he had the newly discovered character method of "The Wedding Ring" firmly in his mind, and as a result he revised some of the tales in accordance with his new method. The revisions thus show him re-conceiving a realistic fictional world in the imaginative terms of his character analysis. For some detailed discussion of these revisions see below, Appendix One, p. 268-70

balance achieved between the presentation of character as vitally individual and as functioning on a more universal dimension. This balance is most sucessfully maintained in the first part of the book, the part concerning Tom and Lydia. Here the interplay between vivid dramatic actualisation and figurative analysis creates a real rapport between the individual and universal dimensions of characterisation. Thus, for example, we have the scene in which Lydia comes to the house to borrow butter,- an unremarkable incident in itself which Lawrence's brilliantly vivid dramatic realism highlights as a significant stage in Brangwen's life. Lawrence's vivid realism throws a warm powerful spotlight upon the event so that it becomes memorable and significant to us as it might do to Tom himself; and then the analytical method shows us the deeper significance of the event for Brangwen in his subconscious struggle with life. It will be worth looking at this passage in detail as representative of the balance in this novel.

Prior to this scene we have been becoming acquainted with Brangwen as an individual, and with his personal situation. We meet him in the first unformed stages of manhood - very unsure, struggling to find some stability after the break-up of his early family life. We are shown his awakening to sex, the brutal disillusionment which follows a chance encounter with a prostitute. We see his partial abandonment of the struggle to achieve any stable individual fulfilment, and his lapse into periodic bouts of drinking to drown his inner frustration at the seeming barrenness of experience. At this point in the novel Tom is an individual hovering on the verge of possible decline or possible development. His deep but unformulated need for some door out of his present situation is as evident as his total lack of awareness of his dilemma; and both factors contribute to the truthfulness of this portrait.

Either Tom will find a door out and develop, or he will stagnate and decline. The situation of a character poised before imminent change is a central one for any novelist. It is in the treatment of the situation that Lawrence introduces a wider dimension into his characterization. Not only are we shown Tom's salvation as being something over which he himself has absolutely no control; we are also shown Tom's personal dilemma and consequent development as part of the wider stream of life itself, subsumed to the unformulated laws of creation and decay which govern all life. Like a plant, Tom must either struggle to survive,or die.

The solution which life finds for Tom is absolutely ordinary, in as much as the fundamentals of life ever can be ordinary. He meets a woman, Lydia, on whom the whole of his confused nature centres itself. She becomes his focus quite by accident, quite unconsciously. It is at this point that the trivial event of the butter borrowing comes in.

At tea-time, as Brangwen sits alone at the table in the Marsh, there is an unexpected knock at the door: "It startled him like a portent." [15] This phrase sets the significance of the episode plainly before us. In the old rustic communities, the entry into a house without invitation is a sign of familiarity. Lydia inadvertently assumes this as her right, ignorant of the customary decorum: she enters the house "as if the door had been opened to admit her." [16] and this again startles Brangwen. Lawrence makes something of this entry across the threshold for a number of reasons. It shows up Lydia's foreignness. Her entry is at once a breach of unwritten etiquette and

[15] D.H. Lawrence, The Rainbow, p.34.

[16] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.34.

an enactment of the strangeness, the sudden inevitability of new life, which will not wait to be invited in but takes one unprepared. Her entry is a sign, a portent, of the unexpected and strange communion which has sprung up between herself and Tom - in this sense she is already familiar enough to walk in without needing invitation, as if this were her rightful place. As Lydia stands there on the threshold about to enter the dramatic situation enacts in a curiously significant manner the threshold upon which both characters hover - the threshold of new creative development and fulfilment. It is a situation which Lawrence uses again with the same intention in the proposal scene later in this first chapter.

Having established the significance of this seemingly unimportant event, Lawrence goes on to present it through his most warm and vital dramatic realism in such a way as to illuminate the scene with a powerful emotional value. He creates a rich atmosphere of complete authenticity in his presentation of the Marsh kitchen, with all the vivid particular details which give the illusion of an intimate knowledge of an actual place: "His tea-things were spread on the scrubbed deal table, a big fire was burning, a dog rose from the hearth and went to her." [17] Lawrence treats the strained situation between Brangwen, Lydia and Tilly with a characteristically warm humour and insight. All three are somewhat at cross-purposes because of the awkwardness of the circumstances: Brangwen, confused by the presence of Lydia, bullies Tilly; Tilly, resentful first of the intrusion of this stranger into her province and then of Brangwen's attentions to the stranger, refuses to co-operate with him; and Lydia stands caught in a confusion between the two of them in their little personal quarrel, resolutely awaiting her demands for butter to be

[17] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.35.

met. The butter itself with its motif of acorns (an emblem of growth) of course has a definite dramatic significance with regard to the relationship. But the dramatic presentation is so accurate, rich and truly alive that the episode works brilliantly as an authentic and real image of life without being overbearingly obvious. But what is of particular interest to us is the effect which the event has upon Brangwen, for it is at this point that Lawrence presents Tom's individual situation in terms of a wider level.

He describes Tom in the following terms:

> Since she had come to the house he went about in a daze, scarcely seeing even the things he handled, drifting, quiescent, in a state of metamorphosis. He submitted to that which was happening to him, letting go his will, suffering the loss of himself, dormant always on the brink of ecstasy, like a creature evolving to a new birth. [18]

Here if anywhere is a clear instance of Lawrence setting the individual character within the wider context of life as a whole, and describing the character as if he were a material phenomenon undergoing allotropic change, in such a way as to create this wider dimension. Brangwen is "in a state of metamorphosis"; he is "like a creature evolving to a new birth". This kind of figurative description transforms Brangwen from an individual with quite ordinary personal experiences into a phenomenon subject to the wider laws of life. Two other instances may serve to reinforce the point, both concerning the early stages of Tom's relationship with Lydia and both conceiving Tom's development in terms of his being re-born:

> As he worked alone on the land, or sat up with his ewes at lambing time, the facts and material of his daily life fell away, leaving the kernel of his purpose clean. And then it came upon him that he would marry her and she would be his life. [19]

[18] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.39.

[19] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.40.

> He returned gradually, but newly created, as after a gestation, a new birth, in the womb of darkness. Aerial and light everything was, new as a morning, fresh and newly-begun. Like a dawn the newness and the bliss filled in. [20]

The figurative terms of this kind of analysis show a heightened version of what is happening, in order to create a wider perspective for the character. The effect of Lydia upon Tom is presented in terms of his being a seed-kernel newly broken forth from an enclosing shell, and in terms of his being a creature re-born. Now, this is an accurate assessment of Tom himself: we have been shown how barren and frustrated his life was before he met Lydia, and the new relationship releases him to a new freedom and fulfilment. But the figurative analysis also translates Tom's fulfilment into a wider perspective: we see him in impersonal terms, as an unconscious seed, slowly growing and being changed by the flow of life without having any control over his destiny. This kind of presentation of character is ultra-realistic, essentially imaginative in nature, going beyond the level of dramatic realism in order to show behind the characters the "greater ordering" [21] which carries the individual along.

The creation of a universal perspective for the individual characters as in The Rainbow is not, however, the full extent of Lawrence's new character method. The portrayal of Tom and Lydia, for example, achieves a wonderfully intimate dramatisation of a human relationship which is then placed in the further dimension by means of the analysis. But as such the characters do not have actual symbolic rôles to play, although Lawrence is obviously moving towards this in the kind of analysis developed later in the novel and in the

[20] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.46.

[21] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.40.

biblical parallels. In the fullest development of his method Lawrence uses the kind of figurative description just discussed to introduce a distinct symbolic dimension to character portrayal. In this respect, the novel we need to now consider is Women in Love, Lawrence's most extensive poetic fiction.

Among many other things, Women in Love is a pervasively symbolic novel. It has what we might describe as an imaginative framework underlying its action and characters, a framework by virtue of which the fictional world of the novel is transformed into a symbolic embodiment of what Lawrence described as the "whole conception of the existence of man. . . good, evil, life, death, resurrection". [22] This is the novel in which Lawrence attempts to create a fictional image which will encompass "the Absolute. . . the whole scheme".[23] Some of the implications of this for the fictional world itself have been postulated already. [24] What we are concerned with here are the implications as far as characterization is concerned; and perhaps the best demonstration of this may be effected by trying to describe the symbolic rôles played in the imaginative framework by certain of the main characters of the novel. But as an initial step we should substantiate a little our term "imaginative framework".

Crudely stated there are two sides to Lawrence's vision in Women in Love, two sides to his conception of the "whole scheme". As we saw in Chapter Two, these two sides may be variously described as life and death, good and evil, creation and destruction, resurrection

[22] See above, Chapter One, p.33 n.50.

[23] ibid.

[24] See above, Chapter Two, p.74-79.

and dissolution. (I hasten to add that this view of the novel is in no way original. It is rather a general thematic outline which is by now basically accepted although interpretations may differ. What I am interested in here is not so much interpreting the novel as showing its nature as a fictional image). Lawrence attempts to represent this universal dimension of life by means of a realistic drama of character relationships which he transforms into a symbolic drama through an imaginative treatment. What this means basically is that he puts into play a fabric of imagery and symbolism to which he relates the action and the relationships, as a result of which they are given a symbolic function. The ultra-realistic figurative analysis of character found in The Rainbow is obviously a central part of this method, but in this novel it is taken one step further and used as a means of creating a defined imaginative rôle for each character within the framework of the novel.

Gerald Crich is a good primary example. His imaginative rôle is clearly defined at the outset of the novel, particularly in relation to Gudrun. Gudrun's first view of Gerald at the Crich wedding prompts in her the following subconscious response:

> Gudrun lighted on him at once. There was something northern about him that magnetized her. In his clear northern flesh and his fair hair was a glisten like sunshine refracted through crystals of ice. And he looked so new, unbroached, pure as an arctic thing. . . . His gleaming beauty, maleness, like a young, good-humoured, smiling wolf did not blind her to the significant, sinister stillness in his bearing, the lurking danger of his unsubdued temper. 'His totem is the wolf,' she repeated to herself. 25

Gudrun's response to Gerald is not far removed from Ursula's response to Skrebensky when he returns to her in Chapter 15 of The Rainbow: she hurries out of her biology laboratory looking towards the meeting

25 D.H. Lawrence, Women in Love, p.15-16.

with Skrebensky as towards "a new beginning"; but when she sees him "She would not admit to herself the chill like a sunshine of frost that came over her. This was he, the key, the nucleus to the new world." [26] Lawrence is doing something very similar in both cases. He is analysing the states of being of his characters and their responses to each other by means of figurative analogies which go beyond the character as an individual and show him up in his essential nature as part of life. And in both cases it is the terms in which the experiences are articulated, rather than the experiences themselves, which make this treatment ultra-realistic: Gudrun's instinctive attraction to Gerald, qualified as it is by her objectivity, is not unreal in the least. Neither is Ursula's centring upon Skrebensky as a hope for new life, a door out of the barrenness of college. It is the arctic imagery in both examples which marks the threshold between a realistic situation and an imaginative treatment of that situation: Lawrence is indicating something about the natures of both Skrebensky and Gerald, the significance of which is readily recognisable in terms of the Northern Gods theme which we outlined earlier. [27] But we need only compare the two examples to see the extent to which Women in Love develops this method further: the difference is quite remarkable. In The Rainbow Lawrence is exploring the individual relationship between two characters, and the reference to frost is used to define Ursula's relationship to Skrebensky. Ursula has just come to the realization, whilst examining a cell under a microscope in her biology laboratory, that "To be oneself was a supreme, gleaming triumph of infinity." [28] The novel's central theme has just been sounded: Lawrence indicates by

[26] D.H. Lawrence, The Rainbow, p.442.

[27] See above, Chapter Two p. 76-8.

[28] D.H. Lawrence, The Rainbow, p.441.

means of the cell image that Ursula, like Tom Brangwen, is an unconscious seed which may or may not be nurtured into growth and fulfilment by the stream of life. And, as with Tom, this greater inhuman will is quite independent of Ursula's own will: she cannot consciously force herself into fulfilment. This is the irony of her resumption of the Skrebensky relationship. She desires a new life, a new beginning, a liberation from the deathliness of her college existence. She centres upon Skrebensky as her hope, her "nucleus to the new world". But Lawrence indicates through the frost image what Ursula herself in her anxiety for freedom refuses to acknowledge - that Skrebensky in his essential nature is himself dead, and will blight or inhibit the growth of Ursula's self rather than warm it into development. In her desperation, Ursula chooses the wrong relationship.

Thus, in this case, Lawrence is telling us something about the nature of this relationship, and the reference to frost is meaningful on this level. In the case of Gerald exactly the same thing happens - Lawrence again indicates the essential nature of the potential relationship between Gudrun and Gerald - but something else also happens. The ice and frost references are also part of a larger pattern within the novel. Through Gudrun's response to Gerald, Lawrence hammers home figurative analogies with ice and cold in order to define Gerald in terms of one fundamental imaginative theme from the poetic framework of the novel - the Northern Gods theme, which is carefully built up through imagery and symbolism into the embodiment of the anti-life pole of the universal scheme. Gerald is delineated as the representative of this theme by means of these figurative analogies. This is his rôle, as a representative of anti-life, in a novel which enacts a drama of such cosmic proportions by giving each of the primary characters

a symbolic rôle within an underlying imaginative framework so that we can translate their individual personal dramas into an embodiment of a universal drama by refering them to the framework and its significance. In this way Women in Love goes much further than The Rainbow in its adaption of character to the needs of a fictional world which functions much more completely (though by no means exclusively) as a poetic representation of life.

To substantiate this further let us look for a moment at the rôles played by the other main characters in the novel. In contrast to Gerald, Ursula is presented imaginatively as a positive life-figure. She is continually treated in terms of new life growing and developing. In the first chapter she is described as being in a state of expectancy, like a bud or an embryo child. [29] Or alternatively, she is associated with images of creative beauty like the butterfly in Chapter 10, "suddenly snapping out of nothingness into a jewel-life." [30] The relationship with Birkin is the catalyst which serves to draw the latent life in Ursula into blossom - we think of the scene in which Birkin enters the still atmosphere of Ursula's classroom as she sits in the dimness: he turns on the light, and "She looked like one who is suddenly wakened. There was a living, tender beauty, like a tender light of dawn shining from her face." [31] This episode, perfectly dramatically convincing as it is, is suddenly rendered into a semi-symbolic event by this single image: Birkin "wakes" Ursula and brings her the "new day" that Skrebensky could not bring her. Likewise, for Birkin, Ursula is a part of the creative stream of existence, and he looks towards her as his salvation, almost his resurrection. With Hermione Birkin had undergone all the deathliness

[29] D.H. Lawrence, Women in Love, p.10.

[30] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.132.

[31] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.39.

of "dissolution"; and he turns to Ursula for his redemption. The antithesis between Hermione's deathliness and Ursula's positive life is nowhere more plain than in Chapter 8, in which Hermione is described in terms of images of dissolution (she is a "corpse" and her house Breadalby is a "sepulchre" [32]), whilst Ursula is "rich, full of dangerous power. . . like a strange unconscious bud of womanhood". [33] The effect upon Birkin is that "He was unconsciously drawn towards her. She was his future." Birkin and Ursula present the positive pole of the cosmic drama enacted in this novel. They embody the force of positive life caught up in the modern tragedy of destructive anti-life as Lawrence saw it. Amid the dies irae conclusion of the novel, Birkin and Ursula are seen as the seed of new life escaping the holocaust - "they seemed to fall like one closed seed of life falling through dark, fathomless space." [34]

From this perfunctory outline sketch, we can see something of Lawrence's intentions with regard to this novel. Essentially, Lawrence is concerned with creating a fictional world which can represent life on both the personal and universal levels. Thus he makes a drama of personal relationships reflect the universal drama of life and death by presenting the characters in imaginative terms through the kind of figurative analysis just discussed. In this way we are invited to place the characters within an imaginative framework which symbolically embodies the universality which Lawrence aimed at. The framework of imagery and symbol itself is expounded primarily by means of the discussion between characters, the rôle of Birkin (which we will consider separately [35]), and the figurative analysis which in itself becomes a very exact tool by which Lawrence

[32] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.100-103.

[33] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.102.

[34] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.437.

[35] See below, Chapter Three Section i , p. 197-204.

can etch out the symbolic dimension of a character with the utmost economy. What is of immediate interest to us, however, is that this kind of imaginative presentation of character at its most extreme might become a very artificial, almost allegorical approach to the concept. To place the mimetic concept - character - into this kind of fictional world might make it difficult to sustain the basic seed of living characterization. The aim of characterization in many ways is to create the fictional illusion of a real person, and to use this illusion to mirror human complexity and human truth in a form which is the most readily identifiable and involving for the reader. We are all interested in other people, and it is this that the novelist plays upon when he uses the concept of a fictional person. But it is of little use (to most readers at least) to create a fictional person who does not seem real: this would seem to defeat the object, even if the novelist did have some ulterior intention for making use of character as a device. Allegory is a very complex narrative mode; but its concerns are not with characters as real people but with characters as representative figures, and somehow this does not satisfy our sense of the particularities and intricacies that are as much a part of life as general truths. The only kind of fictional representation which can really satisfy this demand is the realistic, because it mirrors those very human intricacies in their own human terms. We fall under the novelist's illusion and, rightly or wrongly, we take the realistic character to be more "truthful" than the allegorical character. There is a general abstract truth to be discovered about life and human behaviour. But there is also a particular truth which resides only in the complexities of individual behaviour, and nothing other than the sharp, slightly deflected mirror of the great realistic novelist can catch it. This is why we prize the art of realism so highly. Hence, if Lawrence had

imposed an imaginative or representative rôle upon his characters in Women in Love to the detriment of their individuality as fictional people, he would have fallen into a fatal trap. He does not do this. One of the great triumphs of this novel is that it encompasses the personal as well as the universal, and that Lawrence sustains a realistic level as well as an imaginative level. Indeed, the two are inseparably connected. The imaginative dimension of characters is not detached from their actuality as people: rather, this poetic level is drawn out of the personal nature of the characters as individuals. Gerald's rôle, for example, is drawn out of the particular psychological and emotional reality of Gerald as an individual. Chapter 17, "The Industrial Magnate", shows Gerald's foundations as an actual human being; and out of this detail wider implications arise to compose Gerald's imaginative rôle in the novel. His case is worth considering in more detail.

In Chapter 17 we see first of all the background from which Gerald came, the fatalistic ethos of his family. We are then shown a history of his own development as a person: his initial "savage freedom" [36], his aimlessness, his sudden absorption into the "real adventure of the coalmines" [37], his growing belief in the function of industry and in man's ability to order life mechanistically, his resultant attempts to obsessively improve efficiency in his father's pits; and finally, in the face of success, the sterility with which he is overcome. All of this complex analysis forms an utterly convincing portrait of a man trying to evade his own sense of inner emptiness, of lack of aim or purpose, and ultimately trying to evade a failure to find any positive meaning in life. The outcome is Gerald's

[36] D.H. Lawrence, Women in Love, p.249.

[37] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.249.

success as an industrial magnate, a venture which serves only to manifest and increase his emptiness. But Gerald's tragedy is not simply a personal one. His belief in the material and technological perfectibility of western civilisation is for Lawrence the great tragedy of the modern industrial world. Lawrence takes the sterility of Gerald's coal-mining industry as an element of the imaginative scheme of the novel. The "industrial sea which surged in coal-blackened tides" [38] is itself part of the much larger imaginative complex denoting anti-life, a complex made up of the symbols of water (we think of Gerald's diving in the "Water-Party" chapter), dissolution and corruption (we think of Birkin's river of dissolution and fleurs du mal speech again in "Water Party"), ice and snow, and so on. The whole ethos of the mining community suffers a degradation in this novel (when compared, for example , with Sons and Lovers): they are shown to have submitted to Gerald's mechanistic philosophy; and they are shown to be representative of a purely sensual kind of life, a reductive process which they share with Halliday's African statue. Thus Gudrun's attraction to the sensuous soft atmosphere of the colliery village in the "Coal Dust"chapter is purely regressive. It is from Gerald's personal involvement in the coal-mining industry that Lawrence conceives him imaginatively as the representative and the victim of the destructive anti-life impulse. And again, it is the terms in which Lawrence describes Gerald's personal dilemma that relate him to the wider imaginative framework and give him a poetic rôle. For example, when describing Gerald's utter personal emptiness in the face of the dying of his father, Lawrence analyses him in the following terms: "now his father was passing away, Gerald found himself left exposed and unready before the storm of living, like the mutinous

[38] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.249.

first mate of a ship that has lost his captain, and who sees only a terrible chaos in front of him." [39] ; "His mind was very active. But it was like a bubble floating in the darkness. At any moment it might burst and leave him in chaos." [40] Gerald is quite specifically faced with the terrors which might be unleashed from the "industrial sea" and by the ensuing disintegration: he is faced by the demands of workers who might quite literally turn his life into a chaos like that of his counterparts in Russia in 1917. But the figurative analogies have a further significance, too, of outlining Gerald's psychic disintegration in such a way as to give his state of being a meaning within the novel's imaginative framework: he, like many of the other characters, is being submerged by the waters of dissolution.

The analysis, then, is performing two functions: it is used to present Gerald's personal situation and at the same time to relate him to the underlying poetic level of the action. The same is true of his relationship with Gudrun: we find the same double viewpoint, at once realistic and imaginative; and here, if anywhere, is evidence of Lawrence retaining all the human intricacy and sympathy of realistic characterization whilst introducing his symbolic level. Gerald turns to Gudrun for the wrong reason - to escape his personal dilemma. His motivation is purely selfish: at the time of committing himself to the relationship with Gudrun he is said to be "thinking only of himself". [41] He turns to her in order to sustain himself and not from any true feeling for her. Lawrence shows Gerald to be a certain kind of person in his action, and shows

[39] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.248.

[40] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.261.

[41] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.371.

the relationship to be, in Lawrence's terms, a wrong relationship. It is on this basis that Lawrence makes this relationship into the opposite of the creative union between Birkin and Ursula. Significantly, the Gerald/Gudrun relationship is finalised in the chapter called "Death and Love" - for them the two things are synonymous. Their love is a destructive deathly affair both in personal terms and in the imaginative terms of the novel. Thus, Gerald seeks Gudrun to escape his own deathliness, "all the darkness and fearful space of death" : "he knew he would have to find reinforcements, otherwise he would collapse inwards upon the great dark void which circled at the centre of his soul." [42] He succeeds only in bring deathliness to her. When Gerald finally goes to Gudrun after the death of his father, we are shown the extremity of his personal position with great sympathy: conscious as we always are of the poetic significance of the action, we really do sympathize with this character to the full. He flies from the now empty house to escape his feeling of being hung over "the bottomless pit of nothingness". [43] He is a pitiful and desperate figure as he stumbles around the dark countryside, despairing and almost beaten by life, in search of help - from Birkin, who is away; from his father, who is dead and buried; and finally from Gudrun. When he arrives in her room, heavy with graveyard clay and the damp cold blackness (the dramatic details speak for themselves) we realize the awful situation in which he has placed Gudrun. He has come simply to save himself without any regard for her feeling: "He had come for vindication." [44] But even though Gerald is in the wrong, Lawrence shows with great sympathy why he has come and the state of mind that has driven him to demand help from Gudrun: "He had not known how

[42] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.363.

[43] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.381.

[44] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.388.

hurt he was, how his tissue, the very tissue of his brain was damaged by the corrosive flood of death. Now, as the healing lymph of her effluence flowed through him, he knew how destroyed he was, like a plant whose tissue is burst from inwards by a frost." [45] The experience described in the passage from which this is an extract is entirely comprehensible in the realistic terms of Gerald's personal situation. Near to despair as he is, he turns for reassurance and comfort to Gudrun. She restores his belief in himself simply through her physical presence and contact: by allowing Gerald to have physical possession of her and to take comfort from their love-making, she restores his self-sufficiency in no extraordinary manner, so that "he felt his own wholeness come over him again". [46] The experience is perfectly understandable in human terms, and is portrayed with rich sympathy and insight, even though the whole passage is of tremendous significance for our understanding of the significance of the Gerald/Gudrun relationship within the imaginative framework (we notice, for example, the "flood of death" image, the frost image - the passage is full of suggestions of deathliness which relate to the anti-life complex of imagery and symbolism). Our human responses to the situation are in no way constricted by any sense that the characters are made artificial or over-simplified by their having a symbolic dimension. They remain fully human. Indeed, we feel our human responses are reinforced by the place Lawrence gives this episode within the poetic framework. Though we sympathize with Gerald, we certainly do not condone his attachment to Gudrun; and Lawrence makes it clear by means of his poetic analysis that, far from offering a solution, the relationship with Gudrun is the final stage of Gerald's self-destructive process. Perhaps superficially it was the best action

[45] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.389.

[46] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.390.

Gerald could take, to go to a woman as "the great bath of life" [47] and be healed (although even here there is an implicit comparison with Birkin's rejection of the "accursed Syria Dea", the Cybele.)[48] But the selfishness and one-sidedness of the situation leads us to believe that Gerald is terribly wrong in thinking Gudrun can do him any ultimate good, or that she will placidly submit to his demands for a slave-like comforter. There is an element of deathly subjugation about their love-making which leaves us in no doubt as to its significance: "she, subject, received him as a vessel filled with his bitter potion of death." [49] Gudrun is not the kind of person to give herself in Miriam-like sacrifice or to accept Gerald's use of her; and this becomes all too apparent when Gerald falls asleep satisfied. Far from being herself made self-sufficient, Gudrun experiences a terrible and painful isolation after their love-making; and it is self-evident that there is a fundamental lack of mutual satisfaction on her side which fatally flaws the relationship and gradually turns Gudrun into a very vindictive and cruel woman. Gerald's tranquil sleep is, for her, a torment: she is left with an awful sense of separateness, having no inner stability or peace with which to balance it - "he was far off, in another world. Ah, she could shriek with torment, he was so far off, and perfected, in another world. She seemed to look at him as at a pebble far away under clear dark water. And here was she, left with all the anguish of consciousness". [50] We feel great sympathy for Gudrun at this crisis: she is experiencing here what she always dreaded, what we have always sensed in her character - a fear that she will never find her fulfilment in another person, a fear that she will never find fulfilment at all. This lay behind the tentative probing by Gudrun of Ursula's attitude to

[47] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.389.

[48] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.278.

[49] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.388.

[50] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p. 390

marriage in the very opening chapter of the novel ("'I was hoping now for a man to come along,' Gudrun said, suddenly catching her underlip between her teeth, and making a strange grimace, half sly smiling, half anguish.")[51] It lies also at the root of Gudrun's recurrent envy of Ursula's reserves of confidence and self-sufficiency (as in her "queer, uncertain envy and dislike" when Ursula asserts her complete indifference to everyone else [52]). For all her outward show of confidence and composure, Gudrun suffers from a lack of inner sufficiency. How eagerly she welcomed the delusion that Gerald loved her - "Did she then mean so much to him!" [53] - and how desperately she suffers for her mistake: "Ah, this awful, inhuman distance which would always be interposed between her and the other being!" [54] In being shown Gerald's selfishness and Gudrun's inability to accept the separateness of a polarized relationship, we are at the heart of the reasons for the failure in human terms of their love. We are being shown with remarkable delicacy the complex factors which make up a human relationship; and at the same time the relationship is given a significance through the terms of the analysis which places it within the wider scheme of the novel. Thus, the terms used to explore Gudrun's personal state relate her directly to the anti-life complex. After her virtual violation by Gerald, she is "destroyed into perfect consciousness": in an awful image of futility, she seems to hear "waves break on a hidden shore, long, slow, gloomy waves, breaking with the rhythm of fate, so monotonously that it seemed eternal." [55] In itself the whole passage is remarkable for its evocative power in portraying with disturbing clarity the entirely sterile state induced by a bitterly hopeless situation. But the terms

[51] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.8

[52] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.56.

[53] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.371.

[54] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.390.

[55] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.390.

themselves have a significance in the context of the framework. The concept of consciousness has been given a specific imaginative association of deathliness through Birkin's discussions with Hermione.[56] The images of water and the sea have the imaginative association of death from Chapter 14 "Water-Party", and also from their continual association with the "industrial sea" as we saw earlier. Gudrun is seen to be drawing "a glittering rope of knowledge out of the sea of darkness".[57] : the concept of "knowledge" has been given an imaginative association with anti-life by its use with regard to Hermione; and we have been told earlier in the chapter that Gudrun's desire for "knowledge" of Gerald (in the sense of physical sensual knowledge) is a negative state "like Eve reaching to the apples on the tree of knowledge".[58]

As with Gerald, therefore, Gudrun's experience is presented on two integrated levels, as a personal situation and as part of the poetic framework of the novel. Lawrence's figurative analysis transforms the character into symbol without in any way distorting it as a convincing realistic illusion. This double perspective accounts in many ways for the magnificence and scope of Women in Love as a novel: we see the characters as full and living creations, and at the same time they are acting out a rôle within an entire imaginative conception of life and man's relation to the universal forces which govern life. Lawrence integrates the concept of character into a fictional representation which encompasses the personal and the cosmic by means of his particular kind of treatment. Just so long as he maintains the balance between realism and symbolism, then the two function together as a viable fictional mode.

[56] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.43-8, for example.

[57] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.391.

[58] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.374.

There are, however, some cases in the novel where this balance breaks down. Our response to certain characters is distorted on the personal level for the sake of their poetic rôles. This is perhaps inevitable in the case of minor characters: often they cannot be treated with the depth of major characters, and thus undergo an apparent oversimplification to illustrate some particular theme. This is acceptable as long as the character is treated fairly and is not totally submerged from the reader's sympathy. But even this is not easily achieved with a character which has a derogatory rôle to play. The clearest example of failure in this respect in Women in Love is Hermione. Lawrence presents Hermione most convincingly as a representative of anti-life in the terms of the poetic framework: she manifests the sterile destructiveness, the symbolic "death", from which Birkin is released into new life with Ursula. This rôle is particularly clear during the dinner scene in Chapter 8.[59] Breadalby is shown as a house buried in the past, a monument raised to dead culture, a sepulchre. The atmosphere at dinner is of "an accumulation of powerful force in the room, powerful and destructive"; and at the centre, like a "witch" brewing a "powerful, consuming, destructive mentality", is Hermione herself. The figurative description makes her rôle quite definite: she comes into dinner looking "tall and rather terrible, ghastly"; amongst the gaiety and laughter "she seemed in a swoon of gratification, convulsed with pleasure, yet sick, like a revenant." She is "strange like a long Cassandra", "Like a priestess . . . sunk in a heavy half-trance" emanating a "ruthless mental pressure". Hermione is a deathly force: her oppressively conscious approach to life is taken as the negation of all instinctive impulses, all creative living. The point is dramatised after the ballet, when Birkin suddenly begins to dance with the "irresponsible gaiety" of really spontaneous life. The effect upon Hermione is that "She hated

[59] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.100-103.

him in a despair that shattered her and broke her down, so that she suffered sheer dissolution like a corpse, and was unconscious of everything save the horrible sickness of dissolution that was taking place within her, body and soul." Hermione is directly associated with the negative pole of the book, dissolution, unable to free herself from it as Birkin does, unable even to have the potential for escape as Gerald might have had. Lawrence allows no doubt as to her place within the poetic framework. This rôle is entirely consonant with the kind of person she is shown to be: she has a fundamental lack of "natural sufficiency" [60] which she tries to assuage with aesthetics; she has a wistful, but insistently intellectual approach to life; she attempts to control people with her will in an effort to assert her ego; and she has a passionately destructive capacity which manifests itself particularly in her attack upon Birkin with the lapis lazuli paper weight. Her poetic rôle, drawn from this characterization, is quite acceptable. But what is perhaps not acceptable is the gradual distortion which occurs in Lawrence's attitude to her as a character, a distortion resulting from her poetic rôle and its overemphasis. When we first see her in Chapter One, Lawrence presents her with some sympathy: she is described as a "pensive, tortured woman" [61], and Birkin is assailed "with shame, and with ultimate dislike, and with acute pity for her". [62] But this sympathetic portrayal does not continue: the character of Hermione becomes heavily bowed beneath the poetic rôle assigned to her in the scheme of the novel; and the treatment of her becomes at times so unsympathetic as to be quite vindictive. The result often amounts to near hysteria in Lawrence's attitude towards her as a character:

> "Where is Mr Birkin, Alice?" asked the mild straying voice of Hermione. But under the straying voice, what

[60] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.18.

[61] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.18.

[62] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.23-4.

> a persistent, almost insane will! 63
>
> Her self was all in her head, she did not know what it was spontaneously to run or move, like a fish in the water, or a weasel on the grass. She must always know. 64

We feel that there is little need for such a tone of distaste: it lacks the objectivity of good art, and suggests that Lawrence is bearing a personal grudge. The effect is to distort the character, to preclude the reader's sympathetic response, to use Hermione simply for her poetic rôle.

The failure here is not simply a failure of sympathy, however. It is a basic lack of balance in the treatment of the character. The poetic dimension is over-emphasised to the extent that we lose the character in the imaginative fabric. This is, if anything, Lawrence's one weakness in Women in Love with regard to his poetic treatment of the characters: the ultra-realistic terms of Lawrence's analysis, by which he injects a symbolic dimension into his characters, can become too ultra-realistic, too idiosyncratically figurative so as to make the experiences unrecognisable in ordinary human terms. The most notable example of this kind of dislocation on a local scale occurs in Chapter 23, in the description of Birkin seated "like an Egyptian Pharoah, driving the car". [65] Unlike the examples discussed earlier, in this instance the figurative analysis conflicts with the realistic illusion. One is tempted to wonder at Birkin's capacity for driving a car in the stiff posture of an Egyptian Pharoah, or to remember to control the pedals with all the activity going on inside his legs: "He knew what it was to have the strange and magical current of force in his back and loins, and down his legs". The poetic significance of this

[63] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.98.

[64] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.328.

[65] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.358.

analysis is undisputable. Ursula and Birkin have just won a new stage in their relationship, and Birkin is being shown in his rôle as a representative of creative power, one of the "lords of life".[66] Unfortunately, the terms of the passage are so ultra-realistic as to dislocate the narrative balance, so that, at Pritchard points out, "the symbolic and realistic modes of writing clash dreadfully".[67]

Such failures as this and the treatment of Hermione are, however, minor flaws in comparison with the richness and scope of this novel. Lawrence succeeds in giving us a wonderful picture of life and society during the 1910s which serves as a true mirror of human behaviour and relationships in all their intricacies. But he succeeds also in extending the basis of his fictional representation so that the fictional world also embodies an imaginative depiction of life on the universal scale, using the realistic elements of the fiction as parts of a symbolic drama. Within this conception Lawrence gives character a symbolic rôle, which he creates by using his analytic method as a poetic as well as a psychological instrument.

In Women in Love, however, Lawrence needed to go further than even this in his adaption of character to the demands of his poetic fiction. The use of an underlying imaginative fabric necessitated finding some way in which the framework of imagery and symbolism could be built up within the novel itself to avoid imposing it from outside. The solution Lawrence found for this problem was to use an actual character, Birkin: he uses Birkin as a vehicle for putting into circulation the various themes of the novel's imaginative framework. There are other characters who are used in the same way, particularly in discussions; but Birkin is by far the most important and the most

[66] D.H. Lawrence, "The Snake", The Collected Poems of D.H. Lawrence, ed. V. de Sola Pinto and W. Roberts, Heinemann (1967), p.351.

[67] R.E. Pritchard, D.H. Lawrence - Body of Darkness, Hutchinson University Library, (1971), p.101.

interesting of these. In utilizing Birkin in this way Lawrence again comes up against the need to extend the mimetic concept of character beyond the bounds of realism: in this case he turns the character into something of a persona, almost a mouthpiece. Characteristically enough, Birkin, the chosen character for this purpose, belongs at the centre of that well-known group of Lawrentian self-portraits. It is a measure of Lawrence's artistic capacities that in this case the mouthpiece is used with remarkable subtlety for an entirely objective artistic function.

We can see how important Birkin is as an imaginative vehicle if we consider his soliloquy in Chapter 19 "Moony".[68] Through Birkin Lawrence introduces a passage which is of such importance to the poetic framework of the novel that it is virtually the central statement. In effect Birkin's meditation synthesizes a great number of elements from the fictional world of the novel, giving significance and coherence to various themes, images, ideas, even incidents that have already appeared, and elaborating from them the basic framework of the novel. Birkin considers the two "ways" of life, the way of "dissolution" and the way of "freedom" - which constitute the two opposing poles of the novel, death and life. He goes on to elaborate these two ways of life in terms of various aspects of the novel so far. Thus he reconsiders the African statue in Halliday's flat as representative of the impulse towards dissolution, the disintegration into a purely sensual and reductive view of life. This is the state, he goes on, which occurred for the statue's race "after the death break", after that race had "died, mystically". This "death" is a figurative death. It implies a certain way of life and attitude to life. It implies a lapse of "the goodness, the holiness, the desire

[68] D.H. Lawrence, Women in Love, p.285-7.

for creation and productive happiness"; it implies the negation of "life and hope", of "integral being", of "creation and liberty". All these positive and creative aspects of life are swamped and overcome in the tide of what is virtually an equivalent of what Lawrence himself in St Mawr terms as the Christian idea of "evil". [69] The result of this dissolution is life devoid of the higher impulses, life consumed in "the single impulse for knowledge in one sort, mindless progressive knowledge through the senses, mystic knowledge in disintegration and dissolution". Lawrence is making explicit through Birkin the anti-life pole of the novel in terms of the African statue and, by association, Halliday and the London Bohemia. Birkin goes further and elaborates a correlating process of dissolution for the "white races". Their dissolution after the "death break" is a different kind of anti-life. It is the fulfilment of all the coldly mental and mechanical energies implied in their civilisation. Gerald is specifically associated with this impulse: he is "an omen of the universal dissolution into whiteness and snow", or at least a potential omen. Birkin concludes his speculation by considering the alternative way of life, the "way of freedom", the "paradisal entry into pure, single being" - that attainment of a fulfilled integral self which stands as the positive pole of the novel in opposition to dissolution. It is this which Birkin desires in his relationship with Ursula, for which reason he immediately rushes over to Beldover.

Such a use of a character in a realistic novel would be unthinkable as well as unnecessary. Birkin's meditation is used to bring into focus the imaginative significance of much of the material of the novel; and in effect places Gerald and himself, and by implication the Brangwen sisters, within the framework of the novel's poetic level.

[69] D.H. Lawrence, St Mawr, p.76.

The images and ideas which Birkin brings to the surface are central to an understanding of the imaginative level of the action. They form the fabric of the imaginative framework and, together with their associated image and symbol patterns, are used locally throughout the novel - so that when we recognize the particular local suggestion behind any incident or character portrayal we can make the connection with a particular imaginative pattern and place the episode within the framework. We recognize, for example, from Birkin's meditation the significance of such terms as "death break" and "dissolution" when applied to characters and situation in the rest of the novel. "Dissolution" is a negative state of being or state of mind, the manifestation of the modern way of living (mental and mechanical, or regressively sensual), and the basis of what Lawrence sees as the tragedy of modern society - the split between mind and body, the inability to attain to an integrated being, and all the consequent evils which follow from these. Thus, with respect to Gerald, we see him as caught up in the process of dissolution in his career, in his family and in his relationship with Gudrun. With the London Bohemia (notably Gerald's attraction to Minette) we recognize dissolution in their regressive ephemeral life, summed up by the fleurs du mal image taken from Baudelaire. To their regressive way of life we also relate Gudrun: she too is something of a fleur du mal, as Birkin points out to Ursula [70]; and we also think of her primitivism (her dance before the cattle, her carvings) which connect her with the statue, her attraction to the sensuality of the colliery village, and most of all her attraction to Loerke who "lives like a rat in the river of corruption".[71] Gudrun follows through the whole

[70] D.H. Lawrence, Women in Love, p.193

[71] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.481.

process of reductive dissolution without being finally destroyed by it.

From this we can see how Birkin's meditation virtually gives us the terms in which to view the rest of the novel as a whole, in accordance with his rôle as an imaginative vehicle. The question we need to consider is whether this rôle distorts Birkin as a character; whether Lawrence's extension of the function of character clashes with the mimetic basis of the concept. This very basic problem is a test of Lawrence's artistic ingenuity, and he circumvents it in a brilliant manner. He portrays Birkin as something of an amateur philosopher (very definitely amateur), a person who comes to life with an idea about it and tries to live according to his idea.[72] There is an inherent satiric slant to this self-portrait which makes it perfectly objective. Birkin's main "idea" is to live life spontaneously and free of ideas. As a result of this contradiction we often find him becoming completely muddled in the most absurd manner, and ultimately being forced into living life quite naturally just as it comes. This happens, for example, in Chapter 11 "An Island" in his discussion with Ursula: Ursula provides, as so often, an immediate satiric viewpoint for Birkin's ideas; but we also see Birkin hedging round, playing with words. We see through him: what matters to him ultimately is the "pure, perfect attraction" [73] to Ursula which exists quite independently of his theories about it. For all his philosophising, Birkin is a very living and human figure, full of the most ordinary contradictions, and in the face of any deep appeal to him as a human being his theories melt away. He is thus the perfect vehicle for Lawrence's purposes: it is quite acceptable for him to

[72] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.409, Ursula says of Birkin "'You always seem to think you can force the flowers to come out.'"

[73] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.144-5.

spout all sorts of strange ideas since, by virtue of this inbuilt satire, we do not take him too seriously. We can apply to him what Lawrence actually did recognize in himself: "Don't mind what I say - I am a great bosher and full of fancies that interest me." [74] Thus Lawrence can use him as an imaginative vehicle without any threat that he may be regarded as a serious mouthpiece for his author's philosophies. It is a piece of perfectly brilliant objectivization. It also leaves Birkin as a character perfectly free from any distortion.

We can illustrate this last point quite conveniently with reference to the passage from "Moony" just discussed. We notice first of all that the whole passage, vital as its importance is to the poetic framework, is drawn directly out of Birkin's own immediate personal situation as a character. Birkin has his own emotional and psychological problems. Indeed, as Ursula is quite ready to tell him [75], his life is in as much, if not more, of a mess as any of the other characters'. As far as Birkin the individual is concerned, the passage in "Moony" is an attempt to come to terms with one of his basic problems, his inability to resolve the two sides of his own nature - his desire for sensual fulfilment and his desire for a creative relationship. It is this personal predicament which is the springboard for his meditation on the two "ways" of life. His problem crystallizes out, and he is able to see it clearly for the first time: "Suddenly he found himself face to face with a situation." The resulting deep probing goes much further than its significance for Birkin alone, as we saw; but it is rooted in this immediate personal situation and remains there at one level. Twice Lawrence quite clearly

[74] D.H. Lawrence, The Collected Letters, ed. H.T. Moore, p.202.

[75] D.H. Lawrence, Women in Love, p.345-9.

indicates that Birkin's speculations have a direct connection with him as an individual character. Birkin feels himself on the verge of undergoing the dissolution which he sees in the African statue: indeed, she has long been "one of his soul's intimates", and "that which was imminent in himself" (the sensual death break) had happened to her race thousands of years before. Birkin himself has been, and still is very much a fleur du mal, particularly of course in his relationship with Hermione (shown most clearly in the abandoned "Prologue to Women in Love" in which Hermione's spiritual love bears a very clear resemblance to Miriam's in Sons and Lovers [76]). Birkin now sees himself as confronted with an "either/or"decision: either he can have an entirely sensual life and go the way of dissolution, or he can aspire to a state of "singleness" with Ursula and live the creative life. At this point in the novel he sees no compromise or meeting between the two. What we have to guard against is being misled into thinking that this rather inflexible schematic view of life is intended by Lawrence as a measure of the whole novel. In one sense, of course, it is just that - as we just saw, these "two "ways" of life are the fundamental basis for the poetic framework of the novel - but not necessarily in this simplified theoretical form. Lawrence puts all the responsibility for the ideas in this passage firmly on Birkin's shoulders, and gives us another comic insight into Birkin as an individual. He sends Birkin out to test his momentously vague ideas about "a lovely state of free proud singleness": Birkin rushes over to Beldover at the end of his introspection to ask Ursula to marry him, and there follows the absolutely ludicrous fiasco of the proposal scene - Lawrence at his comic best. There is clearly

[76] D.H. Lawrence, Phoenix II, p.92-108.

something a little wrong with Birkin's scheme, at least as far as he himself is concerned.

Thus the character of Birkin remains absolutely convincing even whilst being used as an imaginative vehicle. Lawrence uses his character ultra-realistically to fulfil an essential need but he still manages to create an objective fictional individual who is not distorted by the rôle he has to play. What we see in Women in Love is Lawrence overcoming the problem of how to integrate the mimetic concept of character into a fictional work which goes beyond realism. By maintaining a balance between realism and poetic fiction he is able to give characters a symbolic rôle and use them in an ultra-realistic manner without contravening the illusion of their reality.

ii : Character as a Reflective Persona - Virginia Woolf

Virginia Woolf's ability at characterization in her early, more conventional novels is far from encouraging. She must have found the machinery of the traditional realistic fictional world far too cumbersome and stiff for her own talents, for, unlike Lawrence, she never really mastered how to use the illusion of actuality to artistic effect. At least, this is the impression we receive from The Voyage Out and Night and Day. The task of sustaining a convincing illusion of actual life was an anathema to her, as was the task of sustaining a convincing illusion of actual people; and she would be the first to admit her difficulties and incapacities as far as formal realism is concerned, saying, for example, that "I haven't that 'reality'

gift" and that "I insubstantise, wilfully to some extent, distrusting reality - its cheapness." [1] As this last comment suggests, she herself was interested in something other than the realistic fictional illusion, in another kind of illusion altogether. Even in The Voyage Out, where she adopts formal realism as her mode, her real interest was not so much in the realistic illusion of character but in using character to create an illusion of pattern behind the fictional image which might mirror her sense of pattern in life itself. Such at least seems to have been her intention, as she explained to Lytton Strachey:

> What I wanted to do was to give the feeling of a vast tumult of life, as various and disorderly as possible, which should be cut short by the death [of Rachel] , and go on again - and the whole was to have a sort of pattern and be somehow controlled. The difficulty was to keep any sort of coherence, - also to give enough detail to make the characters interesting - which Forster says I didn't do . . . Do you think it is impossible to get this sort of effect in a novel . . . [2]

The idea prefigures very closely the central idea of To The Lighthouse - a sense of harmony amid change and disorder, a meaning amid apparent chaos. But it seems almost as if the characters themselves are superfluous, an obstruction preventing the exact formulation of the idea in the fictional construction. And one feels that this is how the early Virginia Woolf viewed character. It remained an obstruction for her until she began to see a way of using the concept other than in the old sense, a way of integrating it into her own kind of fictional representation.

What she did was, like Lawrence, to transfer attention to the interior of the character: she began to concentrate upon the consciousness of the character, the capacity for free-flowing thought or reverie. But this development did not come until after she had

[1] Virginia Woolf, A Writer's Diary, p.57.

[2] Virginia Woolf, Virginia Woolf and Lytton Strachey - Letters, p.57.

discovered and experimented with her own form of free-flowing associational narrative, rather than any embodiment of this in the form of character. This pre-dating is of some importance, because it indicates something of Virginia Woolf's aims and intentions in her later fiction. In such short pieces of prose as "An Unwritten Novel", "A Mark on the Wall", "Kew Gardens" and "Monday or Tuesday" she created a form of associational prose which seemed to her to hold great possibilities for her future fiction:

> Suppose one thing should open out of another - as in an unwritten novel - only not for 10 pages but for 200 or so - doesn't that give the looseness and lightness I want; doesn't that get closer and yet keep form and speed, and enclose everything, everything? . . . I figure the approach will be entirely different this time : no scaffolding; scarcely a brick to be seen; all crepuscular. . . conceive (?) "Mark on the Wall", "K.G." and "Unwritten Novel" taking hands and dancing in unity. What the unity shall be I have yet to discover; the theme is a blank to me; but I see immense possibilities in the form I hit upon more or less by chance two weeks ago. [3]

What she is interested in here is the form of associational prose which all these short pieces have in common. Dissatisfied with the stiffness (for her) of conventional fictional scaffolding, she sought out a free-ranging reflectional narrative which might include everything and anything. It did not take her too long to realize that this kind of reflective narrative could move under the guise of character in a novel, carried via the internal reveries of the consciousness of the character. It is here that Virginia Woolf own peculiar form of "stream of consciousness" is born; but the term needs some qualification with regard to her method. Though she concentrates her attention upon the internal consciousness of character, Virginia Woolf is still not interested in the chosen character as a character, as a realistic illusion. Instead, she is interested in using character as a spring-

[3] Virginia Woolf, A Writer's Diary, p.23.

board for her reflective narrative. She is interested in using character as a persona for what is virtually philosophical reflection about life. She endows her characters like Mrs Ramsay, Lily Briscoe and Bernard with a reflective capacity more usually reserved for the narrator in the traditional novel, or more usually associated with characters like T.S. Eliot's Prufrock or Shakespeare's Hamlet who are recognisably dramatic personae. Using the vehicle of their consciousnesses, Virginia Woolf turns her characters into philosophically reflective personae liberated from the spell of realistic authenticity by virtue of inhabiting fictional worlds which are not bound by the demands or conventions of realistic representation.

What we are concerned with, then, is that, like Lawrence, Virginia Woolf gives a distinct non-realistic dimension to certain of her characters. We are interested in why this is done, how it is done, and how Virginia Woolf deals with the mimetic basis of character in her treatment.

The distinctive interior monologues [4] of Virginia Woolf's poetic fiction function in two ways. Firstly they are used to explore the underlying metaphor upon which the fictional world is based as a representation of life: Erich Auerbach remarks with regard to the reflective characters in To The Lighthouse "It is as though an apparently simple text revealed its proper context only in the commentary on it.".[5] Secondly, the monologues are used as a medium through which Virginia Woolf can "generalize" about life on a scale that attempts in miniature

[4] Rather than resort to the term "stream of consciousness" with all the implications of creating a psychological reality which does not really apply to what Virginia Woolf is attempting to do, I use the term "interior monologue" since this seems to describe her method more accurately and avoids the confusions and preconceptions of the other term.

[5] Erich Auerbach, Mimesis - the representation of reality in Western literature, tr. W.R. Trask, Princeton (1953), p.540.

the reflective universality of Shakespearian soliloquy: Auerbach suggests that the monologues are "attempts to fathom a more genuine, a deeper, and indeed a more real reality". [6] To demonstrate these suggestions I want to consider some of the characters from To The Lighthouse and The Waves.

Along with Bernard in The Waves, Mrs Ramsay and Lily Briscoe are Virginia Woolf's outstanding reflective personae. They are both very human figures, for though Virginia Woolf uses them for a non-realistic purpose, she succeeds in sustaining in them a definite actuality of character. They have human appeal in addition to their function as personae, in a way that Bernard does not - which goes a long way towards accounting for the attractiveness of To The Lighthouse when compared with The Waves. In To The Lighthouse, Virginia Woolf attains her most perfect balance between actual life and her imaginative transformation of it. No doubt this is the result, to a large extent, of the close relationship between the novel and her own life; and this is a point worth dwelling on for a moment in order to give us a fuller picture of the aspects of this fictional world, and in order to lay the foundations for our consideration of the characters as personae.

As F.R. Leavis points out, this novel is to a large extent a direct transcription of Virginia Woolf's recollections of her childhood. [7] It is surprising how close and accurate Virginia Woolf makes this portrait of her family. The setting of the house and garden above a bay coincides exactly with the house bought by Leslie Stephen at St Ives, Cornwall after his second marriage. [8] (Virginia Woolf moved the location to the Isle of Skye in the Hebrides presumably to give

[6] Erich Auerbach, Mimesis, as in n.5, p.540.

[7] F.R. Leavis, "After To The Lighthouse", in T.A. Vogler (ed.), Twentieth Century Interpretations of To The Lighthouse, New Jersey : Prentice Hall (1970), p.99.

[8] F.W. Maitland, The Life and Letters of Leslie Stephen, Duckworth (1910), p.345, 362, 384.

a greater sense of isolation and cohesion to the world of her novel, as well as a certain detachment). Like the Ramsays, the Stephen family visited the house each summer,for thirteen consecutive years until the death of Julia Stephen in 1895. The actual life of the Ramsays on holiday is seemingly an exact replica of the family life of the Stephens': Mr Ramsay's moods and atmospheres mirror the effect of his real-life counterpart on wife and children. Virginia Woolf is even careful enough to remember that it was not until after her father became deaf that the Stephens' children laughed openly at his ridiculous tantrums - the novel depicts an earlier time when they had to hoard up their laughter for the nursery. [9] The guests too are accurately conceived. Mr Carmichael is probably taken from Leslie Stephen's Cambridge friend Wolsteholme, who gave Stephen his power to recite poetry by the yard, like Mr Ramsay. [10] More suprisingly, the historical setting of the novel is also absolutely accurate. The Ramsay children are said to be discussing the passing of the Irish Reform Bill at one point in the novel [11] ; and in 1886 Leslie Stephen had actually complained in a letter to his friend Norton that the subject of Ireland was impossible to get away from in his house: "I found one of my brats the other day - aged four [i.e. Virginia - my note] - pronouncing something to be a 'ghastly job'. I fancy she must have heard someone discussing W.E. G[ladstone] 's scheme." [12]

All this is of interest to us because it tells us something about the actual relationship in the author's mind between the fictional world and actuality. Such accuracy, however, should not be taken for

[9] F. Baldanza, "To The Lighthouse Again", P.M.L.A., 70, (1955), n.7

[10] N. Annan, Leslie Stephen : his thought and character in relation to his time, MacGibbon and Kee (1951), p.55 and p.294.

[11] Virginia Woolf, To The Lighthouse, p.11.

[12] F.W. Maitland, as in n.8 above, p.388.

mere transcription. Paradoxically, this novel is the outstanding case in which Virginia Woolf used a real model to imitate in her fictional world, and was directly in contact with actual life; and yet it is also the case in which she achieves a perfect transformation of the details of actuality into a coherent imaginative representation of life. She took her own advice as offered in the essay "Life and the Novelist": the experiences of actual life underwent that "drastic process of selection" by which novelists should have "mastered their perceptions, hardened them, and changed them", so that "There emerges from the mist something stark, something formidable and enduring". [13] This process of transformation can be very clearly seen in the way Virginia Woolf treats the character of Mrs Ramsay.

Virginia Woolf had a very definite model in real life for the character of Mrs Ramsay: the figure is a remarkable and unmistakable likeness of Virginia Woolf's mother, Julia Stephen. Vanessa Bell, Virginia Woolf's sister, is said to have thought it "an amazing portrait of mother". [14] We can easily pick out details in the characterization which coincide with the original: for example, both share a philanthropic concern for other people [15], and a Madonna-like aura. [16] The portrait also coincides with Virginia Woolf's description of the Victorian "Angel in the House", to be found in the essay "Professions for Women", which must also have been drawn directly from her impressions of her mother. From this very close imitation Virginia Woolf creates a remarkably fine and very

[13] Virginia Woolf, Collected Essays Vol. 2, p.131.

[14] Virginia Woolf, A Writer's Diary, p.107.

[15] F.W. Maitland, as in n.8 above, p.431 n.10.

[16] F.W. Maitland, ibid., p.323,324,431.

living miniature portrait. Close imitation of course is perhaps the last quality to assure the success of a character, unless Virginia Woolf did more and breathed real vital life into her creation. She attempted to do just this and to do more - to create a living character and also a philosophical persona. Can we demonstrate that these two facets not only exist in Mrs Ramsay, but also coexist harmoniously? In dealing with this question we will be dealing with Virginia Woolf's attempts to utilise the mimetic concept of character as a viable element within a poetic fictional world, and whether she is successful. For this purpose, Sections 11 and 12 of "The Window" provide good evidence - Section 11 shows Mrs Ramsay in her rôle as a reflective persona, and Section 12 shows her as a vital character creation; whilst the relationship between the two sections shows the two elements to be inseparable.

In Section 11 of "The Window" Mrs Ramsay sits on the terrace, thinking. Mildred takes James away to bed and Mrs Ramsay settles back in her chair with her knitting, feeling the relief of being alone - "She could be herself, by herself." [17] She experiences a liberation from everyday involvements, a sudden sense of "unlimited resources": beneath the surface of life "There was freedom, there was peace, there was, most welcome of all, a summoning together, a resting on a platform of stability." [18] She concludes that beneath "the fret, the hurry, the stir" there is "this peace, this rest, this eternity" in life; and her conclusion coincides with the last of the three strokes of the lighthouse beam, "the long steady stroke". Inevitably, the beam of light itself adopts the association of that stability and momentary coherence over which Mrs Ramsay is pondering: it signifies

[17] Virginia Woolf, To The Lighthouse, p.72..

[18] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.73.

the momentary sense of eternity beneath the everyday, Mrs Ramsay's view of life, which her thoughts are at that moment presenting to us. Giving in to a momentary sentimentalization of attributing this "peace" to "the Lord", she turns again to the hard light of the lighthouse as the best expression of her self: as an inanimate thing it "expressed one" in a way that the idea of the "hands of the Lord" could not do, for the "hands of the Lord" took no account of the fact "that there is no reason, order, justice : but suffering, death, the poor. . . No happiness lasted; she knew that." [19] For Mrs Ramsay the lighthouse beam is only one of the little odds and ends by which "one helped oneself out of solitude".[20] (At this point Mr Ramsay passing by the terrace, is "saddened" by his wife's look of sternness into a sudden feeling of her "remoteness", her vulnerability, and his own guilt at being incapable of helping her, at being a positive hindrance to her - he looks into the dark intricacies of the hedge as into the unfathomable intricacies of life itself). To expunge the insincerity of her religious impulse, Mrs Ramsay considers the harsh side of her view of life, the "treachery", the "solitude". As an expression of her view, the lighthouse beam has this inherent irony about it since, like the essential harmony she had perceived a moment ago, it shines for an instant and then is lost in the darkness. Thus, even at its brightest, it has something "pitiless", "remorseless" about it. [21] Yet, as she watches, its beauty returns, the moment comes again: "the ecstasy burst in her mind and she felt, It is enough! It is enough!" [22]

[19] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.74.

[20] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.75.

[21] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.75.

[22] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.76.

What, than, has happened in this section? Mrs Ramsay has been thinking. Erich Auerbach describes Virginia Woolf's presentation of Mrs Ramsay's thoughts as "a natural and even, if you will, a naturalistic rendering of [the] processes [of consciousness] in their peculiar freedom". [23] But this is misleading unless one qualifies it by saying that Virginia Woolf merely creates the illusion of thought in Mrs Ramsay. We have the illusion of a free-flowing consciousness, but not an attempt to represent an individual consciousness. On consideration it will be obvious that Mrs Ramsay's "thoughts" are of such a level as to be inconsistent with the kind of person she is. Would the normal Victorian matriarch have conducted such a philosophical inner soliloquy as we find in this passage? One would have thought not. Mrs Ramsay's thoughts take us to a level at which questions about the nature and meaning of life arise as naturally as questions about gardeners do when she is with her husband. We are carried along by the impression, but only the impression of her consciousness. Mrs Ramsay begins in this section to explore her own life and life in general in a way she could never do if she were a literal realistic character and this were merely a record of her thoughts. She tries in fact to make sense of life, to find a meaning in it and to articulate her own partial belief in a "meaning". These are feelings which, we allow, Mrs Ramsay might easily have as a realistic character. What is remarkable, and an indication of her non-realism, is her ability to articulate them and philosophize about them in this manner. The explanation seems to be that Virginia Woolf is utilizing the illusion of Mrs Ramsay's consciousness as a vehicle by which she herself may objectively

[23] Erich Auerbach, as in n.5 above, p. 538.

explore and reflect upon the questions raised in the section, and do so ostensibly from Mrs Ramsay's point of view. In this way Mrs Ramsay functions as a dramatic persona for Virginia Woolf, an imaginative transformation of Julia Stephen. Does she function as a living character?

Mrs Ramsay's reflection in Section 11 has immediate dramatic repercussions in Section 12 in terms of action and character. In other words her role as a reflective persona is not detached from her dramatic reality as a character. Mr Ramsay has seen his wife on the terrace "thinking", and is upset by the "sternness" and "remoteness" which are brought to her face by her thoughts. The consequence is that we see an instance of the remarkably delicate portrait of human relationships that Virginia Woolf manages to capture in this novel: she creates a really subtle portrayal of the relationship between Mrs Ramsay and her husband, a sense of their intimacy as purely a matter of instinctive feeling and sympathy rather than any conscious or spoken understanding. Ramsay, in his self-centred way takes Mrs Ramsay's sternness to be the result of his own irritability over the Lighthouse trip: he feels the impulse to speak to her, to allay their "quarrel" (which itself had been a matter of inexplicit feelings rather than words). But with a slight touch of self-martyrdom, he decides "he would let her be. . . though it hurt him that she should look so distant, and he could not reach her, he could do nothing to help her." [24] Mr Ramsay is in need of attention: he wishes to allay his sense of guilt over the quarrel by making a gesture of protection towards his wife, as she looks troubled on the terrace; but he is too proud to plead for attention, and determines to pass by. At that moment

[24] Virginia Woolf, To The Lighthouse, p.76

instinctively understanding his quandary, Mrs Ramsay calls to him and goes to him, "For he wished, she knew, to protect her." From this point onwards, Virginia Woolf captures Mrs Ramsay's unconscious understanding of her husband and the evasive undercurrents of their relationship with all the subtlety necessary to make this a rich and very warm piece of character portrayal. Virginia Woolf shows us the difference between what people say and what, beneath the surface, they mean: the almost comic chit-chat between Mr and Mrs Ramsay is seemingly so superficial; yet it is only the veneer for deep levels of unspoken intimacy which pass between them with never a word of direct emotion (as with the rest of this novel, a very English situation). They talk about the garden, the gardener, the children - everything other than what they really feel; until finally Mr Ramsay ventures forth in a bungling attempt at something like direct communication: "He did not like to see her look so sad, he said." [25] The result is an embarrassed moment of confusion: Mr Ramsay cannot bring himself to say what he means (to apologise for being "touchy" and making things worse for her [26]), whilst Mrs Ramsay, expecting just such an apology, cannot bring herself to tell Mr Ramsay exactly what she was feeling on the terrace - "No, they could not share that; they could not say that." [27] Instead of smoothing the quarrel over into harmony, their walk has separated them even more: Mrs Ramsay reprimands herself, "Had she known that he was looking at her . . . she would not have let herself sit there, thinking." ; and, typically, Mr Ramsay now desires escape, to be off on his own "telling himself the story how Hume was stuck in a bog". Like a child, Mr Ramsay reasserts his ruffled ego, tells his wife not to worry about the

[25] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.79.

[26] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.75.

[27] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.79.

children, postulates that he himself will be off for a day's walk - an idea that leads him off on a most melancholy train of self-indulgence, until his sigh brings about a precipitation of their mutual desire for some intimacy that has been hovering around their words and gestures all the way through their walk:

> she said to him, in a matter-of-fact way, that it was a perfectly lovely evening. And what was he groaning about, she asked, half laughing, half complaining, for she guessed what he was thinking - he would have written better books if he had not married.
>
> He was not complaining, he said. She knew that he did not complain. She knew that he had nothing whatever to complain of. And he seized her hand and raised it to his lips and kissed it with an intensity that brought tears to her eyes. . . 28

Beneath the stiff veneer, Virginia Woolf subtly evokes the finely modulating currents of feeling between husband and wife. She is extraordinary as a novelist in her capacity to convey a sense of the intimacy and the abiding isolation within relationships. Mr and Mrs Ramsay never really come together in this scene: a poignant comedy hovers around their separateness, the final irony of which is Mrs Ramsay's decision that Lily and William Bankes should marry too.

What we find in this episode is a living and truthful portrayal of a human relationship, a remarkably subtle piece of characterization which should convince us of Virginia Woolf's ability to sustain the dramatic reality of her character in balance with the persona rôle. The two are integrated in such a way that Mrs Ramsay's "thinking" directly results in the interplay discussed above. So that when we describe Mrs Ramsay as a reflective persona for Virginia Woolf we should not be misled into thinking that Virginia Woolf is using her character as a medium for personal reverie or recording. [29] The fact

[28] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.81.

[29] This is the basis of M.C. Bradbrook's objection to Mrs Ramsay's reflections on the terrace, ("Notes on the style of Mrs Woolf", Scrutiny 1 (1932-3), p.33-8.

that Mrs Ramsay is an actualized living character objectifies her function as a persona, giving it a dramatic impersonality. Mrs Ramsay's monologues are not Virginia Woolf rhapsodizing: they form an individual speculation on life, presented within the bounds of an actual character but articulated in such a way as to free them from the restraints of literal credibility. Mrs Ramsay is a non-realistic persona, a vehicle for philosophical reflection; but she is also an independent dramatic creation.

The point about objectification is one of some importance for this kind of character treatment. The objectivity of the character prevents it from being simply the vehicle for the author's sensibility. Virginia Woolf was well aware of the dangers that lie behind the associational narrative form - "the damned egotistical self; which ruins Joyce and Richardson to my mind". She queried "is one pliant and rich enough to provide a wall for the book from oneself without its becoming, as in Joyce and Richardson, narrowing and restricting?" [30] Whilst writing the early version of Mrs Dalloway she asked "Have I the power of conveying the true reality? Or do I write essays about myself?" [31] By creating objective characters (Mrs Ramsay, Lily Briscoe) and using them in this way as reflective personae, Virginia Woolf achieves a remarkable artistic design: she is able to present objectively the "true reality" through the various attitudes of her personae to the question "what is the meaning of life?" The meaning which Mrs Ramsay discovers in her reflections on the terrace is felt to be inadequate by Lily Briscoe later in the novel: for Mrs Ramsay, the "ecstacy" of the momentary illumination (surrounded as it is by the grim realization of the transience of happiness and the final solitude

[30] Virginia Woolf, A Writer's Diary, p.23.

[31] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.57.

of death) is still "enough! It is enough!" [32] For Lily (faced as she is by the fact of death in the absence of Mrs Ramsay) these "little daily miracles" of Mrs Ramsay's have become the poverty of "matches struck unexpectedly in the dark" [33] Virginia Woolf is not presenting us with a solution. Instead we are shown attitudes: the personae are the means by which Virginia Woolf probes the basic human responses to the deepest realities of life, without necessarily attempting to resolve them. For Mrs Ramsay, these realities are ultimately momentous and "enough"; for Lily Briscoe they are bewildering and painful. At this level the novel is about belief and non-belief, about faith and lack of faith; and Virginia Woolf attains this level through the use of non-realistic personae.

It will be worth considering Lily Briscoe as a further example of a character being used as a reflective persona, since she provides a slightly different case to Mrs Ramsay. Lily acts almost as a chorus for the whole novel, an analogy which is not as arbitrary as it might appear. Virginia Woolf's comments on the rôle of the chorus in Greek drama describe something very close to her own personae, particularly Lily, in their aim at least. She writes that the emphasis upon presenting action (which she sees as restricting drama as it restricts the novel) can be overcome through some means "by which what was general and poetic, comment, not action, could be freed without interrupting the movement of the whole. It is this that the choruses supply". The rôle of the chorus is to "comment, or sum up, or allow the poet to speak himself or supply, by contrast, another side to his conception." [34] The chorus provides a general perspective for

[32] Virginia Woolf, To The Lighthouse, p.76.

[33] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.182.

[34] Virginia Woolf, "On Not Knowing Greek", Collected Essays, Vol.1, p.5-6.

particular action; and, Virginia Woolf feels, there is a constant need for that voice in imaginative literature: "For though Shakespeare ; . . dispensed with the chorus, novelists are always devising some substitute - Thackeray speaking in his own person, Fielding coming out and addressing the world before his curtain rises."[35] In To The Lighthouse, Virginia Woolf devised her own "substitute" in the form of Lily Briscoe: it is her rôle as a reflective persona to generalize the present action of the novel.

In the third part of the novel Virginia Woolf uses Lily to bring the whole narrative into focus and show its relationship to life in general. She does this by conceiving Lily's function as a persona in terms of her activities as a painter. It is entirely acceptable that Lily should spend most of her time pondering about her painting and pondering on the fictional world around her, trying to bring it into a paintable harmony. Thus Virginia Woolf can use Lily's thoughts about her painting as the vehicle for her rôle as chorus: Lily reflects on the world around her and tries to resolve it into the order of her painting, effectively providing Virginia Woolf with a means by which she can compose the action of the novel into a whole. Lily's reflections become a metaphor for the universal struggle to find a meaning, a harmony: as with Miss La Trobe and her pageant, the artist-figure is used as an archetype for the search for a whole vision.

At the centre of Lily's painting is the attempt to paint Mrs Ramsay as she sat on the terrace in the first part of the novel - Mrs Ramsay, who "cared not a fig for her painting" [36] ; who seemed to have a control over life, an ability to resolve the fragments of experience into a permanent memorable whole and to give life meaning as Lily herself is unable to do; who was the active, involved, living

[35] Virginia Woolf, as in n.34, loc. cit.

[36] Virginia Woolf, To The Lighthouse, p.58.

woman Lily knows herself not to be. Lily's attempt to paint Mrs Ramsay quickly assumes the dimensions of her trying to paint the centre, the harmony, the meaning of life itself - the thing that gives it significance. In the first part of the novel Lily was incapable of finishing her painting of Mrs Ramsay. She can only do that when Mrs Ramsay is dead. The suggestions are multiple: life can only be understood after the event; whilst it goes on it is perpetually elusive. Thus Lily tries to paint life/Mrs Ramsay in absentia; and as she paints she also reflects, gathering together her impressions of the past until her thoughts about the painting and her memories of the past seem to combine. We have the illusion that she is painting the past for us, composing it into a whole in her attempt to understand it:

> she began precariously dipping among the blues and umbers, moving her brush hither and thither . . . And as she lost consciousness of outer things, and her name and her personality and her appearance, and whether Mr Carmichael was there or not, her mind kept throwing up from it depths, scenes, and names, and sayings, and memories and ideas, like a fountain spurting over that glaring, hideously difficult white space [i.e. the canvas] , while she modelled it with greens and blues. 37

Part by part Lily goes back over the characters and events of the first section of the novel, telling us what has happened to them during the ten year lapse, painting their completed shape for us of which we saw only one small corner in "The Window". We begin to have the experiences of that one day placed within the wider perspective of life and time, and to feel the tangible effect of that wider perspective. Lily remembers the Rayleys: "The Rayleys, thought Lily, squeezing her tube of green paint. She collected her impressions of the Rayleys." 38 Suggestively, Virginia Woolf shows

37 Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.181.

38 Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.196.

Lily squeezing out her memories like paint, before considering where to place them in the final picture. Their place is in the dark side of the painting: the outcome of the love affair in part one of the novel was a marriage which "turned out rather badly". The illusion of love, fostered by Mrs Ramsay in her attempt to marry Paul and Minta off, had been quickly dispelled by the reality: now, "They were 'in love' no longer. . . They were excellent friends". [39] Lily now feels a little superior to Mrs Ramsay, knowing the outcome of her attempt to create harmony, the inevitable fragmentation of her attempt to give shape to chaos. Lily feels for a moment that Mrs Ramsay was wrong with her prescription for life, "'Marry, marry!'" [40] Lily herself "had only escaped by the skin of her teeth" [41] : she had retained herself intact, "she stood here painting, had never married, not even William Bankes." [42] She feels a certain exultation at having escaped the pattern, at having stood up to Mrs Ramsay and ignored her command to marry William Bankes. She has retained him as a disinterested friend: "One could talk of painting then seriously to a man. Indeed, his friendship had been one of the pleasures of her life. She loved William Bankes." [43] Suddenly Lily comes to the surface: she looks around for some help defining Mrs Ramsay's expression; she feels the impulse to go to Mr Carmichael and ask him "About life, about death; about Mrs Ramsay" [44] ; she looks at the empty drawing-room steps, and her painting of the empty steps, and it becomes "like curves and arabesques flourishing round a centre of complete emptiness". [45] What Lily has suddenly realized is the tragedy of her own life resultant

[39] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.197-8.

[40] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.198.

[41] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.200.

[42] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.199.

[43] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.200.

[44] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.202.

[45] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.203.

from the passing of those ten years. She can see the failure of Mrs Ramsay's vision (the Rayleys), and feel glad to have escaped; but what she has in fact escaped is life itself: Mrs Ramsay wanted her to marry William Bankes; she did not marry William Bankes - yet "She loved William Bankes". Lily suddenly realizes that in ignoring Mrs Ramsay she has missed out on life - life has passed her by in those ten years. Bewildered by her realization, Lily is overtaken by pain:

> Could it be, even for elderly people, that this was life? - startling, unexpected, unknown? For one moment she felt that if they both got up, here, now on the lawn, and demanded an explanation, why was it so short, why was it so inexplicable, said it with violence, as two fully equipped human beings from whom nothing should be hid might speak, then, beauty would roll itself up; the space would fill; those empty flourishes would form into shape; if they shouted loud enough Mrs Ramsay would return. 'Mrs Ramsay!' she said aloud, 'Mrs Ramsay!' The tears ran down her face. 46

The fact that Lily finds Mrs Ramsay missing (and the implications of this realization) is extraordinarily powerful in the context of what has gone before. She shouts out for Mrs Ramsay so that "those empty flourishes would form into shape" - i.e. the painting would be complete, life would be harmonious - and so that "Mrs Ramsay would return" - i.e. the <u>facts</u> of time, change and death embodied in Mrs Ramsay's absence would be proven untrue. Lily's monologue enacts at this point the sudden terrifying certitude that time passes, death is unavoidable, life is empty of meaning: she cries out demanding reassurance which does not come - Mrs Ramsay does not return. Lily's despair forms the climax of the novel so far, the emotional nadir necessary as a prelude to the stark and ambivalent affirmation with which the novel ends. The whole of this crucial scene is carried off

46 Virginia Woolf, <u>ibid</u>., p.204-5.

with supreme sympathy and firmness by Virginia Woolf, never waning into sentimentality as it easily might. We are moved by Lily's own emotional strife; and at the same time her rôle as a reflective persona has led us through the fictional world to a deeper, more impersonal level where the realities of life and human inability to explain them face us uncompromisingly. Lily's attempt to paint her picture is overturned by the impingement of life itself.

Thus, Lily's rôle as a reflective persona is somewhat different to Mrs Ramsay's - not simply a vehicle for reflecting about life, but a medium for bringing the fictional world of the novel into focus. In both characters we find an objective and impersonal voice through which Virginia Woolf can probe the nature of human existence. The use of character as persona, and the monologue form accompanying it, so appealed to Virginia Woolf that in her next major novel, The Waves, she tried to organize a fictional representation in terms of a series of monologues by a set of six personae. The resulting work has caused a good deal of controversy, and since it has a direct bearing upon her non-realistic use of character we need to consider it in some detail.

The Waves is Virginia Woolf's most poetic fictional world. It is the most extreme manifestation of her desire to eliminate "this appalling narrative business of the realist" [47], and forge a form of fictional representation suited to her imaginative needs. She apparently does away with plot, narrator, the fabric of social detail and setting, the necessity for a credible and coherent sequence of events acted out by plausible and defined characters - indeed, all those many aspects of realistic fiction which she felt restricted

[47] Virginia Woolf, A Writer's Diary, p.139.

its range and her imagination. Instead, this novel is designed as "a series of dramatic soliloquies" [48] spoken separately by six characters at progressive stages of their lives. In effect Virginia Woolf has tried to pare down the fictional world to allow her to dive straight in to the serious business of presenting life through the medium of character personae in the manner just described in To The Lighthouse - rather than dramatize life in the action and character relationships, and examine it incidentally as the narrative progresses, in the manner of the traditional realistic novel. The immediate result is a great freedom, but also a fundamental weakness (which one suspects Virginia Woolf herself realized): The Waves has no continuous line of action to sustain the reader's interest; which coupled with the intense concentration makes it difficult to read as a narrative. It is not suprising to find Virginia Woolf remarking incredulously in her diary "it sells - how unexpected, how odd that people can read that difficult grinding stuff!" [49] Also it is not irrelevant to point out that she did not really eliminate "all detail, all fact" [50] as she had hoped. Instead she could only create the illusion that the story or plot was understood beforehand by both author and reader. To do this, the vestigial remains of story,

[48] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.159.

[49] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.175.

[50] Virginia Woolf, letter to John Lehmann (John Lehmann, The Whispering Gallery, Longmans (1956), p.171). The rest of this letter, as far as it refers to The Waves, suggests further Virginia Woolf's realization of the shortcomings of her design: "I agree that it's very difficult - bristling with terrors, though I've never worked so hard as I did here to smooth them out. But it was, I think, a difficult attempt - I wanted to eliminate all detail; all fact; and analysis; and myself; and yet not to be frigid and rhetorical; and not monotonous (which I am) and to keep the swiftness of prose and yet strike one or two sparks; and not to write poetical, but pure bred prose, and keep the elements of character; and yet that there should be many characters and only one; and also an infinity, a background behind - well, I admit I was biting off too much."

background and setting have to be narrated or suggested through the characters themselves. This tends to dilute some of the monologues with material which is essential to a clear understanding of the situation, but which is, by Virginia Woolf's own criteria, irrelevant. For example, Louis has the task usually assigned to the narrator of filling in the partial background to each character, and the effect is somewhat incongruous:

> "I will not conjugate the verb," said Louis, "until Bernard has said it. My father is a banker in Brisbane and I 'speak with an Australian accent. I will wait and copy Bernard. He is English. They are all English. Susan's father is a clergyman. Rhoda has no father. Bernard and Neville are the sons of gentlemen. Jinny lives with her grandmother in London. [51]

What begins as an insight into Louis' sense of inferiority sinks simply into the explanation of circumstances necessary for the reader's understanding of the situation. The burden of explanation, belonging to the narrator, has been shifted to the monologues; and this re-creates rather than solves the problems Virginia Woolf sought to avoid.

There is, however, a more drastic aspect of Virginia Woolf's design of dividing the novel into a series of monologues. By separating the characters in this way she effectively eliminates all possibility of inter-relation between them. Hence it could be argued that Virginia Woolf has fragmented the basic experience of the novel (as a form which depends upon such inter-relations) in favour of a series of isolated poetic rhapsodies,(something which Virginia Woolf avoids in To The Lighthouse by virtue of the dramatic objectivity of the characters and their relationships). Essentially this is M.C. Bradbrook 's objection to the novel: "There are no solid characters, no clearly defined situations, and no structure of feelings, merely sensations in the void. Without any connections of a vital sort between

[51] Virginia Woolf, The Waves, Penguin (1966), p.16.

them, with no plot in the Aristotelian sense, the sensations are not interesting." [52] More recently, R.A. Brower has voiced similar objections: "the attempt to write 'dramatic soliloquies' without drama ... is for most readers not successful. It is very nearly impossible to hear any distinct voice in any speaker in The Waves, other than the voice of the lyric novelist." [53] The static isolation of the monologues; the absence of dramatic interplay between characters; the seeming absence of distinct individuals in the seperate voices; worst of all perhaps, the accusation that the monologues are designed simply to afford Virginia Woolf the opportunity of lyrical rhapsody - these are all fundamental reservations about the basic design of The Waves which question the validity of calling it a "novel" at all. Whilst not wishing to exaggerate Virginia Woolf's capacities as a novelist, it should be pointed out that the basis of these criticisms is in part unfair. They condemn The Waves by its failure to retain certain standards and methods of representation deduced essentially from the realistic tradition. For example, Miss Bradbrook raises the point about the absence of solid characterization. We suggested earlier that Virginia Woolf was never really interested in character as such. Certainly the characters in The Waves are extremely limited, and indeed seem to make no attempt to be otherwise: there is no evidence of any real effort to create a sense of full character in the figures. In each case the range of personal attributes is very limited; and one tends to view the characters rather as one views the characters of Ben Jonson's plays - not as full personalities, but as types each defined by certain limited characteristics. Virginia Woolf herself said that she wanted to "keep the elements of character" [54]

[52] M.C. Bradbrook, as in n.29 above.

[53] R.A. Brower, "The Novel as Poem", in M.W. Bloomfield (ed.), The Interpretation of Narrative, Harvard : Massachusetts (1970), p.229-48.

[54] Virginia Woolf, as in n.50 above.

but she decided in the early draft of the novel that "I can give in a very few strokes the essentials of a person's character. It should be done boldly, almost as caricature." [55] This is virtually what we have in The Waves, so that it seems Virginia Woolf did not aim at characterization at all in Miss Bradbrook's sense of the word. The differentiations of character are achieved basically through the allocation of images which fix and symbolize the personality of each speaker, and which follow them through their part in the novel giving them a certain sense of limited individual identity. This is the way in which we recognize each figure since there is no attempt to characterize the monologues with distinctive individual speaking voices. The main images associated with Louis, for example, are those of the chained beast stamping its foot (with the associated image of forging rings and chains of steel, rings of poetry), and of a plant with roots going down through the earth. These serve to represent Louis' personality. Here is the plant image as it appears in the novel for the first time:

> I hold a stalk in my hand. I am the stalk. My roots go down to the depths of the world, through earth dry with brick, and damp earth, through veins of lead and silver. I am all fibre. All tremors shake me, and the weight of the earth is pressed to my ribs. Up here my eyes are green leaves, unseeing. I am a boy in grey flannels with a belt fastened by a brass snake up here. Down there my eyes are the lidless eyes of a stone figure in a desert by the Nile. I see women passing with red pitchers to the river; I see camels swaying and men in turbans. I hear tramplings, tremblings, stirrings round me. [56]

We see in this extract an insight into Louis' personality presented in terms of the basic image of the plant and roots and its various suggestions. Louis is an immigrant from Australia, and his consciousness of this great social difference and (in his eyes)

[55] Virginia Woolf, A Writer's Diary, p.157.

[56] Virginia Woolf, The Waves, p.9.

inferiority to the other characters makes him very insecure. Thus his basic desire for stability and integration, expressed in the image of roots: he wishes to grow stable roots in this new situation, to become established and accepted. The image also expresses an awareness of a duality in his nature (perhaps encouraged by his imposition of a new English self upon his old Australian self): as others see him, on the surface he is merely "a boy in grey flannels" - his outward self is comparable to the stalk above the ground. It is this self which, together with his desire to establish a secure social position to overcome his inferiority, leads him to become a successful executive. But just as a plant has hidden roots beneath the ground, so Louis is conscious of an inner self unseen by the world - a psychological split induced by his fear of his new situation. In his inner self Louis is a figure of romance, a poet, imagining the Nile and sensitive to the least emotional "tramplings, tremblings, stirrings". He is also multivarious, chameleon-natured, capable of encompassing the silver and the lead, the dry and the damp in life, changing according to the circumstances around him seemingly without any central stable ego - a state comparable with the "incandescent" androgynous mind of the poet par excellence as Virginia Woolf describes him. [57] It is this side of Louis that leads him to act a double life: once his outer self is safely established in its office, he can rent his attic, love Rhoda, and "forge rings" of poetry out of the spectrum of his experiences in an attempt to chain the tramplings of the beast, life.

Thus the whole of Louis' character is anticipated and concentrated in the form of this image. The later monologues are, in part,

[57] See in particular Virginia Woolf's descriptions of Shakespeare, A Room of One's Own, Penguin (1967), p.58, and A Writer's Diary, p.157.

expositions and developments of the character done in terms of modulations of the images prepared in the first part of the novel. The image-group associated with Louis recurs throughout his other monologues, in each case with some variation which brings out a sense of the development of his character whilst emphasizing the unchanging foundations of it:

> I do not wish to come to the top and say my lesson. My roots are threaded, like fibres in a flower-pot, round and round about the world. I do not wish to come to the top and live in the light of this great clock, yellow-faced, which ticks and ticks.
>
> Dr Crane reading in assembly : Now all is laid by his authority, his crucifix, and I feel come over me the sense of the earth under me, and my roots going down and down till they wrap themselves round some hardness at the centre.
>
> My roots go down through veins of lead and silver, through damp, marshy places that exhale odours, to a knot made of oak roots bound together in the centre.
>
> 'What has my destiny been, the sharp-pointed pyramid that has pressed on my ribs all these years? That I remember the Nile and the women carrying pitchers on their heads; that I feel myself woven in and out of the long summers and winters that have made the corn flow and have frozen the streams. I am not a single and passing being. My life is not a moment's bright spark like that on the surface of a diamond. I go beneath ground tortuously, as if a warder carried a lamp from cell to cell. My destiny has been that I remember and must weave together, must plait into one cable the many threads, the thick, the thin, the broken, the enduring of our long history, of our tumultuous and varied day. There is always more to be understood; a discord to be listened for; a falsity to be reprimanded. Broken and soot-stained are these roofs with their chimney cowls, their loose slates, their slinking cats and attic windows. I pick my way over broken glass, among blistered tiles, and see only vile and famished faces. [58]

Each of these variations transposes the original image, elaborating what was implied earlier, developing our insight into Louis' character whilst retaining in view its basic element. The first extract expresses

[58] Virginia Woolf, The Waves, p.16, p.28-9, p.81, p.173.

Louis' desire to escape from the facts of existence (lessons and time) and hide in his inner self. His outer life constricts his "real" inner life like the flower-pot constricting the roots of a plant: the world of lessons and of the great clock does not give him the necessary freedom for free growth. Implicit in this is a powerful statement about the refusal or inability to accept the objective fact of time and its compulsion over the individual - the great clock which "ticks and ticks" - and the desire to avoid the inevitability of time passing (expressed here as a child's escapism, this fear shows the primal desire to avoid death).

The second extract indicates a change in Louis, a realization which shapes the rest of his life: he discovers that he can resolve his feelings of insecurity by establishing himself within the conventional world symbolized by Dr Crane. Louis finds "a hardness at the centre" - authority, order, the status quo, with which he surrounds himself in later life as a shield for his inner life (and, implicitly, as a shield from such facts as the "great clock . . . which ticks and ticks"). The third and fourth extracts extend that sense of encompassing all aspects of experience in an attempt to reconcile through poetry the beauty of life with the sordidness of the streets outside his attic window. The image of winding roots is transformed into an image of plaiting together the frayed and seemingly incompatible elements of modern life into a "cable", a ring of poetry. Particularly powerful is the variation which turns the initial image into one of Louis condemned to wander the winding passages of a dungeon, illuminating each cell momentarily with his lamp, drawing together the elements of modern life into what T.S.

Eliot called "the boredom, and the horror, and the glory".[59] This final extract in particular is a very fine example of the way Virginia Woolf can transform these image groups defining each character into a flexible means for conveying their intricacies as figures. But it should be immediately apparent that the pitch of such a piece goes so much further than simple expression of character; that we really ought to look further for Virginia Woolf's true aim in her rather drastic reduction of character portrayal. Even though there are definite shortcomings in the way Virginia Woolf utilizes character in The Waves, there is nothing to be gained from attacking this novel for its failure to adhere to methods of representation derived from a tradition which Virginia Woolf is quite clearly trying to free herself from. We should rather ask whether by her creation of this rather idiosyncratic fictional world, Virginia Woolf achieves something comparable to that sense of life that we associate with the novel form.

Let us have a look at the design of the novel in detail. The first point to be raised is that from Virginia Woolf's own point of view the arrangement of the novel into separate monologues has an immediate dramatic function. It dramatizes one of her major themes, the separation, the isolation, the inability to finally communicate which besets human relationships. We share this sense primarily

[59] T.S. Eliot, The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism, Faber (1964), p.106. The analogy between Louis and T.S. Eliot is of interest because in many ways Louis is very similar to Eliot. Eliot himself was a colonial immigrant, with the same kind of personal insecurity; and he led the same kind of dual life as Louis, working in a bank and then in a publishing firm whilst writing his poetry. He was very much concerned, as is Louis, with reconciling "the boredom, and the horror" with a sense of "the glory", by means of poetry. The scenes from Louis' attic window are very similar to those in "Prufrock" and "Preludes". Finally, Virginia Woolf herself describes Eliot and Louis in the same terms, noticeably by the unusual word "marmoreal", used of Louis in The Waves, p.188, and of Eliot in an extract from her diary quoted in Leonard Woolf, Downhill All the Way, Hogarth (1967), p.172. It is not too remote to suppose that, in view of Virginia Woolf's long friendship with Eliot, she at least partially based the figure of Louis upon Eliot as she saw him.

by virtue of the very lack of dramatic interplay in the monologue form, which "insists upon the relative isolation of the individual persons within the group", as A.D. Moody points out.[60] Furthermore, on the three major occassions that Virginia Woolf does bring the characters together into some sort of dialogue, the monologue form still remains in essence, emphasizing the seperateness again. At the same time, the very act of the six voices coming together into an almost musical grouping and then breaking apart dramatizes that persistent theme of momentary wholeness and communion which is shattered and dispersed. So that the very absence of traditional inter-relationships in this novel is one means by which Virginia Woolf can represent her view of life.

The second and most important point to notice about this novel is that Virginia Woolf's central idea is to use all six speakers as reflective personae in the manner of Mrs Ramsay or Lily Briscoe, and that the monologue form is designed to this end. The characters reflect upon their own lives, upon the lives of the other characters, and inevitably upon life in general. Each is shown in the act of experiencing life and of attempting to find some coherence behind what they undergo. The constant struggle to find order amid chaos, to face the realities of life, is central to the monologues: it is the drama of continual "effort"[61], the sense of the characters struggling with existence, that forms the impetus behind them. To demonstrate the effect it is worthwhile remaining with the figure of Louis, since we have already established the basis of his portrayal. The speech in the sixth section of the novel serves as an example. I refer the reader to the actual passage, as it is too long to quote.[62]

[60] A.D. Moody, Virginia Woolf, Oliver and Boyd (1963), p.51-2.

[61] Virginia Woolf, A Writer's Diary, p.162.

[62] Virginia Woolf, The Waves, p.142-6.

In this sixth section Louis is firmly established in the world of authority. He has created for himself an ordered and compact outer existence, summed up by the signature which he writes on the documents before him. Hidden beneath it are the layers of his past and his illusions about himself, "all the furled and close-packed leaves of my many-folded life are now summed in my name".[63] But this authoritative stability, behind which Louis now shelters, is not perfected. There is a disturbing sense that the ordered round of his outer life does not encompass everything, that his routine is a bulwark against chaos only as long as he believes in it as such and accepts its delusions: "I must drop heavy as a hatchet and cut the oak with my sheer weight, for if I deviate, glancing this way, or that way, I shall fall like snow and be wasted."[64] Louis is still haunted by a sense of inadequacy, a fear of his ordered shelter failing him, of seeing through it to the realities from which it protects him (the great clock). It is this conflict that creates the dialectic of the monologue. His love of the symbols of order which surround him (the telephone, the typewriter, the engagement book) is part of his battle against elements which might disrupt his life: he submerges himself from reality in this seemingly orderly world which he has created. Alongside this order, there is the desire to reconcile the fragments of experience into some greater order: "When I have healed these fractures and comprehended these monstrosities so that they need neither excuse nor apology . . . I shall assemble a few words and forge round us a hammered ring of beaten steel."[65] As so often in this novel , the attempt to transform life into poetry is used by Virginia Woolf as

[63] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.143.

[64] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.143.

[65] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.144.

a metaphor: it expresses Louis' desire to consolidate life and experience into a solid harmony or meaning. But Louis relinquishes this (as we all do) for the business of the moment, his important and secure commercial ventures, which it would be irresponsible to neglect in favour of "what Plato said". [66] The tension between these two - his desire to find the meaning of life and the immediate demands of the outer world - remains throughout this monologue. Louis is half conscious that he is merely playing a game in his outer life, that he is avoiding the central issues. He convinces himself that "This is life; Mr Prentice at Four; Mr Eyres at four-thirty." [67] in order that he should not be overcome by the pointlessness, the evasion of the certain realities. Thus he relegates his search for "poetry", and his love for Rhoda, to his attic room: they are safely sequestered where they will not disturb the equinimity of his outer existence. Louis realizes the necessity for this division, for if he were faced with Prufrock's "overwhelming question" [68] then he too would be entirely incapable:

> if I do not nail these impressions to the board
> and out of the many men in me make one; exist
> here and now and not in streaks and patches,
> like scattered snow wreaths on far mountains;
> and ask Miss Johnson as I pass through the
> office about the movies and take my my cup of
> tea and accept also my favourite biscuit, then
> I shall fall like snow and be wasted. [69]

Thus the ritual of the office is a symbol both of Louis' desire for an order, a coherence in life and his evasion of the task of finding the true order. The awareness of this contradiction and the struggle to keep this awareness from overthrowing him completely creates an

[66] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.144.

[67] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.144.

[68] T.S. Eliot, "Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", Collected Poems 1909-1962, Faber (1965), p.13.

[69] Virginia Woolf, The Waves, p.145.

inner drama in this monologue which involves us vitally in Louis' struggle.

In this monologue, then, Virginia Woolf starts at one point - Louis in his office - and, utilising the character's own personal struggle, gradually broadens the scope until she is exploring fundamental aspects of life through the persona of Louis. The purpose is the same as in To The Lighthouse, but the way it is done is somewhat different. There is no longer even the illusion of an individual consciousness, as there is in the case of Mrs Ramsay for example. Louis' monologue is most decidedly a reflective meditation; but instead of using the impression of a consciousness as a vehicle for reflection, Virginia Woolf creates a form which has more in common with the kind of poetic meditations to be found in T.S. Eliot's Four Quartets. The comparison is noticeable not only in the philosophical level on which it is conducted, but also in the circular structure of the monologue, beginning and ending with the signature. The result is that by comparison with the effect of the fleeting intricacies of the consciousness simulated in Mrs Ramsay, Louis' monologue seems rather stiff and deliberate. This lack of fluency and flexibility is a major quality of the form as used in The Waves (with the exception of Bernard's final speech which really does flow), and results from Virginia Woolf choosing a design aimed unrelaxedly at the deepest levels of experience. The attempt to use character as persona purely for the sake of this kind of semi-philosophical reflection seems rather doggedly profound when placed against the lighter intricacies of Mrs Ramsay and Lily Briscoe and their human complexity as character-personae. This, if anything, is the great drawback of Virginia Woolf's attempt to pare away her novel to its bare essentials. It lacks the simple human dimension.

Virginia Woolf overcomes this limitation, however, in the figure of Bernard, in particular in Bernard's final speech in the last section of the novel. Here, Bernard is used as a persona with all the range and flexibility one could desire. He is the most important of the six personae. He functions most clearly and most successfully as a vehicle for Virginia Woolf's philosophical reflection through the imaginative world created in the fiction. Bernard's ultimate function is analogous to that of Lily Briscoe: he is an artist-figure, a storyteller; and thus becomes the medium through which Virginia Woolf can harmonize the novel into a whole. It is the extent and scope of Bernard as a conception that distinguishes him from Lily, and we can best demonstrate this by examining his final monologue.[70]

Bernard delivers his long monologue in a café to "you", a casual listener whom he has picked up in the cafe and whom we may identify with ourselves as readers. What he does in his monologue is what any casual acquaintance might do - to tell us the story of his life, like Conrad's Marlowe, perhaps. But Virginia Woolf takes this situation only as a springboard for a remarkable imaginative experience. What Bernard in fact does is to re-tell the "story" of The Waves, and of the lives of the six characters, the story that we have already followed in the preceeding eight sections of the novel. The effect is two-fold.

In the first place, this last section gives us the direct sense of experiencing time. Bernard says that "when I come to shape here at this table between my hands the story of my life and set it before

[70] Virginia Woolf, The Waves, p.204-56.

you as a complete thing, I have to recall things gone far, gone deep, sunk into this life or that and become part of it". [71] He has to recall the past, his past, made up of all sorts of fragments belonging to him and to others. But in a sense it is also our past: like Bernard we too have "lived" through this "story" already; and thus when Bernard begins to remember scenes and events from earlier in the novel, we experience with him a definite sense of time past, of loss, of change. All these emotions are swept along in the elegaic flow of this superb stretch of prose. This creation is not simply of a sense of time, but an illusion of the actual experience of time; and it is achieved in two main ways. Firstly, there is the actual recurrence of particular scenes, events or images from earlier in the book; and, as with our own memories, these come back now full of indefinable meaning, saturated with the experiences and emotions for which they have become symbols.- as Bernard says, "All these things happen in one second and last forever." [72] In this way Virginia Woolf is working in a manner comparable with the symbolist poets and the imagists, where the visual image is taken as a symbol for a whole experience - one thinks, for example, of the last verse of T.S. Eliot's "La Figlia Che Piange":"She turned away, but with the autumn weather/Compelled my imagination many days,/Many days and many hours:/Her hair over her arms and her arms full of flowers." [73] The moment and the momentary impression is taken as something ultra-meaningful and eternal, and as such it abides in the imagination like a memory but more than a memory. The

[71] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.249.

[72] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.205.

[73] T.S. Eliot, as in n.68 above, p.36.

importance of this method for Virginia Woolf should be clear if we realize that it is the perfect way in which to capture that momentary sense of the eternal that lies at the heart of her view of life. Not only is it the perfect way to capture this sense: it is the perfect way of actually creating this sense, of leading the reader to actually experience the feeling that this image or scene is saturated with meaningfulness. Virginia Woolf plants sensations and experiences in the images and scenes of the first part of the book, and like seeds they blossom in the imagination of the reader as he reads through, so that by the end of the novel, to quote Bernard, "these all float to the top of the waters that now lie deep on every scene." [74]

The second way in which Virginia Woolf creates the actual experience of time is through the change of viewpoint inherent now in Bernard as a character. He looks back at the things of his life with a very different view to that with which he (and we) first saw them. For example, the child Bernard in the first section of the novel could see "a ring. . . hanging above me. It quivers and hangs in a loop of light." [75], and we feel the clean, clear perceptions of the child's fresh mind looking at things for the first time. Whereas the elderly Bernard in the last section of the novel looks back at that first perception with all the flat prosaic habitualness of one who has been in the world long enough for things to go stale: "I saw something brighten - no doubt the brass handle of a cupboard." [76] The change of viewpoint, of which Bernard himself is totally and semi-tragically conscious, evokes a sense of Wordsworthian loss and

[74] Virginia Woolf, The Waves, p.180. A detailed analysis of this recall effect in practice may be found below, Appendix ii p. 298-309

[75] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.6.

[76] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.205.

change.

But this last section of The Waves is much more than simply a pale imitation of Proust's A la Recherche du Temps Perdu. The effect of Bernard's monologue extends much further than the creation of the experience of time. The whole of this last section shows Bernard trying to make sense of his life and of life in general; trying, moreover, to communicate the essence, the "truth" to "you". It is here that we feel Virginia Woolf's true achievement in creating the persona of Bernard. There is a sense in which Bernard in this final section tries to tell us about life through the medium of a story, this particular story which he has just made up about the six characters Bernard, Louis, Neville, Rhoda, Jinny and Susan. He has just finished the actual story itself, and now he is about to sum it up and show "you" what the truth behind it is - he starts his monologue "Now to sum up" [77], as if coming to the end of something he has just been telling us. What in fact happens is that Bernard takes over Virginia Woolf's rôle as storyteller and fiction-maker: the whole novel as far as we have read becomes Bernard's construction, his fictional image or world for representing "life". He is trying to tell us what life is about, and he does it through the image of the rest of the book. The outcome of this brilliant artistic manœuver by Virginia Woolf is two-fold.

Firstly, the rest of the novel, the self-contained little world it creates, becomes for Bernard (as it has been for Virginia Woolf) an image of life in general, an image which stands (however inadequately) for the whole of experience. It is a "pool" [78] of life, complete in

[77] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.204.

[78] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.210.

itself containing all varieties of experience, from which Bernard can take out persons and objects and events, examine them, show us their meaning, and put them back - like a scientist examining the ecosystem of a pond. It is the "story" which contains within it all the possible "stories", all the possible elements of life and experiences that men face. As Bernard says, "In order to make you understand, to give you my life, I must tell you a story - and there are so many, and so many - stories of childhood, stories of school, love marriage, death and so on; and none of them are true." [79] We have seen each of these stories as we have read through the preceding sections of the novel - the story of childhood in section one, the story of school in section two, and so on. Now, Bernard suggests,

> while we eat, let us turn over these scenes as children turn over the pages of a picture-book and the nurse says, pointing: "That's a cow. That's a boat." Let us turn over the pages, and I will add, for your amusement, a comment in the margin. [80]

Suddenly the whole novel is condensed into a miniature image of life, a child's picture-book; and Bernard's rôle now will be that of the nurse, turning over the pages again, pointing to the scenes and telling us what they are, occasionally stopping to say "'Look. This is the truth.'" [81] Thus Bernard becomes the chorus for the action, the medium for reflecting upon what we have seen and making sense of it. He begins to tell the book over again in condensed form, and the effect of this re-run is immensely powerful: by virtue of the change

[79] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.204.

[80] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.205.

[81] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.247. Virginia Woolf's comments on the novel whilst in progress give some support to this view of Bernard as the storyteller: she began with the design of having one central person calling up characters and telling a story (A Writer's Diary, p.144). This developed into the novel having a central thinker (ibid., p.146), and the ending being conceived as a "gigantic conversation" (ibid., p.153) such as we have in part in the cafe monologue. From the entry for December 22nd, 1930 we can deduce that she originally intended Bernard's final speech to be in parts, summing up the sections seperately, until she hit upon the idea of fusing the whole together "making him absorb all those scenes" (ibid., p.162.

of perspective, the events of the earlier scenes of the book are made symbolic of the basic experiences of life: they are the "stories" which Bernard uses to represent life. He begins with the story of childhood: "'In the beginning, there was the nursery, with windows opening on to a garden, and beyond that the sea." [82] The effect of this return to the garden setting of section one is particularly poignant after our knowledge of what happens to these children from the garden in later life. But more than that, the way in which Bernard begins this reprise, and the choice of this garden story suggests an analogy with the Old Testament genesis myth - creation, the paradise garden from which man fell - but presented in terms of the fictional world of The Waves. The garden of section one becomes an archetype of innocence, a microcosm of all the passions of later life (love and hate in the games of the children), a microcosm of their lives as a whole (hence the continuous analogy with the time of day in the garden in the intervening lyrical interludes at the beginning of each section). This is the remarkable achievement of this monologue: Bernard picks up piece after piece of the novel and makes us feel in each case that it stands for some part of life as a whole. His reflections take us to the same philosophical depth as Lily's reflections upon her painting, but the design achieves a much wider scope and range than Lily's.

But there is a second outcome of Virginia Woolf's artistic manouver which complicates the rather simple picture just outlined and makes this last section of The Waves achieve this greater range. Bernard, as we have suggested, is the archetypal storyteller, teaching us about life through his stories. Virginia Woolf gives him greater depth as

[82] Virginia Woolf, The Waves, p.205.

a reflective persona by making him realize something fundamental about his stories: "none of them are true." [83] All his attempts to present life in a coherent ordered form as a story are falsified by the unpredictability of life itself, its refusal to conform to any pattern, its chaos, its disorder. Whilst trying to make a pattern or a story out of life Bernard is continually faced by the inexplicable, the disruptive, the absurd. Thus, in recalling his first love, he attempts to tell us a story of love, and place love within the compass of his picture-book. He tells us of himself, caught in his adolescence in a changing flux of selves, acting out parts - Hamlet, Shelley, Raskolnikov, Napoleon, Byron - and to give substance to his Byronic self, he fell in love, "somebody quite inappropriate - a girl now married; now buried". [84] He goes on in an attempt to describe this first love:the sense of change, of radiance, of agony, of the girl's indifference, of joy at his love being recognised, of horror at the end of the affair. But what shakes Bernard most now is that this melodramatic story, enacting faithfully all the clichés of "love", was a pure romantic falsification and did not coincide at all with the reality. The reality is "years later to see a middle-aged woman in a restaurant taking off her cloak." [85] The reality is time, which has changed the young girl into a middle-aged woman, changed him, and destroyed his illusions. The story was "untrue".

[83] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.204.

[84] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.214.

[85] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.215.

This basic paradox about Bernard's rôle (he needs to make up stories, but the stories are untrue) is absolutely central to this last section of the novel. It is the paradox of the artist, met with already in Lily and Miss La Trobe, that the artist attempts to give an order to something which in itself has no order, and thus the artist's "order" is really "untrue". As in the other two cases, Virginia Woolf is here using this paradox as a metaphor for the human condition: men are driven to find a meaning in life, but the fact that they find a meaning is both a triumph and a tragedy since the meaning itself is fated to be lost after a momentary perception. We pretend that there is a stable meaning, we impose an illusion on life, we make up a story about it - "In the beginning . . ." Thus, Bernard, after showing his story of love to be untrue, says "Let us again pretend that life is a solid substance, shaped like a globe, which we can turn about in our fingers. Let us pretend that we can make out a plain, and logical story". [86] What Bernard's monologue shows above all is the confrontation between man's desire of, and positive need for meaning in life (what Wallace Stevens calls 'the "Blessed rage for order" [87]), and the chaos of the actual experience he faces. And at the very centre of this confrontation is the necessity for a continual effort to again reach a moment of perception of the truth, the harmony, the "glory"; the necessity for a continual effort to fight off the opposite side of the equation, the "boredom", the "horror". [88] This returning "effort" [89] against the

[86] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.215.

[87] Wallace Stevens, "The Idea of Order at Key West", The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens, New York : Knopf, (1955), p.130.

[88] T.S. Eliot, as in n.59 above, loc. cit.

[89] Virginia Woolf saw "effort" as the dominant theme of The Waves, (A Writer's Diary, p.162.)

"enemy" [90] is the pattern, the "truth" that Bernard shows us in his own life - the continual striving upwards to the top of the wave, the sudden perception, the tumbling down into the trough, and the resumption of the fight up the next wave. This process of struggling against the flux (time and change), struggling to retain a sense of something beyond, is the true "story" that Bernard, like the "old nurse", points to beneath the artificial stories of his picture-book, his life - the irony being, of course, that this "story" is just as untrue as the rest. Bernard shows us how his life developed into the complacent formula "Life is pleasant. Life is good" [91] ; and how this impervious crust of habit was smashed open by death, the death of Percival. This deprived Bernard of his formula, brought him into direct confrontation with reality in its harshest and most uncompromising form. It led him to see through "the universal determination to go on living", "these walls, this protection" [92] that people (including himself) build up as a shell to protect them against the true nature of life - we think of Mr Ramsay. At this point Bernard shows us the nature of life's paradox: after Percival's death he had been defeated; he despaired, and was on the point of giving in to the waves after this shipwreck -

> But if you hold a blunt blade to a grindstone long enough, something spurts - a jagged edge of fire; so held to lack of reason, aimlessness, the usual, all massed together, out spurted in one flame hatred, contempt. I took my mind, my being, the old dejected, almost inanimate object, and lashed it about among these odds and ends, sticks and straws, detestable little bits of wreckage, flotsam and jetsam, floating on the oily surface. I jumped up. I said 'Fight! Fight!" I repeated. It is the effort and the struggle, it is the perpetual warfare, it is the shattering and the piecing together - this is the daily battle, defeat or victory, the absorbing pursuit. [93]

[90] Virginia Woolf, The Waves, p.232 passim.

[91] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.225.

[92] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.228.

[93] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.232.

If this heroic affirmation in the face of life's harshest realities puts us in mind of Mr Ramsay jumping out of his boat "for all the world . . . as if he were saying 'There is no God,'" [94] it is not really surprising, since we are here at the very heart of Virginia Woolf's vision - and at the heart also of the way in which she represents this vision in fiction. By his comments on his life, his story, Bernard, the persona, shows us the very process of life as Virginia Woolf saw it, "the shattering and piecing together". But beyond that he shows the need for a continued struggle, a struggle against remaining shattered by the "grindstone" (like Rhoda) and against remaining whole - either of which falsify the true process. Thus, Bernard has just experienced the fragmentation of his old self, and undergone the moment of perception : "for a moment I had sat on the turf somewhere high above the flow of the sea and the sound of the woods, had seen the house, the garden and the waves breaking. The old nurse who turns the pages of the picture-book had stopped and had said, 'Look. This is the truth.'" [95] He has just reached this stage of revelation, perhaps before he walked into the restaurant, perhaps even whilst trying to shape his life into a whole for "you". But even as he sits summing it all up, philosophising and reflecting as if immune from further change, he catches sight of "you" looking at him, his certainty wavers, he becomes self-conscious, the wave breaks:

> 'Lord, how unutterably disgusting life is! What dirty tricks it plays us, one moment free; the next this. Here we are among the breadcrumbs and the stained napkins again. That knife is already congealing with grease. Disorder, sordidity and corruption surround us. We have been taking into our mouths the bodies of dead birds. It is with these greasy crumbs, slobbered over napkins, and little corpses that we have to build. Always it

[94] Virginia Woolf, To The Lighthouse, p.236.

[95] Virginia Woolf, The Waves, p.247.

> begins again; always there is the enemy; eyes meeting ours; fingers twitching ours; the effort waiting. Call the waiter. Pay the bill. We must pull ourselves up out of our chairs. We must find our coats. We must go. Must, must, must - detestable word. Once more, I who had thought myself immune, who had said, "Now I am rid of all that," find that the wave has tumbled me over, head over heels, scattering my possessions, leaving me to collect, to assemble, to heap together, summon my forces, rise and confront the enemy. 96

Once again this present attempt by Bernard to shape his life into a whole, a story, and to tell it to "you" has been thwarted by the unpredictability of life itself: the present circumstances, (the congealing grease, the stains and crumbs of the table in the cafe) become representative of the boredom, the horror, reasserting themselves. We leave Bernard on this note, in the midst of the process, undergoing once more the struggle and the confrontation.

What we find in this last section of The Waves is a persona of really remarkable scope - the vehicle for the composition of the fictional world itself, and the medium for a complex imaginative experience which probes the essentials of human existence. In one sense, the rest of this novel exists simply for the sake of Bernard's last monologue: it is the closest Virginia Woolf comes to representing her vision at its fullest in a kind of fiction most suited to her needs, a fiction whose success she measured not by how closely it mirrored the details of everyday existence, but by how well she could capture the reality beneath.

96 Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.252.

iii : Summary.

Character is perhaps the most intriguing element to take as an example of how changing views of fictional representation inevitably influence the very nature of the fictional construction, the fictional world and its constituent parts. Character seems superficially to be an indispensable element in a prose fiction; yet in one way this is simply a legacy of the realistic tradition, a convention, a preconception, derived from one particular tradition of representation. Character for most people implies the illusion of an actual person as created in a realistic image of life. What we have seen in this chapter is two novelists struggling against the seeming inviolability of this concept, overcoming the inherent "realistic" nature of it as an element in a fictional world, and transforming it into a viable element in their own kind of fictional representation. The process necessitated character developing a non-realistic dimension - having a symbolic rôle in Lawrence's case, becoming a persona in Virginia Woolf's case. In the same way, the whole process of their breaking through the conventions of realistic representation necessitated their conceiving of a fictional world which would function in terms other than those dictated by realism. What we see in the poetic fiction of Virginia Woolf and D.H. Lawrence is the realisation that there are many different possible forms of imitation or kinds of imitation, other than that which works as a "realistic" image. The result of this realisation is their attempt to escape the dominance of realism as a way of seeing and representing the world, and their attempt to forge a fresh way of seeing and representing the world in prose fiction.

CHAPTER FOUR : CONCLUSION

Ultimately, the interest behind this argument is one of aesthetics and perception - kinds of representation, ways of seeing the world. The ideas are far from new: Ernst Gombrich has explored them and their implications for pictorial art in a most lively and stimulating way in his works on art history and aesthetics.[1] We have been concerned with prose fiction, ways of representing and seeing the world of human experience through the medium of an invented "world". "Reality" is a highly elusive concept. Literary study leads one to the conclusion that there are many different "realities", and that each is given its own particular embodiment by the artist. Thus each fictional world or work of art establishes its own relationship to the world of general human experience: each imitates in its own terms; and hence there are as many different kinds of imitation as there are works of art, and as many different fictional worlds as there are novels. Each creates its own particular terms of reference, its own set of conditions for understanding its "meaning" and the way in which it imitates. We simplify the complexity into general kinds, however, and say "This is basically realistic; this symbolic;

[1] See Ernst Gombrich, Art and Illusion : a study in the psychology of pictorial representation, New York : Phaidon, (1960); The Story of Art, Phaidon (1970).

this documentary; this allegorical", and so on. The general kinds of imitation or representation, in as much as they exist at all, are not static: they are fluid. They may become tired, or seem no longer viable or possible - which is what happened to realism in the first decades of the twentieth century in England. It seemed as if its practitioners had somehow lost the true art of this form of representation; and writers like Virginia Woolf and Lawrence sought out an alternative. The fact that there was an alternative, or more correctly "alternatives", still comes as something of a surprise since the novel has for so long been tied to that one particular kind of representation which demands that it present at least an acceptable picture of life "as it is". What we have examined are Virginia Woolf's and D.H. Lawrence's versions of the alternative, which we have named "poetic fiction" - a fictional world which represents imaginatively instead of, or as well as, "realistically". We have examined some of the points at which they break with the conventions of realism and invent not an authentic "mirror-image" of life, but fictional worlds which work as, for example, poetic fables, metaphoric narrative, symbolic dramas.

Thus we have considered their "poetic fiction" against the tradition of "realistic fiction" from which they turned, but to which they were still inextricably tied in many ways. But realism was not worn out, of course: it simply seemed so at the time. All the possible kinds of representation are equally viable(depending upon the person handling them). What is fascinating about this attempt to forge a new kind of fiction by Virginia Woolf and D.H. Lawrence is that it demonstrates something about the novel and prose fiction in general which we tend to overlook by virtue of the very dominance of realism as a representational tradition in fiction. The world of a novel

need not necessarily be "like life". And if it is like life then in essence it will be doing neither more nor less than if it were not like life. There is no difference between one kind of fictional world and another, other than their means of representation. The realistic fictional world, the poetic fictional world - both are artistic constructions, illusions, invented worlds which present "life", "reality", "truth", each in its own way. This realisation is more startling with regard to realistic fiction than any other, obviously; and one which tends to be forgotten precisely because we fall under the particular artistic illusion of realism - that this is real. Jane Austen's Emma is no more nor no less " real" than Virginia Woolf's The Waves (though whether it is more profound is another question): it creates the illusion that it is " real" since this is its basis as a fictional representation; and herein lies the power, the relevance, the intriguing appeal of realism. But it is an illusion still. For all the delicate sympathies and absorbed human responses it calls forth in us, the world of Emma is, like the world of The Waves, an artistic invention, one which creates an image of actual life yet so ordered and made transparent that we can see down to the bottom of the image in a way that we can never do with the original. In this lies the perennial fascination of all fiction. In holding up the mirror to life, whatever the kind of mirror, we can perceive an ordered and meaningful world of which we can see the total significance. These models satisfy us in a way that life itself often cannot.

Appendices and Bibliography.

Appendix i : D.H. Lawrence and Poetic Prose

a : Naturalism and poeticism

Lawrence's prose at its best is rooted in the authentic language of everyday life - its diction, its tone, its rhythm. He is a master of the kind of prose we associate with realism, a prose style adapted to give an illusion of complete authenticity.[1] The prose of a tale like "Odour of Chrysanthemums" has all the authenticity necessary to create a convincing realistic world, and it also has the latent dramatic suggestiveness necessary to make that world meaningful. The opening paragraphs of that brilliant little tale serve as an example:

> The small locomotive engine, Number 4, came clanking, stumbling down from Selston with seven full wagons. It appeared round the corner with loud threats of speed, but the colt that it startled from among the gorse, which still flickered indistinctly in the raw afternoon, outdistanced it at a canter. A woman, walking up the railway line to Underwood, drew back into the hedge, held her basket aside, and watched the footplate of the engine advancing. The trucks thumped heavily past, one by one, with slow inevitable movement, as she stood insignificantly trapped between the jolting black wagons and the hedge; then they curved away towards the coppice where the withered oak leaves dropped noiselessly, whilst the birds pulled at the scarlet hips beside the track, made off into the dusk that had already crept into the spinney. In the open, the smoke from the engine sank and

[1] Ian Watt, (The Rise of the Novel, Chatto and Windus, (1957), p.27) suggests that the adaption of prose style to give an air of complete authenticity was one of the major developments in the rise of realistic fiction.

> cleaved to the rough grass. The fields were dreary and forsaken, and in the marshy strip that led to the whimsey, a reedy pit-pond, the fowls had already abandoned their run among the alders, to roost in the tarred fowl-house. The pit-bank loomed up beyond the pond, flames like red sores licking its ashy sides, in the afternoon's stagnant light. Just beyond rose the tapering chimneys and the clumsy black headstocks of Brinsley Colliery. The two wheels were spinning fast up against the sky, and the winding-engine rapped out its little spasms. The miners were being turned up.
>
> The engine whistled as it came into the wide bay of railway lines beside the colliery, where rows of trucks stood in harbour.
>
> Miners, single, trailing and in groups, passed like shadows diverging home. At the end of the ribbed level of sidings squat a low cottage, three steps down from the cinder track. A large bony vine clutched at the house, as if to claw down the tiled roof. Round the bricked yard grew a few wintry primroses. Beyond, the long garden sloped down to a bush-covered brook course. There were some twiggy apple trees, winter-crack trees, and ragged cabbages. Beside the path hung dishevelled pink chrysanthemums, like pink cloths hung on bushes. A woman came stooping out of the felt-covered fowl-house, half-way down the garden. She closed and padlocked the door, then drew herself erect, having brushed some bits from her white apron. [2]

The last sentence in particular testifies to the almost documentary manner of this passage, the plain, direct accuracy with which Lawrence aims to build up a really convincing scene. Details, like the exact numbering of the engine and of its wagons, work in the manner of semi-documentary description, particularising the scene exactly. The whole effect of the passage is to create the authentic tone of someone describing the scene first-hand.

[2] D.H. Lawrence, "Odour of Chrysanthemums", "The Prussian Officer, Penguin (1968), p.204-5.

But if we look at this naturalism with regard to its artistic effect, we will see the suggestive power that Lawrence achieves even in this seemingly artless prose. These few paragraphs are quite startling in the amount of dramatic suggestiveness implicit beneath the simple exterior. The style does its work through the dramatic potential inherent in this authenticated prose, and hence it is definably realistic - the medium through which Lawrence creates the realistic fictional world of this tale. We can demonstrate this with the aid of Lawrence's first publisher, Ford Ma~dox Ford. Ford was the editor of The English Review when Lawrence submitted this tale for publication in 1911. Ford later wrote in his memoirs that he could recognise from this first paragraph alone of this tale that "this fellow knows his job".[3] Perhaps Ford is expecting a little too much in asking us to accept this; but he does provide a very perceptive insight into the art of this realistic prose. He notices that Lawrence does not state the speed at which the train is travelling: "He does not say 'It was coming slowly' or - what would have been a little better - 'at seven miles an hour'. Because even 'seven miles an hour' means nothing definite for the untrained mind. . . But anyone knows that an engine that makes a great deal of noise and yet cannot overtake a colt at a canter must be a ludicrously ineffectual machine." Lawrence has chosen

[3]Ford Ma~dox Ford's comments on this tale are contained in E. Nehls ed., D.H. Lawrence : A Composite Biography Vol. 1, Madison : University of Wisconsin Press (1957-59), p.108.

the most natural and unassuming of descriptive detail and used it to convey dramatically the speed of the engine. We know that the engine is slow through the concrete and precise picture Lawrence creates through this contrast with the colt. It is done by the dramatic implications of the prose.

The rest of the passage has the same artfully controlled simplicity and naturalism. The engine comes "stumbling" round the corner, with "loud threats of speed". What is noticeable here is Lawrence's remarkable gift for choosing words which are precise and also evocative. Each of these details creates the concrete impression of an old, rather ramshackled machine, capable of only verbose proclamations rather than of any action - rather like a drunken and emptily threatening miner. The surrounding scene is evoked by means of the same kind of concrete detail, full of implicit suggestiveness. Lawrence allows the details he is documenting to speak for themselves: "In the open, the smoke from the engine sank and cleaved to the rough grass." - this very plain description carries in it the implication of the kind of day this is, a raw, windless Autumn day when smoke hangs low over the ground refusing to disperse. Also, such details have a clear dramatic part in setting the scene for the action which follows: Lawrence points out it is late in the day, that the miners are coming up, anticipating Bates' failure to return; the "dreary and forsaken" scene accords dramatically with the prevailing atmosphere of the tale; and the woman hemmed in by the engine, with the careful detail

of her watching the footplate (evoking the size of the machine as it goes by her), is a miniature dramatic parallel to Bates' confrontation with industry. The figurative power which is latent in the language of this passage, is also designed to evoke very precisely the actuality of the scene before us and to let it speak for itself dramatically - and even this is quite naturalistic. Dialect, after all is often full of the resources of figurative language; and the examples in this passage certainly have the colour and abruptness of dialect. Lawrence is anyway so careful to integrate his similes into the authentic flavour of the prose that they are suggestive but in no way disturb the naturalness: "There were some twiggy apple trees, winter-crack trees, and ragged cabbages. Beside the path hung dishevelled pink chrysanthemums, like pink cloths hung on bushes." The aim is great accuracy through concrete visual presentation.

What we find, then, in the prose of these paragraphs is an illusion, an illusion of simplicity and naturalism which creates that sense of authenticity necessary for the larger illusion of the realistic fictional world to work on us. Yet beneath the illusion of the prose is a great deal of careful art, an implicit dramatic suggestiveness which carries the burden of the dramatic suggestiveness of the fictional world as a whole. What we need to realize is that Lawrence's seemingly effortless artistry was not only carefully created; it was also very hard won. It

took him quite a long time to evolve the controlled simplicity of the prose of "Odour of Chrysanthemums". His earlier prose was bedevilled by self-consciousness, immaturity and artificiality, and a major part of these early weaknesses were created by a tendency towards overlush and overpoetic language. The paradox of Lawrence's prose style is that he began with "poetic prose"; and that he had to weed out this poetic element, forge a purely naturalistic and seemingly spontaneous prose before he could go on to re-create a new form of poetic prose for his later imaginative fiction. It will be worthwhile tracing for a moment the stages of this development in some detail.

The early poetic-prose is to be found in The White Peacock, The Trespasser, and some of the early tales like "A Fragment of Stained Glass". This prose is poetic in the bad sense of the word. The indulgent and overcharged descriptive passages of The White Peacock are based upon a rhapsodic figurative prose which has very little strength and no restraint. Even whilst writing it Lawrence himself admitted that the novel's prose was mainly self-indulgence: he described it as being "All about love - and rhapsodies on Spring scattered here and there - heroines galore - no plot - nine tenths adjectives - every colour in the spectrum descanted upon - a poem or two - scraps of Latin and French - altogether a sloppy, spicy mess".[4] Partly we

[4] D.H. Lawrence, The Collected Letters, p.5, (quoted by Keith Sagar, The Art of D.H. Lawrence, Cambridge University Press (1966), p.12).

may attribute this to the fragmentary way in which Lawrence wrote the novel, partly perhaps to the adverse influence of the prose of such writers as Richard Jeffries[5], and partly to simple artistic immaturity. Whatever reasons we give can hardly excuse prose such as the following extract, which accompanies Annable's funeral:

> It was a magnificent morning in early Spring when I watched among the trees to see the procession come down the hillside. The upper air was woven with the music of the larks, and my whole world thrilled with the conception of summer. The young pale wind-flowers had arisen by the wood-gale, and under the hazels, when perchance the hot sun pushed his way, new little suns dawned, and blazed with real light. There was a certain thrill and quickening everywhere, as a woman must feel when she has conceived. A sallow tree in a favoured spot looked like a pale gold cloud of summer dawn; nearer it had poised a golden, fairy busby on every twig, and was voiced with a hum of bees, like any sacred golden bush, uttering its gladness in the thrilling murmur of bees, and in warm scent.[6]

Apart from anything else the passage is almost a detachable prose-poem; but the style is too lyrical, too ornate and too literary to work well even as a prose poem. We cannot deny the remarkable powers of perception, the exuberant use of language, above all the sincerity of this and other similar passages from The White Peacock. What we can question is the lack of control and the artificiality which make this bad art, "poetic" in the bad sense. We notice the ornate similes like "The upper air was woven with music", the literariness of "perchance", "arisen" and "favoured spot", the self-consciousness of "my whole world thrilled" and the

[5]Richard Jeffries (1848-87): Nature writer, distinguished by his intensely lyrical prose descriptions.

[6]D.H. Lawrence, The White Peacock, Penquin (1966), p.182.

simile of the woman conceiving. The effect is of diluted romanticism. Even more damning perhaps is the imagery, which at times is used with a really remarkable vagueness and imprecision. The image of the "new little suns" growing and blazing "with real light", for example, is open to criticism in the weakly metaphorical and very vague use of "real". The last sentence is particularly open to attack. The points one notices in order are: the vagueness of "it had poised" (I just cannot see <u>what</u> "had poised"); the incongruity of the image of blossom as a "busby" (particularly a "fairy busby" - the word just does not suit this lush romantic atmosphere); the vagueness of "was voiced" (same criticism as "had poised"), and the consequent incongruity of "like any sacred bush" (one wonders how "any sacred bush" can be "voiced"); and finally the seemingly unintentional paradox of "the thrilling murmur of bees" (I cannot imagine the murmur of bees as "thrilling"). These criticisms, I hope, are not based simply upon my own incapacities as a reader. The weaknesses of such a passage seem to me to have something in common with those that Robert Graves detects in Yeats' poem "The Lake Isle of Inisfree". The passage fails to work according to the demands of imaginative logic: there is no doubt about it, it is badly written.

The passage is typical of the weaknesses of this early poetic prose of Lawrence's. Even whilst in the midst of writing <u>The White Peacock</u>, however, he had, as we have

noticed, developed a distaste for this kind of writing. In 1910 he looked back on this novel as "a florid prose-poem, or a decorated idyll running to seed in realism".[7] In 1912, whilst writing The Trespasser in a similar vein of prose, he expressed his dissatisfaction to Edward Garnett by saying that the work was "probably still too literary", and significantly exhibiting a recently conceived dislike of Richard Jeffries.[8]

These reservations and self-criticisms were an intimation of a distinct change of direction as far as Lawrence's prose style was concerned. Already previous to this he had been writing stories in a quite different vein, a more naturalistic vein. It is with the publication of Sons and Lovers in 1913 and, more pertinently for our discussion, of The Prussian Officer in 1914 that this other style manifests itself most clearly. The tales in The Prussian Officer are particularly helpful from our point of view because of a very simple fact: most many of them had been initially published, like "Odour of Chrysanthemums", in The English Review; and they were subsequently revised by Lawrence for inclusion in the 1914 collection - so that we have two versions of certain tales, and the comparisons of these are often a good insight into what Lawrence was aiming for in his prose style. One of the clearest things that emerge from such comparisons is the very development we have just outlined - the attempt to eliminate the excesses of the early poetic prose and to substitute a more

[7] D.H. Lawrence, The Complete Letters, p.66-7.

[8] D.H. Lawrence, ibid.; p.94

naturalistic prose. We might illustrate this from a number of tales like "Second Best" or even a tale like "A Fragment of Stained Glass" which is even in the final version quite overcharged. But perhaps the most useful comparison would be the versions of "Odour of Chrysanthemums", since we have already centred on this tale as representative of Lawrence's realistic prose. Between the two versions,[9] the English Review version (hereafter referred to as E.R.) and the Prussian Officer version (hereafter referred to as P.O.) there is clear evidence of Lawrence weeding out any tendency towards overembellishment or artificiality, and eliminating any remnants of his earlier poetic prose.

The description of the house and garden, with which our earlier example ended, was carefully revised by Lawrence between the two versions (although noticeably the rest of those opening paragraphs were untouched from the first version). Here are the two versions for comparison: all differences between the two are underlined.

E.R. Version : There were many twiggy apple trees, winter-crack trees, sinister-looking bushes and ragged cabbages. Beside the path hung torn and scattered groups of dishevelled pink chrysanthemums, like pink cloths hung on bushes.

P.O. Version : There were some twiggy apple trees, winter-crack trees, and ragged cabbages. Beside the path hung dishevelled pink chrysanthemums, like pink cloths hung on bushes.[10]

[9] In the following discussion I am using the first version of "Odour of Chrysanthemums" as it appears in The English Review, Vol. VIII, June 1911, p.415-33 and the final revised version as it appears in The Prussian Officer, Penguin (1968). There is a third earlier version of the tale, dating from 1909 (or earlier) and reprinted by J.T. Boulton in Renaissance and Modern Studies, Vol. XIII (1969), p.5-48; but the points to be made in this discussion are adequately represented by the first and final versions alone.

[10] D.H. Lawrence, The Prussian Officer, p.205

Admittedly, the changes are small, but it is on such a localised level that style makes its impact: the rephrasing of minutiae can have a cumulative effect and change the overall impression of a piece quite considerably. Here, the effect of the revisions is to make the final version altogether more direct and straight-forward. Lawrence eliminates the tendency towards over-elaboration of the scene: the slight melodrama of the "sinister-looking bushes" is not really necessary; and the description of the chrysanthemums is tidied up considerably by the elimination of "torn and scattered groups of" - after all, "dishevelled" does the work just as effectively. The effect, then, is that the revisions reinforce the note of direct authenticity upon which this naturalistic prose is based.

The same result can be seen in the episode concerning Elizabeth and her father which follows the opening paragraphs; and here we have some indication of how Lawrence's clarifications through the revisions are designed to add to the primarily dramatic impact of this prose. Lawrence quite noticeably alters the dramatic effect of the character of Elizabeth's father by changing select phrases; and he does so to make the character of Elizabeth's father much more dramatically relevant to the tale as a whole. In the earlier version this character is a daunted, condescending figure, whereas in the later version he becomes an assertive and self-possessed man who is not to be intimidated by his daughter's hostility towards himself or

her husband. Lawrence makes his self-possession towards Elizabeth and the question of his own re-marriage into a dramatic echo of Bates' quiet self-possession in death at the end of the story. The whole tale is much more of a cohesive dramatic unity, and yet the changes are quite minimal, very economical, and seem to gain in naturalness rather than lose it. A few examples will illustrate this point:

a) E.R. Version: "I didn't come to see you on Saturday," began the little grey-bearded man. "Because. . ."
"I didn't expect you," said his daughter, coldly.
The engine-driver winced; then trying to resume his merry airy manner. . .

P.O. Version: "I didn't come to see you on Saturday," began the little grey-bearded man.
"I didn't expect you," said his daughter.
The engine-driver winced; then reassuming his cheery, airy manner. . .

b) E.R. Version: At her brief censure the little man made an impatient gesture, and said coaxingly, excusing himself:
"Well, what's a man to do? It's no sort of life for a man of my years living with strangers. And if I'm going to marry again it may as well be soon as late - a few months make no difference."
The woman did not reply, but turned and went into the house. The man in the engine cab stared about in much discomfort.

P.O. Version: At her brief censure the little man made an impatient gesture, and said coaxingly, yet with dangerous coldness:
"Well, what's a man to do? It's no sort of life for a man of my years to sit at my own hearth like a stranger." And if I'm going to marry again it may as well be soon as late - what does it matter to anybody?"
The woman did not reply, but turned and went into the house. The man in the engine cab stood assertive. . . [11]

[11] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.206

The later character sketch is far from the self-pitying, self-excusing man of the earlier version; and in addition Lawrence gives the dialogue much more dramatic bite and suggestiveness. In the first example, a), he eliminates the attempted self-explanation, '"Because. . ."'. Instead the father just states the fact as a prelude, a tentative opener to the little skirmish which he knows is coming. The daughter replies, not "coldly" - she just replies; and we feel the icy reserve of her brooding nature in the sharpness of the words themselves rather than in the weak descriptive epithet supplied in the earlier version. We feel it also in her father's wincing; but the later version of the character of the father is an altogether more determined man. He is not to be contravened by his daughter's silent rebuke: he doesn't "try" to resume his cheeriness; he just resumes it. We are made to feel dramatically the silent battle of wills between two strong characters, and the whole is very suggestive of the opposition which must have already existed on this issue of re-marriage. In the second example (b), the father is again made much more "assertive". Also, Lawrence turns the rather weak "a few months makes no difference" into the quite explosive "what does it matter to anybody". This is exactly the sort of exasperated, reckless phrase a man would blunder into: it quite obviously <u>does</u> matter to his daughter, and we can imagine her remembering such a statement, brooding on it and holding it against him for the future.

The careful attention to detailed phrasing of his prose, which Lawrence gives here, results in such telling dramatic suggestiveness, but without in any way detracting from the seemingly natural spontaneity. Indeed, he attempts to increase this impression since this is the source of the prose's dramatic vitality. For example in the following passage, the rather exaggerated reaction of the father to Bates' misdeeds in the earlier version is replaced by a more restrained, more natural, and yet also more suggestive turn of phrase:

> E.R. Version: "It's a crying shame, he wants horsewhipping," said the little man. The woman turned her head away with weary impatience. Her father swallowed the last of his tea and handed her the cup. "Aye," he sighed, wiping his mouth. "I've repented the day I ever let you have him."

> P.O. Version: "Aye, it's a nice thing, when a man can do nothing with his money but make a beast of himself," said the grey-whiskered man. The woman turned her head away. Her father swallowed the last of his tea and handed her the cup. "Aye," he sighed, wiping his mouth. "It's a settler, it is -" 12

The dialogue is quite obviously altogether more colloquial: in the later version the very nice last phrase contains all the inconsequentiality with which a conversation is brought to an end; the idiomatic phrasing of the first sentence evokes the impression of the reserved reflections of an elderly man, so much more effective than the extremity of the

12 D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.207.

earlier version. The little revision in the narration, too, is to effect: the plain documentary statement of the woman's action speaks her weariness for itself without the need of the earlier phrase "with weary impatience". Lawrence can be seen paring his prose down into something quite bare and direct, allowing it to speak for itself.

This small excursion into Lawrence's revisions serves to illustrate the consciousness and care with which he created the authentic prose of his realistic fiction, as well as giving an insight into his awareness and realisation of its essentially dramatic potential. This naturalistic or realistic style is a decisive element in Lawrence's best prose, and one which we cannot afford to ignore. It is the medium for the success of his realistic fiction. It forms the basis for that penetratingly off-hand satiric prose which is so much in evidence, even in the early works like "Daughters of the Vicar". What is of even more importance is that this naturalistic note is a vital ingredient in the prose which Lawrence uses for his later poetic fiction. Poetic fiction, based as it is upon an imaginative foundation, does invite the use of a more elaborate, more concentrated, prose in an attempt to convey a symbolic power, and elaboration can easily give way to excess and artificiality. This is a failing which Lawrence often falls into. Throughout his career he retained an often unfortunate inclination towards artificiality

and flamboyance in the use of poetic elements in his prose - a legacy from the early poetic prose style. This often led him, within the context of a non-realistic fictional image, to write in a highly overcharged manner - the manner of what we may call his pseudo-poetic prose. Having made this distinction, however, we can say that Lawrence controls this tendency in the prose of his best poetic fiction: he manages to attain a balance in which the poetic elements of his prose are tempered with the restraint, the avoidance of elaboration, and the naturalism of the prose of his realistic fiction.

b : Analytic Prose.

The one major feature of Lawrence's prose in his mature poetic fiction is his use of figurative language to describe character in such a way as to create a symbolic dimension in the manner discussed in Chapter Three. Lawrence introduces this figurative element into his prose specifically to accommodate his developments of fictional representation.

One of the most interesting stages of Lawrence's writing as far as the development of this figurative element in the prose is concerned occurs between 1911 and 1914 - between the publication of his first stories in The English Review and his revision of these stories for inclusion in The Prussian Officer volume. It is between these very dates that Lawrence was re-thinking his conception of characterization in the terms outlined in the letter to Garnett discussed in Chapter Three.[13] For this purpose he forged his figurative/analytic prose as the instrument for the delineation of his new imaginative conception of character. The tales published in The English Review and subsequently revised for The Prussian Officer volume show this new development by spanning the two stages: in the revisions we often find Lawrence going back upon what originally was a quite realistic tale as published in The English Review, and giving it an imaginative treatment through his figurative prose. We can illustrate this point by a short consideration of the two versions of "The Prussian Officer".[14]

The most noticeable aspect of the revision of this tale is the way Lawrence gives an imaginative treatment to the relationship between the Officer and his Orderly by means of the newly developed figurative prose. The basic nature of the relationship is the same between the two versions; but in The English Review version it is given an almost purely realistic treatment, whereas in The Prussian Officer version Lawrence introduces a figurative element which delineates the relationship in imaginative terms. This is particularly

[13] See above, Chapter Three pages 165-72.

[14] First published as "Honour and Arms" in The English Review, August 1914, p.24-43; revised for inclusion in The Prussian Officer (1914).

noticeable in the first section of the tale. Lawrence introduces a sequence of flame images to describe the responses between the two men. This is done mainly through insertions into the earlier text rather than through changing particular words or phrases, indicating in some ways that when Lawrence came back to this tale to revise it he saw the dramatic situation of the earlier realistic version in a different light and thus wanted to present it differently as a whole, rather than tinker with it. The following example may illustrate this point:

> E.R. version : He could not get away from the sense of the youth's person, whilst he was in attendance. There was something so free and self-contained about him, and something in the young fellow's movement, that made the elder man glance at him. And this irritated the Prussian.
>
> P.O. version : He could not get away from the sense of the youth's person, whilst he was in attendance. It was like a warm flame upon the older man's tense, rigid body, rigid body, that had become almost unliving, fixed. There was something so free and self-contained about him, and something in the young fellow's movement, that made the officer aware of him. And this irritated the Prussian. He did not choose to be touched into life by his servant. [15]

We can see immediately the effect of the figurative treatment of the second version. The emphasis is thrown upon the significance of the relationship, rather than its dramatic actuality alone; and, moreover, its significance is presented in imaginative terms through the figurative prose. The Officer is an inert, dead force ("the older man's tense, rigid body, that had become almost unliving, fixed."); the Orderly is a vital living force ("a warm flame", which might warm the older man into life, thaw out his deadness). What comes across in this second version is an imaginative presentation of the nature of

[15] D.H. Lawrence, The Prussian Officer, p.9.

this relationship which conveys what it means in terms of life and death - the cosmic dimension, which gives the wider significance of the tale's dramatic situation. The confrontation which Lawrence defines through his figurative prose insertions is not simply between two people but between two forces, life and death. The warm freedom of the Orderly might have had the effect of liberating the Officer into new life - this might have been a regeneration fable. But the Officer rejects this: "He did not choose to be touched into life by his servant." The acceptance of his physical attraction might have rekindled him into life - the notion of "touch" became very important for Lawrence in later regeneration fables like The Man Who Died and Lady Chatterley's Lover - but the Officer rejects this "life" (his military nature represses it, whilst his pride refuses to acknowledge his servant's offer - both things are very meaningful in the context). The result is that the Officer remains "dead", an anti-life force; and as such he tries in the rest of the tale to contravene and crush the Orderly's life and spontaneity. The outcome is that, as with Rico, Gerald and Cathcart, the life-force has its revenge on the Officer: the "warm flame" burns him up and is itself burnt out. The flame and heat imagery become synonymous with a destructive passional force acting on the two characters, perhaps signifying also the failure of the male-male relationship.[16] Both are destroyed by the nature of the relationship, and Lawrence brings out the wider significance of this through the figurative prose. We might mention other passages beside the example cited in which we find Lawrence inserting sections which bring out this wider significance in this

[16] For a discussion of this tale from this point of view see R. Brandeis, Male Relationships in the work of D.H. Lawrence, unpublished Ph.D. thesis presented at University of Leicester (1972). I owe the suggestion for the significance of this tale to Mr. Brandeis.

way through the flame and heat imagery.[17] The revisions all serve to make the same point: Lawrence came back to this tale with a different conception of the characters and the relationship; and felt he could use them in a different way by giving the realistic drama of the first version a definite imaginative level.

From this we can see something of Lawrence's attempts to accommodate the demands of his poetic fiction by developing a figurative element in his prose which transforms the terms of reference of the fictional world. We saw this prose at work at its best in our discussions of The Rainbow and Women in Love in Chapter Three. It needs remarking on here that this figurative element with regard to character is the element which most often leads Lawrence to degenerate into some of his worst writing - what we have called his "pseudo-poetic" prose. One of the "best" examples to take to illustrate this comes in The Rainbow, Chapter XI, and describes Ursula and Skrebensky at the wedding of Fred Brangwen. It must be emphasised that the excesses of this passage are in no way representative of this very fine novel. They do serve, however, as an indication of the effect which this imaginative prose could sometimes have upon Lawrence's judgement as a writer. The passage is too long to quote, and I refer the reader to the actual text of the novel for the details of the following examination.[18]

There is no doubting the power of this extract: the trouble is that it is too powerful, too overcharged.. The figurative language lacks imaginative clarity, and hence fails to present the nature of the relationship clearly in realistic or imaginative terms.

[17] See, for example, the following passages which are total insertions : The Prussian Officer, p.9-10 (section beginning "Once when a bottle of wine" and ending "his neutrality as a servant"); and p. 10 (section beginning "But now if he were going to be forced" and ending "irritated the officer more and more.")

[18] D.H. Lawrence, The Rainbow, p.317-24.

We can follow the general outline of the extract well enough - the difficulties come when we try to understand it in detail. Clearly there is a fundamental opposition between Ursula and Skrebensky, which Lawrence articulates imaginatively by associating Ursula with the moon and Skrebensky with shadows and darkness. These are the basic figurative terms in which the battle between the two characters is described and thus given a wider imaginative level as with the Orderly and the Officer - we notice that, by the end of passage he is describing the battle as being a conflict of "souls", "her soul crystallized with triumph, and his soul was dissolved with agony and annihilation . . . he was dead." [19] The basic imagery of Ursula as the moon's light destroying Skrebensky, the shadow, serves to show the relationship up as a destructive confrontation, like that of the Orderly and the Officer; and to make this significant on the wider level of life and death by virtue of the imaginative presentation. By associating Ursula with the moon Lawrence conveys her desire for a free, individual life, her desire to become a defined self-sufficient ego or personality. Skrebensky contravenes this desire by tying her and involving her in a relationship of sensual attraction, hence the references to her being caught in a magnetic or gravitational field in the sensuality of the dance: "She felt like bright metal weighed down by dark, impure magnetism." [20] Skrebensky thus overshadows Ursula's brightness by his demands on her; whilst Lawrence seems to emphasise the sterility of Ursula's desire for self-contained isolation by showing the destructiveness of her effect on Skrebensky in terms of her rôle as the moon destroying his shadow. (The very use of the moon image indicates that the kind of

[19] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.322.

[20] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.319.

magnetic attraction of which Ursula wishes to free herself is a natural and inevitable part of a relationship, just as gravity is in planetary influences).

Thus, in general outline, the significance of this intensely powerful extract is clear. There is nothing really at fault with the conception of the passage. The failure lies in its articulation and in the extremes to which Lawrence takes his figurative language. When we try to follow this closely it proves an impossible task. In part this is the result of some very confused phrasing and some hopelessly vague imagery, as for example "She wanted the moon to fill in to her". Much of the language is remarkably definite and vivid, however. This fails by having no dramatic correlative in the actual scene, creating a clash between the realistic and symbolic levels. It is difficult, for example, to conceive the actual experience being described in the following examples:

> she was cleaved like a transparent jewel to its [the moon's] light . . . her body opened wide like a quivering anemone. 21

> her naked self was away there beating upon the moonlight with her breasts and knees, in meeting, in communion. 22

> He was afraid of the great moon-conflagration of the cornstacks rising above him. 23

The symbolic significance in terms of the nature of the relationship is clear, but this seems to be at the expense of the dramatic reality of the situation. There is a certain incongruity about this proliferation of imagery, a lack of control. Lawrence throws image after image into the melting pot so that we lose any sense of a definite imaginative context; whereas in Women in Love the figurative analysis

21 D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.319.

22 D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.319.

23 D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.321.

works through the precise application of a restricted set of images. To add to the confusion, Lawrence builds up this passage by means of some very heavily rhythmical prose in his incantatory style, which does nothing to alleviate the sense of strain. Clearly he is trying to use the repetition of imagery and rhythms to create an emotional effect. He creates a rhythmical cycle of imagery which builds up to a very powerful climax in the last paragraphs of the extract. Particularly noticeable is the elaboration and modulation of the pillar of salt image for Ursula, used to capture the growing destructiveness which Ursula feels towards Skrebensky: she is, at the end, "seething like some cruel, corrosive salt around the last substance of his being, destroying him, destroying him in the kiss." [24] This idea of an acidic salt bubbling and seething as it attacks some weaker compound very vividly presents the destructively sensual attraction and conflict between Ursula and Skrebensky. But this climax is a little too much to accept without wincing: the frantic repetition of phrases, images and rhythms is excessive and jarring, as well as being rather idiosyncratic and obscure. The plainness of the intention hardly vindicates the desperation of the bizarre, rather grotesque effect of the episode as a whole. The strain is indicated by the jolt with which Lawrence brings the narrative back to normality.

c : Incantatory Prose.

We have noticed in this passage from The Rainbow a feature of Lawrence's "poetic prose" which, however badly it may be used in that

[24] D.H. Lawrence, ibid., p.322.

particular example, is worthy of some attention in itself. This feature is the use of repeated imagery, syntax and rhythm in a kind of cyclical progression - what we may call "incantatory prose". In itself, this stylistic feature does have its justifiable place within Lawrence's attempt to develop his prose in accord with the needs of his poetic fiction.

We can trace the origins of this kind of prose to the influence of the Authorized Version of the Bible on Lawrence. He himself recognised the deep and lasting effect which the Bible had had upon him, particularly the Book of Revelations:

> I was brought up on the Bible, and seem to have it in my bones. From early childhood I have been familiar with Apocalyptic language and Apocalyptic image . . . I did not even listen attentively. But the language has a power of echoing and re-echoing in my unconscious mind. . . the sound of Revelation had registered in me very early. [25]

This influence was often not a good one as far as Lawrence's own prose was concerned. The rhythms, the syntax and the language of the Authorized Version and of Revelations were some of the main sources for Lawrence's worst prose, particularly in his non-realistic fiction. The Plumed Serpent was especially vulnerable to this weakness because of the strange mythological basis of the novel's fictional world. One thinks in particular of the pseudo-Biblical religious incantations with which the novel is beset. [26]

Lawrence, however, defended his incantatory prose in principle in his "Forward to Women in Love", in which he writes,

[25] D.H. Lawrence, Phoenix, p.301-2.

[26] Keith Sagar (The Art of D.H. Lawrence, Cambridge (1966), p.224) has isolated and discussed a particularly "good" example.

> In point of style, fault is often found with the continual, slightly modified repetition. The only answer is that it is natural to the author: and that every natural crisis in emotion or passion or understanding comes from this pulsing, frictional to-and-fro, which works up to a culmination. 27

He also suggests a justification for it in artistic terms in his self-association with the style of various other writers. He admired the emotive, non-logical movement of Giovanni Verga's prose, which "makes curious swoops and circles. It touches the point of pain or interest, then sweeps away again in a cycle, coils round and approaches again. There is a curious spiral rhythm." [28] Lawrence might be describing his own method and his own attempts to capture an intuitive emotional movement in prose. Even more interesting are his comments upon the writers of the Book of Revelations itself. He describes their method of working in cycles of imagery which are developed in a kind of rhythmic progression:

> the pagan thinker or poet - pagan thinkers were necessarily poets . . . starts with an image, sets the image in motion, allows it to achieve a certain course or circuit of its own, then takes up another image. 29

What Lawrence describes in the discussion from which this extract comes is a purely imaginative kind of prose, designed to function in a symbolic mode of narrative, and one which coincides very closely in method at least with the effect found in, for example, the remarkable symbolic episode of Birkin's stoning of the moon, discussed in Chapter Two. [30] The success of such a passage shows exactly what Lawrence was after in this kind of prose, and justifies the incantatory method despite the many lapses one might point to. That is, we may

[27] D.H. Lawrence, Phoenix II, p.276.

[28] D.H. Lawrence, Phoenix, p.249-50.

[29] D.H. Lawrence, Apocalypse, Secker (1932), p.96.

[30] See above, Chapter Two Section iii, p.137-42.

feel this incantatory style justifiable in this way. Virginia Woolf, on the other hand, found it provoking in the extreme: whilst reading some such passages in Huxley's edition of Lawrence's letters she indignantly complained "I don't like strumming with two fingers - and the arrogance. After all, English has one million words : why confine yourself to 6? and praise yourself for doing so." [31] , a remark which characterises the antipathy in literary terms at least between these two authors - after which we can do little better than to go on to uncover the basic attitude to prose that led Virginia Woolf to make such a statement.

[31] Virginia Woolf, A Writer's Diary, p.188.

Appendix ii : Virginia Woolf and Poetic Prose

In Tom Jones Fielding humorously suggests that "poetical embellishments" in a work of fiction "are designed to supply the place of ale, and to refresh the mind, whenever those slumbers which in a long work are apt to invade the reader as well as the writer, shall begin to creep upon him." [1] Virginia Woolf shared Fielding's appetite for such literary "ale". She looked back to a slender tradition of "impassioned prose" [2] - Sir Thomas Browne, Laurence Sterne, Thomas de Quincey, Thomas Love Peacock - for the medium with which she might bring such refreshment into her own works. Virginia Woolf was an indisputable experimentalist with prose. It was one of her chief concerns as a writer to develop the capacities of the prose medium so that it might encompass what she called "the poetry of existence". [3] She believed it to be capable of immense development in its expressive capacities: she writes of "prose . . . with its capacities and possibilities, its power to say new things, make new shapes, express new passions". [4] She even goes so far as to suggest that the emotions of the modern mind, with its mixtures of "ugliness, sordidity, beauty, amusement", may "submit more readily to prose than to poetry". The kind of work she envisages "will be written in prose, but in prose which has many of the characteristics of poetry. It will have some of the exaltation of poetry, but much of the ordinariness of prose". [5] Prose, she felt, could do the job better

[1] Henry Fielding, The History of Tom Jones, Penguin (1968), p.151

[2] A phrase used by Virginia Woolf for De Quincey, Collected Essays, Vol.1, p.165.

[3] Virginia Woolf, A Writer's Diary, p.56

[4] Virginia Woolf, "English Prose", Athenaeum, Jan. 30th 1920, p.134-5

[5] Virginia Woolf, "The Narrow Bridge of Art", Collected Essays, Vol.2, p.225

than poetry, even poetry of the kind that T.S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf's close friend, was writing at the time.[6]

The kind of prose she looks to is suggested in the foregoing quotation "prose which has many of the characteristics of poetry". What the characteristics of poetry were for her she defined elsewhere: "Why admit anything to literature that is not poetry - by which I mean saturated?" [7] We have already seen some of the ways in which Virginia Woolf "saturated" her fictional representations of life. For her a saturation of the fictional modes of representation went hand in hand with a saturation of prose. The development of her kind of imaginative fiction allowed, and even demanded, that she develop the expressive capacities of her chosen medium, prose; and this she did by introducing resources of poetic language such as are not really available to the realistic novelist. Non-realism and poetic prose were natural corollaries for Virginia Woolf, and she contemplated and theorised upon both with equal energy.

To return to the "characteristics of poetry", T.S. Eliot, in an article on what De Quincey called "the thorny question of Poetry and Prose" [8], suggests that if there is any distinction to be made between poetry and prose it is "not a question of 'subject matter' so much as the way in which this subject matter is treated." [9] Virginia Woolf, by her qualification

[6] For Virginia Woolf's opinions of Eliot's poetry at this time see John Lehmann, The Whispering Gallery, Longmans (1956), p.201, and Virginia Woolf "Is this Poetry?", Athenaeum, June 20, 1919, p.491.

[7] Virginia Woolf, A Writer's Diary, p.139.

[8] Thomas De Quincey, "Rhetoric", The Collected Writings of De Quincey ed. D. Masson, Edinburgh : A. and C. Black (1890), Vol. X, p.130.

[9] T.S. Eliot, "Verse and Prose", Chapbook Vol.22, April 1921, p.4

in the above quotation, implies that by "poetry" she too means in part at least a certain kind of treatment - a "saturated" treatment. Poetry works primarily through its "saturation", what Eliot defines as its "concentration" - "stating or implying much in proportion to the space occupied".[10] It is this primary characteristic of poetry which Virginia Woolf wanted to develop in prose - its concentration and suggestiveness. The way she aimed at doing this was through introducing into prose elements of language which we normally associate with poetry (or with a certain kind of poetry), elements which she admired in the prose of writers with whom she had an affinity. Thus, she noted in Proust "those frequent passages of elaborate metaphor, which spring out of the rock of thought like fountains of sweet water". [11] In her introduction to Sterne's A Sentimental Journey, she cites as "pure poetry" a passage which, as R.A. Brower points out, is "rich in visual imagery. . . and written in the kind of freely rhythmed prose of which she writes admiringly in another essay on Sterne." [12] She admires the "unconventionality of Sterne's style, which cuts gaps in "the thick-set hedge of English prose", which "takes such liberties with grammar and syntax and sense and propriety and the long-standing tradition of how a novel should be written", and which "allows Sterne almost the licence of a poet." [13]

[10] T.S. Eliot, ibid., p.4

[11] R.A. Brower, "The Novel as Poem" in The Interpretation of Narrative ed. M.W. Bloomfield, Massachussetts : Harvard University Press (1970), p.245.

[12] R.A. Brower, ibid., p.245

[13] Virginia Woolf, Introduction to A Sentimental Journey by Laurence Sterne, Oxford World's Classics (1965), p.v, vi.

So, Virginia Woolf had quite specific things in mind when she spoke of "the characteristics of poetry". She had in mind primarily the use of metaphor, the use of figurative language and imagery. Such prose would be of such a nature that "pages of deliberate description are fused into a single line" [14], yet which retains the freedom and "fluidity" which she admired in Sterne. [15]

She was well-aware, as we perhaps are well-aware when we read the novels, of the "ill effects" of her struggles "with poetry in prose". [16] She was aware, for example, of her own vice of a fatal infatuation with and facility for language: "One must write from deep feeling, said Dostoievsky. And do I? Or do I fabricate with words, loving them as I do?" [17] To some extent Virginia Woolf distrusted her great inventiveness and abundance in language, as indeed many readers distrust her novels for the same reason. She was herself conscious that such qualities can be as disastrous as they can be successful, resulting in a brilliant but superficial flow of volubility. She was disturbed by the comment of one reviewer on Orlando: "one reviewer says that I have come to a crisis in the matter of style: it is now so fluent and fluid that it runs through the mind like water". [18] She acknowledged the truth behind a comment of G.W. Rylands' that "when V[irginia] lets her style get on top of her, one thinks only of that". [19]

[14] Virginia Woolf, "Aurora Leigh", Collected Essays, Vol.1, p.217

[15] Virginia Woolf, A Writer's Diary, p.165

[16] Virginia Woolf, quoted in The Whispering Gallery, as in n.6 above

[17] Virginia Woolf, A Writer's Diary, p.57

[18] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.137

[19] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.120

In this respect the possibilities of poetic prose were a grave temptation for Virginia Woolf to fall into a trap which Eliot discerned in Sir Thomas Browne, whom Virginia Woolf admired - the trap of displaying "a commonplace sententiousness[which]is decorated by reverberating language", and of developing a style which appears "to seduce quite apart from the content". [20] Eliot objects to Browne's prose as "language dissociated from things, assuming an independent existence", [21] a criticism which we could equally well apply to Virginia Woolf on the occasions when we sense that her style is running away with her. One often suspects that Fielding's phrase "poetical embellishment" is at times exactly right to describe what Virginia Woolf achieves in some of her prose. Poetic prose in the novel demands the same kind of strictures as Eliot applied to poetic verse in drama when he wrote "I start with the assumption that if poetry is merely a decoration, an added embellishment, if it merely gives people of literary tastes the pleasure of listening to poetry at the same time that they are witnessing a play, then it is superfluous. It must justify itself dramatically". [22] In the same way we demand that poetic prose in the novel, if the novelist must needs look at it in those terms, should justify itself as part of the novel as a form.

Virginia Woolf acknowledged this herself. To attempt a prose which submits the elements of the novel to what Virginia Woolf elsewhere called "beautification in language" [23] is

[20] T.S. Eliot, as in n. 9 above, p.7

[21] T.S. Eliot, ibid., p.7

[22] T.S. Eliot, "Poetry and Drama", On Poetry and Poets, Faber (1965), p.72

[23] Virginia Woolf, A Writer's Diary, p.58

perhaps to pay the price of restricting some other vital part of the novelist's art: "the novelist's task lays such a load upon every nerve, muscle and fibre that to demand beautiful prose in addition is, in view of human limitations, to demand what can only be given at the cost of a sacrifice."[24] The sacrifice is manifested most obviously in a lack of artistic cohesiveness between intensely beautiful or concentrated prose and the more matter-of-fact prose which must necessarily make up some part of the novelist's work. Virginia Woolf recognised this to be a weakness in Conrad, for example, she felt that the suggestive power of some of his prose throws other passages into relief, making them appear flat or monotonous.[25] She remarks also on E.M. Forster's failure to make his lyric asides really integral parts of his fiction.[26] The difficulty is a matter of integration, of making an unselfconscious and smooth transitions between concentrated prose and relaxed prose. In an article on de Quincey she writes that "prose has neither the intensity nor the self-sufficiency of poetry. It rises slowly off the ground; it must be connected on this side and on that."[27] She felt that de Quincey himself failed to achieve any finally satisfactory integration in his prose. She is clearly in sympathy with de Quincey's attempts to write "impassioned prose" and looks to him as one of her predecessors; but she slightly distrusted the end product of his efforts. De Quincey tended to neglect the whole form of his work for the sake of the occasional spark of brilliance, the imaginative

[24] Virginia Woolf, A Writer's Diary, p.58

[25] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.135

[26] "Virginia Woolf; The Novel as Poem", R.A. Brower as in n. 11 above, p. 243

[27] Virginia Woolf, "Impassioned Prose" Collected Essays Vol.1, p.168

rhapsodies which are scattered through his works like diamonds that turn the rest to dross; whereas Sterne manages to sustain a style in which "The utmost fluidity exists with the utmost permanence", in which the "flash of poetry" that illuminates the depths of experience for a moment co-exists alongside the "jest", the "jibe", the commonplace.[28] Sterne integrates and encompasses everything, "From the chuckle, the babble, to the rhapsody", in one unified prose style; whereas de Quincey's prose tended to fall into two irreconcilable halves. Virginia Woolf wanted to share Sterne's secret, by which the novelist could integrate prose of high and low power and create a flexible medium for the novel. It must be stressed that it was for the sake of the novel, for the sake of giving its basic medium greater expressive power thereby enabling the medium to work in conjunction with a new type of fictional image in fresh explorations of life and the depths of experience. She recognised how all too easy the divorce between style and form might be and how easy it might be to make style an end in itself without any real function within the novel form. She felt, for example, that de Quincey's poetic rhapsodies were often restricted by and in conflict with the fictional elements of character and narrative with which he structured his prose works. Any new developments of prose must be integral to the needs of the novel as a form.

There are many other possible "ill effects" of the use of poetic characteristics in prose which Virginia Woolf

[28] Virginia Woolf, as in n.13 above, p.vi and viii.

neglects to treat at any length in her essays or comments on prose. Not in the least of them is the distinct danger that prose of this nature might become too concentrated, so that its effect is somewhat stultified and artificial. Elements like figurative language, a use of metaphor, and a use of distinct rhythm can easily overburden the texture of prose as we have already seen with Lawrence. T.S. Eliot has stated that poetry "cannot afford to lose its contact with the changing language of common intercourse" [29], and prose, we may feel, is subject to the same general rule. Virginia Woolf is consciously interested in the art of prose and in expanding the expressive potential of her prose in a way that involves a shift away from naturalism. But prose, like the fabled donkey, can become very temperamental and refuse to budge for anyone who tries to interfere with its nature and hurry it along too intensely: and Virginia Woolf did have some trouble in the most poetic of her prose in The Waves.

Virginia Woolf herself felt that The Waves marked a decisive stage in her development both as an artist and as a person. It was inspired by the sudden crystalisation, whilst staying at Rodmell in 1926, of her understanding of life and reality; she records this strange and, as she calls it, mystical vision in the entry for Thursday, September 30th [30], and from that point on she returns constantly to this as her central revelation of the meaning of life - "One sees a fin

[29] T.S. Eliot, "The Music of Poetry", On Poetry and Poets, p.29

[30] Virginia Woolf, A Writer's Diary, p.101

passing far out. What image can I reach to convey what I mean?". Already she is testing the resources of her command of language for its ability to capture this vision. The Waves she recognised to be the fulfilment of this promise. Immediately after having finished the novel she remarks "I have netted that fin in the waste of water that appeared to me over the marshes out of my window at Rodmell".[31] The trouble was that before beginning this work Virginia Woolf felt she needed some other prose style than that she had used in To The Lighthouse and Orlando in order to "come to terms with these mystical feelings".[32] The quick and fluid brilliance of the prose in these novels she saw as something of a "disease" and asks herself, specifically in reference to "The Moths" (later The Waves), "Shall I now check and consolidate, more in the Dalloway and Jacob's Room style?"[33] - the style which, she says elsewhere, was composed of "sentences absolutely struck with an axe out of crystal".[34] Virginia Woolf distrusted her fluency, but she also felt that the style of To The Lighthouse would not be sufficiently expressive to come to terms with her clearer, more profound view of life. She wanted to develop the capacities of her prose in order to encompass these deeper levels of experience. It is at this point that she asks "Why admit anything to literature that is not poetry - by which I mean saturated?", and to conclude that "That is what I want to do in The Moths."[35] She admits that

[31] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.169

[32] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.137

[33] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.137

[34] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.142

[35] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.139

"a kind of ease and dash" (in the manner of Orlando) are "good", but that this kind of prose is too light and superficial on its own to explore her new sense of life residing in transitory moments of intense experience which we have already had some cause to discuss. In order "to give the moment whole", as she aims to do in "The Moths", she needs "to saturate". There is thus an undeniable link between her desire to investigate the deep levels of her mystical vision and the poetic saturation of the prose of The Waves. The prose of The Waves is like it is because Virginia Woolf felt the need of the further expressiveness created by the poetic characteristics which she introduces - in particular the figurative language, the distinct rhythmic element and the syntax. Through a concentrated use these were designed to provide the new dimensions demanded in her prose. The following examination will centre around them. [36]

Whilst writing the first version of the novel,[37] we find Virginia Woolf complaining "I'm not writing with gusto or pleasure because of the concentration". [38] The slightest glance at the dense texture of the prose will convince of the difficulties which must have beset her in the writing and re-writing of this work. But what are the elements that

[36] This examination is designed to be literary rather than technical; but mention should be made of the exhaustive linguistic study by Irma Rantavaara, "Virginia Woolf's The Waves" in Commentarium Humanarum Litterarum Tomus XXVI Nos. 1-3, Helsinki (1966), p.36-91.

[37] The Waves underwent four separate stages of writing from the evidence of Virginia Woolf's Diary: the first version was written between September 10th 1929 and April 10th 1930; the second version was written between May 1st 1930 and February 7th 1931; this version was then corrected in typescript twice, the first correction taking place between May 1st 1931 and June 22nd 1931, the second correction taking place between June 25th 1931 and 17th July 1931, (A Writer's Diary, p.172.) These different versions, which exist in the New York Public Library, Berg Collection are unfortunately not available as yet in published form. Their revisions would most certainly be an intriguing insight into the development of the prose in The Waves, as well as into the novel as a whole.

[38] Virginia Woolf, A Writer's Diary, p.146

make up that concentration and what effect do they have? The most obvious and most powerful element is the very concentrated figurative language. With this prose we need to take our time unravelling the imaginative suggestions behind the phrases in the same way that we do with poetry. This is most certainly language "in which pages of deliberate description are fused into a single line". Its fundamental strength lies in the powerful visual quality of the imagery and metaphor. Virginia Woolf particularly admired Lawrence's ability for "sudden visualisation" [39], and this is a virtue which she well knew how to utilise herself. The figurative language of The Waves is rooted in concrete visual imagery and from this comes its remarkable suggestive power. A few examples will illustrate this element:

> It is a stormy night; the branches of the chestnut trees are ploughing up and down.
>
> The flowers swim like fish made of light upon the dark, green waters.
>
> "Cold water begins to run from the scullery tap," said Rhoda, "over the mackerel in the bowl."
>
> Jinny and Susan, Benard and Neville bind themselves into a thong with which to lash me.
>
> Rich and heavy sensations form on the roof of my mind; down showers the day - the woods and Elvedon; Susan and the pigeon. Pouring down the walls of my mind, running together, the day falls copious, resplendent. [40]

The first two examples are simply vivid metaphoric description: the word "ploughing" in the first example turns the tossing tree branches into plough blades furrowing the night in turmoil; in the second example we are led to imagine the bright flowers in the dense green

[39] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.188

[40] Virginia Woolf, The Waves, p.42, 9, 7, 16 and 22

of the flower bed are fish floating in green water like flecks of light. In each case the language creates a fresh visual impression of a common experience through its metaphoric action. The third example is slightly different: there is no figurative language strictly speaking. It is simply a very precise articulation of a sensory experience. But as in the other examples, we notice that the precise visual appeal of the language gives the chosen detail a sharp particularity and resonance which makes it evocative beyond its literal nature. We imagine the silver mackerel tumbling in the silvering water from the tap: they might be the children being tumbled in the first fresh brightness of life in childhood - unconscious that this is only water from the scullery tap, that life's silver freshness is deceptive. Such is the wide suggestiveness which Virginia Woolf gives to her sharp concentrated figurative language. This theme of life's deceptiveness is a central one to the novel and prefigured here in this image. In connection with this it is worth noticing the layout of such figurative language within the wider dimensions of the novel as a whole: the language of the first two parts of the novel, which deal with childhood, is by far the most densely figurative and visual in its sensory appeal, and contrasts quite markedly with the growing laxity and diffuseness of the later parts. This is an attempt on Virginia Woolf's part to dramatise in her language the gradual recession of the clarity and intensity of childhood experience as the characters grow older. The garden scenes in

particular are full of the sense of freshness and immediacy of childhood, which makes them the most appealing part of the novel; and this creates the impression later in the book, when the characters begin to look back, of the importance and unconscious meaning of those first early perceptions in childhood, the impression of the perfection of childhood in contrast to the greyness of later life, the impression of time. So that the concentration of figurative language in the first parts of the novel does have a distinct dramatic function within the novel as a whole in addition to its immediate local function.

To return to the unfinished examples, we find in the last two that Virginia Woolf uses figurative language in connection with actual characters as well as scenes. In the fourth example we are given a direct and vivid insight into Louis' lack of self-assurance: his insecurity is expressed through the image which sees other people as a whip, implying that they torture him by their presence and by their demands upon his unformed individuality - a psychologically very accurate impression of the effects of a group upon a weaker individual in the group. The last example evokes Bernard's feeling of fulness and completion at the end of the day. His mind is compared to a cavern, upon the roof of which the experiences of the day distil and coagulate like water vapour condensing. This down-pouring of collected experiences, sometimes after a day, sometimes after much longer periods, is an experience which

is common to most people, and which Virginia Woolf captures perfectly in this sharp and perceptive image. It has the wider suggestion that the dripping of experience, as in the case of natural caves, leaves a deposit on the roof of the mind which is never lost and collects slowly over the years. It is from such processes that the bases of character are formed, and Virginia Woolf suggests as much in the wider resonance of her image. Thus, the use of figurative language in this novel is related very directly to characters as well as to scenes: it is used to illuminate characters and relationships in a very sharp and remarkable way.

We can see, then, that the strength of Virginia Woolf's figurative language lies in the vivid visual and sensory appeal of the imagery and metaphors, through which we are led to imagine the experiences of the novel pictorially. She comments upon her method in the novel itself through Bernard, who in his capacities as a "phrase-maker" is the representative of Virginia Woolf's own artistic desire to capture experience in words: Bernard says that "The bare visual impression is unattached to any line of reason, it springs up as one might see the fin of a porpoise on the horizon. Visual impressions often communicate thus briefly statements which we shall in time to come uncover and coax into words." [41] For Virginia Woolf the virtue of sharp figurative language lay in these very things: such language as we have just examined stands out starkly and barely, and by doing so seems to capture much more than simply the actual detail it describes. In contrast to the language of

[41] Virginia Woolf, The Waves, p.162.

the traditional realistic novel (tied as it is to an outer fabric of detail and fact), such language has an independence and self-sufficiency which allows it to stand alone quite enigmatic and impersonally suggestive without it being explainable or needing to be explainable in terms of the actual scene in which it occurs.

This effect is sustained particularly through careful variations in the texture of the prose. The prose of The Waves is not so concentrated that one metaphor succeeds another without any pause, nor is the language all figurative. The figurative is its basic strength, but that strength makes its impact through variety and control. The most concentrated language is noticeably present when there is some natural emotional climax in the prose: it is introduced to convey the emotional or imaginative significance through the kind of impersonal resonant statement which Bernard talks about, or to achieve its effect by contrast with the less intense language juxtaposed against it. Here is an extract from Rhoda's speech at the party at the end of the third part of the novel. Even more than Louis who at least manages to build himself a shelter of respectability, Rhoda is at the mercy of other people:

> I am not yet twenty-one. I am to be broken. I am to be derided all my life. I am to be cast up and down among these men and women, with their twitching faces, with their lying tongues, like a cork on a rough sea. Like a ribbon of weed I am flung far every time the door opens. I am the foam that sweeps and fills the uttermost rims of the rocks with whiteness; I am also a girl, here in this room.[42]

The passage begins with quite flat statements of Rhoda's fears and despair in the face of society and life. To make her feelings

[42] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.92

more tangible, Virginia Woolf introduces the metaphor of life as a sea on which Rhoda is tossed like a cork or a piece of seaweed or the foam of a wave. The images express very sharply the rough and unfeeling treatment which Rhoda's over-sensitive nature receives from the constant unexpected demands which life makes upon her. But the real tragedy is expressed quietly and plainly in the last clause, "I am also a girl, here in this room." The return to the flatness of natural statement gives Rhoda's emotions the note of truth: it deflates pertinently the romantic gesture of the previous image of foam; and it also captures the authentic tone of resignation and despair. By such subtle variations between figurative and plain, natural language, Virginia Woolf tracks the rising and falling intensity of emotion behind the dramatic monologues, as well as ensuring that the concentration of the language is not too heavy or artificial.

The same kind of fluctuations in the prose can be seen in this second example, which comes from a monologue by Neville in the meeting at Hampton Court in the eighth part of the novel. Neville is conscious of his inferiority to the other characters and feels the need to justify himself by showing them proof of his right to be considered seriously - his proofs, his "credentials", are all the achievements of his life so far. Hidden in this is the effective metaphor of life as an examination, aptly used in connection with the academic Neville; but it leads further to a dramatic climax achieved through figurative language:

> I feel in my private pocket and find my credentials - what I carry to prove my superiority. I have passed. I have papers in my private pocket to prove it. But your eyes, Susan, full of turnips and cornfields, disturb me. These papers in my private pocket - the clamour that proves that I have passed - make a faint sound like that of a man clapping in an empty field to scare away rooks. Now it has died down altogether, under Susan's stare (the clapping, the reverberation that I have made), and I hear only the wind sweeping over the ploughed land. [43]

In the face of Susan's very different scale of values, conveyed in the image of farm fields - (Susan is married to a farmer, we may remember), Neville's achievements in life are shown to be unimportant and diminished into nothing. Susan's life seems the more permanent and the more directly in contact with reality - the irony being that Susan herself hates her life. Neville is left with a terrible sense of waste and of his own unimportance in the face of the unfathomed vastness of life. This is powerfully suggested in the last desolate image, which Virginia Woolf has built up to very carefully through Susan's rural ethos and which stands out impersonally conveying Neville's feelings but also giving them a much wider perspective. The language has a resonance which is built up from the particular scene and perfectly captures it, but which goes much further than that. It is by means of such language that Virginia Woolf aimed to invoke the deeper levels of human experience and set them against a wider perspective, what she called "an infinity, a background behind".[44] In such examples as this she succeeds admirably, balancing the intense power of the figurative language with plainer, less

[43] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.181

[44] Virginia Woolf, Letter to John Lehmann 17th September 1931, quoted in The Whispering Gallery, as in n.6 above

demanding, and in many ways more natural language.

She is not, by any means, always so successful. There are two particularly relevant criticisms to be made of the use of prose in this way. The first is perhaps the most obvious: such a style is too laboured and, at times, turgid to read fluently or naturally. M.C. Bradbrook has complained that "the effect of a page or two of epigrammatic metaphor is very fatiguing: the myopic observation, the lack of variation in the tension imposes a strain on the reader".[45] This criticism is somewhat unfair since we have already seen something of the variations in the texture of the prose, but it does coincide with Virginia Woolf's own realisation that this prose is "difficult, grinding stuff".[46] To some degree this is a matter of taste. Virginia Woolf had herself aimed "to keep the swiftness of prose and yet strike one or two sparks; and not write poetical, but pure bred prose".[47] She had to admit, however, that the final effect is often of "one jerk succeeding another".

There is a more serious criticism of this figurative style which is not quite so open to taste. It is that there are times when the figurative language becomes melodramatic

[45] M.C. Bradbrook, "Notes on the Style of Mrs. Woolf", Scrutiny, 1 (1932-3), p.33-8.

[46] Virginia Woolf, A Writer's Diary, p.175

[47] Virginia Woolf, letter to John Lehmann, as in n.43 above.

[48] Virginia Woolf, A Writer's Diary, p.173

and rhetorical, when it calls too much attention to itself because the imagery is too extreme or is untempered by any naturalism. The effect then is one of complete artificiality both in the language and the rhythm. For example, when Bernard is overcome by a sense of the hopelessness of human endeavour in the face of the vastness of life and time, Virginia Woolf articulates his feeling in this manner:

> "It is true, and I know for a fact", said Bernard, as we walk down this avenue, that a King, riding, fell over a molehill here. But how strange it seems to set against the whirling abysses of infinite space a little figure with a golden teapot on his head. . . And we ourselves, walking six abreast, what do we oppose, with this random flicker of light in us that we call brain and feeling, how can we do battle against this flood; what has permanence? Our lives too stream away, down the unlighted avenues, past the strip of time, unidentified.[49]

It is not that we object to the initial image of the king, for this refers quite factually to King William who did die by his horse tripping over a molehill - Virginia Woolf is giving Percival the status of a king and hero. Nor do we object to the incongruity of the "golden teapot", since this merely draws out the basic point of the passage - viz., that such a hero could be tripped up by death seems a totally incongruous and yet tragically certain fact. What we object to is that a surprising number of the phrases in the passage lack any suggestive power at all - they seem to be mere cliches of empty rhetoric. Phrases like "the whirling abysses of infinite space", "how can we do battle against this flood", "what has permanence", are

[49] Virginia Woolf, The Waves, p.194-5

too vague and too flat: they invoke gigantic questions without any effort upon their own part to make the questions vivid or real. They fail to visualize. The result is that the tone seems melodramatic, the questions rhetorical, and even the quite justifiable images do not escape seeming either ridiculous or empty of real meaning. Such superficial fertility is dangerous: we could apply Eliot's criticism of Browne and say that it displays "a commonplace sententiousness which is decorated by reverberating language". We may agree as to the final integrity and effectiveness of Virginia Woolf's prose in The Waves, but she is nevertheless by no means free of such an accusation - though her failing is with figurative language rather than with auditory verbal beauty as in Browne's case. She quite often fails to treat her profound themes in other than a facile manner. Another example occurs a few pages earlier than the one already mentioned. The theme is the paradoxical awareness of the transience of life amid the monotony and routine of everyday living:

> How swift life runs from January to December! We are all swept on by the torrent of things grown so familiar that they cast no shade; we make no comparisons; think scarcely ever of I or of you; and in this unconsciousness attain the utmost freedom from fiction and part the weeds that grow over the mouths of sunken channels. We have to leap like fish, high in the air, in order to catch the train from Waterloo. And however high we leap we fall back into the stream. [50]

Virginia Woolf seems more concerned with fancifully elaborating upon the initial image of the river than with using it to give a true insight into her theme, and the elaborations tend to cloud rather than illuminate. The image of life as a swift flowing

[50] Virginia Woolf, The Waves, p.185.

river is in itself suggestive enough, though something of a cliché; but the developments of it seem to be made purely for their own sake. For example, it is difficult to see the direct relevance of the clause "and part the weeds that grow over the mouths of sunken channels". The later image of leaping out of the stream bears such an extravagant relation to catching a train for Waterloo that it also seems inappropriate. The reader is diverted by the virtuosity of the writing rather than by the truth of the experience; and, as is often the case, this is Virginia Woolf's main failing here. The use of figurative concentration does go a long way towards anchoring her inventiveness, giving it a density lacking in her earlier fluid style and allowing her to treat life on a larger perspective through the extra suggestive power. But, as we have seen, she does not always succeed in eliminating her weakness. Having examined the local effect of Virginia Woolf's metaphoric prose, it is worth considering it in the larger structure of the novel.

We cannot read the prose of The Waves without being aware that Virginia Woolf frequently re-uses the same images and rhythmical structures throughout the whole fabric of the novel, and that part of her interest lies in the imaginative effect created by the recurrent interweaving of images and phrases throughout the work as a whole.[51] Virginia Woolf clearly intended the prose of this novel to function in this manner and

[51] Many previous critics have commented upon this basic element of the prose of The Waves; see, for example, the favourable reactions of Jean Guiguet, Virginia Woolf and her Works tr. J. Stewart, Hogarth (1965), p.299, and the hostile reaction of M.C. Bradbrook, as in n.44, above.

saw it as integral to the aesthetic effect of the work as a whole. During the first draft she complained to herself of the concentration of the writing, because "whenever I make a mark I have to think of its relation to a dozen others . . . I am always stopping to consider the whole effect".[52] Even more interesting is the comment she made after finishing the second writing in February 1931, and which suggests how far she had progressed from the first uncomfortable trials of the method:

> What interests me in the last stage was the freedom and boldness with which my imagination picked up, used and tossed aside all the images and symbols which I had prepared. I am sure that this is the right way of using them - not as set pieces, as I had tried at first, coherently, but simply as images, never making them work out, only suggest. [53]

The phrase "the images. . .which I had prepared" indicates how aware Virginia Woolf was of using recurrence as an integral part of the design of this novel. We do feel a sense of preparation in the first part of the book: the images in the first passages are all separate, as if by their separateness and their sharpness Virginia Woolf is attempting to fix them in the imagination of the reader for later use.

We suggested earlier (in Chapter Three) that the aim of this method is in part to create the experience of time and memory in the reader, and in part to create a purely imaginative effect in the recurrence of certain scenes and symbols especially

[52] Virginia Woolf, A Writer's Diary, p.146-7

[53] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.169

in Bernard's final monologue. We were looking there at the effect of this in general. It will be worthwhile now to investigate the effect of this cumulative repetition in more detail on the local scale of the prose itself. To do this a specific passage is necessary, and I propose part of Rhoda's monologue in the fifth part of the novel.

> 'There is the puddle,' said Rhoda, 'and I cannot cross it. I hear the rush of the great grindstone within an inch of my head. Its wind roars in my face. All palpable forms of life have failed me. Unless I can stretch and touch something hard, I shall be blown down the eternal corridors for ever. What, then, can I touch? What brick, what stone? and so draw myself across the enormous gulf into my body safely?
>
> 'Now the shadow has fallen and the purple light slants downwards. The figure that was robed in beauty is now clothed in ruin. The figure that stood in the groove where the steep-backed hills come down falls in ruin, as I told them when they said they loved his voice on the stair, and his old shoes and moments of being together.
>
> 'Now I will walk down Oxford Street envisaging a world rent by lightning; I will look at oaks cracked asunder and red where the flowering branch has fallen. I will go to Oxford Street and buy stockings for a party, I will do the usual things under the lightning flash. On the bare ground I will pick violets and bind them together and offer them to Percival, something given him by me. Look at what Percival has given me. Look at the street now that Percival is dead. The houses are lightly founded to be puffed over by a breath of air. Reckless and random the cars race and roar and hunt us to death like bloodhounds. I am alone in a hostile world. The human face is hideous. This is to my liking. I want publicity and violence and to be dashed like a stone on the rocks. I like factory chimneys and cranes and lorries. I like the passing of face and face and face, deformed, indifferent. I am sick of prettiness; I am sick of privacy. I ride rough waters and shall sink with no one to save me. [54]

It is worth noticing some of the images in this passage which have been used previously or will be used again, and on what occasions. I have been able to compile the following list, although this does not claim to be exhaustive. I am particularly interested,

[54] Virginia Woolf, The Waves, p.135-6

for the sake of the analysis which follows, in the second paragraph.

line 1 image of the puddle : also used on p.54

line 5 image of "something hard" : also used on p.22
line 9 image of shadow : also used p.7, 120
line 9 image of purple light : also used p.27, 120

line 10 image of the figure : also used on p.38, 198, 199, 233
line 10 phrase "robed in beauty" also used on p.38, 91, 198, 199, 233
line 12 phrase "steep-backed hills" : also used on p.91, 119
line 20 image of violets : also used p.120
line 31 image of "rough waters" : also used p.14, 36

What we are interested in is not the fact of these recurrences so much as the effect of them. It seems that in a passage like this the recurrences on this local level in the prose are not really attempting to create an effect of time or rememberance so much as a wider aesthetic effect. Some critics have resorted to an analogy with music in an attempt to describe the effect of this prose in The Waves. Analogies between one art and another are a very indirect method of describing a work, but in this case the connection seems inevitable. The cumulative allusiveness achieved in this prose by Virginia Woolf is very similar to that described by T.S. Eliot in his essay "The Music of Poetry" and put into practice in Four Quartets. As with the phrasing, themes and harmonies of a piece of music, the images and phrases of the prose in The Waves accumulate evocative and imaginative power through being used in association with some emotional context. Thus, when they are alluded to again, either in their original form or in some transmutation of it, they generate the emotional suggestions and

associations which they have previously accreted. This kind of imaginative recall is in some ways purely aesthetic in its effect. Virginia Woolf weaves her images and phrases together, in her own words "never making them work out, only suggest" on the level of poetic allusiveness.

Thus, our response to and understanding of the details of each passage of prose in The Waves is increasingly conditioned by what we have read before. The sharpness and distinctiveness of Virginia Woolf's figurative language allows her to do this successfully: we are able to remember earlier images quite clearly, or they linger in the imagination, so that when they return later an imaginative or emotional effect is generated. We can illustrate something of this effect with reference to the monologue by Rhoda, though it needs to be stressed that the effect is cumulative within the whole book and difficult to isolate in any one passage outside of a whole reading of the novel.

Rhoda is the most isolated and the most exposed of the characters in The Waves, a dreamer trying and failing to hide from the material realities of life around her. Unlike Louis, she cannot build any bulwark of protection: she suffers continually throughout the novel and finally commits suicide.[55] At this point in the novel it is midday, the middle of life when the sun burns "uncompromising and undeniable" [56] and everything is made fearfully plain: Rhoda is thus given no opportunity for escape

[55] Virginia Woolf, The Waves, p.241

[56] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.126

from the "uncompromising and undeniable" fact of death, the death of Percival. To express Rhoda's insecurity and fear Virginia Woolf picks up images which have been used before to express this same quality in Rhoda as a child, the images of the puddle and the corridors, both of which developed from Rhoda's fear of falling into nothingness. She is now faced, as she was as a child, by a puddle which she cannot cross: the "puddle" here, however, is her realisation of death as a fact, a realisation which has come about through the death of Percival; and her consequent fear is thus similar to that she had as a child but on a much larger scale - an ontological fear for her own existence. She sees the "puddle" (death), hears the great grindstone of the implacable forces of life, and fears that she will be blown into nothingness. She cannot accept or accommodate herself to the fact of death. She needs some help, something by which to stabilise her attempt to cross this gulph as she was stabilised by a brick wall when she had to cross the puddle as a child. The "brick" which she finds occurs later in the monologue from which this extract comes: she goes into a concert hall and hears a string quartet which seems to give the world order again, the order of art and the aesthetic vision, "a perfect dwelling-place".[57] As so often is the case in The Waves, this monologue enacts the search from some order amid the seeming chaos of experience.

This first paragraph, then, shows Rhoda at a moment of

[57] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.139

crisis, and Virginia Woolf precipitates out a number of the latent images associated with Rhoda. What we perhaps notice above all is that these images are used metaphorically to express Rhoda's crisis. Rhoda is here faced by a metaphorical "puddle" and seeks a metaphorical "brick": images from the actuality of the fictional world are being transformed into metaphors for particular states of mind; just as, at the very end of the passage, the image of "riding rough waters" is a metaphoric translation of Rhoda's basin of rose leaves which she plays with in the first part of the novel.

Rhoda's first reaction to the question she poses herself - "What, then, can I touch? What brick, what stone?" - is to despair of finding any way of accommodating to the new view of life thrust upon her. Virginia Woolf expresses her disillusionment in the next paragraph, which depends quite heavily upon the presence of images which have already made an appearance in The Waves. It would not be too extreme to say that much of the emotional effect of this paragraph results from the imaginative suggestiveness generated by these recurrences, together with a careful use of rhythm and cadence. The purple light that slants down is an image picked up seemingly on the spur of the moment from an earlier passage concerning Rhoda's schooldays. In its original context it referred to the purple light from Miss Lambert's ring; but here it seems to have a wider connotation of fate and decline. This purple light image was used in the Hampton Court passage too,

in connection with the image of the shadow slanting: in that passage, as Percival entered Rhoda had simultaneously a sense of celebration (she imagines a festival in celebration of the "beloved" - Percival), and of imminent decay: as the "procession" passes she and Louis are "aware of down-falling, we forebode decay. The shadow slants." [58] The shadow itself was one of the first images to be planted in the opening section of the novel: as the children are out in the garden" 'A shadow falls on the path', said Louis, 'like an elbow bent.'" [59] In the original context it probably literally refers to the shadow of Mrs. Constable, perhaps coming to gather the children up into the house. But it obviously has the latent note of fate even in that original setting, with the additional suggestion of time as the shadow moves with the sun. In the particular passage that we are concerned with, the major event or act of fate in the novel (the death of Percival) has happened - "The shadow has fallen". The image is recalled with a momentary finality which embodies Rhoda's disillusion.

Closely allied to both the shadow and purple light images in this context is the image of the figure. Like the purple light, the figure image developed from Rhoda's admiration of Miss Lambert and is used earlier in the novel as a romantic archetype symbolising beauty for Rhoda. The figure of the statue robed in beauty signifies to Rhoda "a world immune from change"[60],

[58] Virginia Woolf, The Waves, p.120

[59] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.7

[60] Virginia Woolf, ibid., p.91

an eternal perfection which remains despite the arbitrariness of life. But the death of Percival destroys for Rhoda this faith in an immutable perfection which exists even though all else seems chaos. The figure is now "clothed in ruin". The modulation upon the image evokes Rhoda's disillusionment with an imaginative suggestiveness which I can only compare to the recurrence of a musical theme or harmony in the minor key after its original presentation in the major key. The image recurs like a ghost at later points in the novel, but always now with a sense of momentariness rather than with the implicit permanence prior to the death of Percival. What we see in Rhoda is a change from a belief that beauty exists to a realisation that beauty exists and is destroyed; it exists only momentarily within the flux of life and, as her despair suggests, is in danger of being subsumed altogether under chaos. Part of the effective communication of this theme comes from the cadencing achieved by the modulation in sentence three upon the sentence structure of sentence two.

2) The figure (S) / that was robed (a) in beauty / is now clothed (A) in ruin.

3) The figure (S) / that stood (a1) in the groove /

where the steepbacked hills come down (a2) /

falls in ruin (A) /

The simple structure of subject (S), adjectival clause (a), adjunct (A) in sentence two is modulated in sentence three with two adjectival clauses, thus delaying the completion of the sense whilst following the structure exactly. Even more contributory to the effectiveness is the careful repetition of rhythms. Just taking primary stresses, the second sentence gives the following pattern:

2) The figure that was robed in beauty is now clothed in ruin.

whilst the third sentence modulates this pattern in the following manner

3) The figure that stood in the groove
where the steep-backed hills come down falls in ruin.

The second sentence creates two complementary groups of three primary stresses. The third sentence retains this pattern but does so by using the interpolated clause "where the steep-backed hills come down", thus allowing the heavy emphasis and shortening to two stresses in the last part of the sentence "falls in ruin".

The use of a coupled image (in this case the shadow, the purple light, and the figure) together with the careful rhythmic phrasing has the effect of striking an <u>unconscious</u> imaginative chord in the reader's mind. It perhaps needs stressing that much of the aesthetic effect of such prose <u>is</u> unconscious: as one reads the imagery and rhythms

work upon the imagination in a way difficult to define accurately since we may doubt whether it is noticeable consciously. The sense one gets is of things "in play", of things being triggered off in one's imagination, a sense of fragments being built up into a whole without necessarily being able or wanting to define what those fragments are. The previous analysis is not of course necessary to an appreciation of each passage in The Waves: it is simply put forward as an attempt to define the way in which the prose works in a manner akin to music or a manner akin to that of T.S. Eliot's Four Quartets.[61] One might do the same with any passage from the novel, with greater or lesser success depending on one's choice; but it is nevertheless worth recognising that this kind of aesthetic effect is a vital part of the impact and that far from being the "futile counterpointing" [62] that M.C. Bradbrook describes, it has dramatic and aesthetic justifications within the fictional world created in this novel. The peculiar and compulsive imaginative resonance evoked by the recurrent figurative language has its most vital rôle to play in the building up of fragments into a

[61] I associate The Waves with Eliot's Four Quartets because (among other things) the monologue/reverie form as it is used in The Waves seems to share with many of the movements of the Quartets the essential nature of "poetic meditation": not only are the themes (and even some of the imagery) very similar; we also may find the very same use of recurrent motifs for this same aesthetic purpose, what Eliot defines as "allusiveness" and poetic "music": "The music of a word is, so to speak, at a point of intersection: it arises from its relation first to the words immediately preceding and following it, and indefinitely to the rest of its context;" ("The Music of Poetry", On Poetry and Poets, Faber (1967). This small point is just another fragment in the endlessly intriguing literary relationship between Virginia Woolf and Eliot.

[62] M.C. Bradbrook, as in n.45 above.

whole which Bernard's final monologue achieves. Virginia Woolf's two year familiarity with her "notes for a book" allowed her to be light and deft in the final writing: the way in which Bernard's monologue ranges over the whole canvas of the book testifies to the fluent yet saturated prose which Virginia Woolf utilises. The very nature of the prose coupled with the nature of that final monologue embodies in itself the essence of Virginia Woolf's vision. The way in which Bernard's monologue summons together and builds up a whole out of fragments may be taken as dramatising her central concern with the elusive search to rescue a momentary order from chaos, an eternal from the transient, in a manner which she herself may best be left to describe. Writing in A Room of One's Own of a hypothetical female novelist of the future, Virginia Woolf makes the following demand before bestowing her approval:

> no abundance or fineness of perception would avail unless she could build up out of the fleeting and the personal the lasting edifice which remains unthrown. I had said that I would wait until she faced herself with 'a situation'. And I meant by that until she proved by summoning, beckoning and getting together that she was not a skimmer of surfaces merely, but had looked beneath into the depths. Now is the time, she would say to herself, when without doing anything violent I can show the meaning of all this. And she would begin - how unmistakable that quickening is - beckoning and summoning, and there would rise up in the memory, half forgotten, perhaps, quite trivial things in other chapters dropped by the way. And she would make their presence felt while someone sewed or smoked a pipe as naturally as possible, and one would feel, as she went on writing, as if one had gone to the top of the world and seen it laid out, very majestically, beneath. [68]

[68] Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own, Penquin (1967), p.92

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