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IN WORKS BY THREE MODERN BRITISH
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THE THEME OF THE ARTIST'S ISOLATION IN WORKS
BY THREE MODERN BRITISH NOVELISTS

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THE THEME OF THE ARTIST'S ISOLATION IN WORKS
BY THREE MODERN BRITISH NOVELISTS

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THE THEME OF THE ARTIST'S ISOLATION IN WORKS
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Until the twentieth century witnessed the phenomenon of totalitarianism, isolation had seemed a persistent fact of the human condition. The theme of isolation has found countless forms of literary expression, ranging from its various presentations as a moral situation in the actual world to its projections into the radical terms of the imagination--the golden dream of independence and fulfilled desire and the gothic nightmare of alienation and total frustration. A legacy of nineteenth-century romanticism, the theme was transformed by the cataclysmic events of the first quarter of this century and assumed gigantic dimensions as the loss of spiritual communion among societies and, esoterically, as implied superiority of artistic perception. Culture in ferment provided artists with new perspectives, materials, techniques, and dramatic potentialities for dealing with the theme.

Generally, the British novel through the twenties

comprehended the theme as vigorous dramatic tension between the individual and society, usually from the point of view of the individual. Two major writers of this era, James Joyce and D. H. Lawrence, are generally recognized as representing the extremes in the tradition of modern British fiction and as tremendous influences on subsequent literature on the Continent and in America as well: Joyce, the cerebral reconstructor of myth and protractor of symbol, and Lawrence, the "mystical primitive" and deifier of sex; these are their cliché images. By necessity of the prevailing conditions of the cultural milieu and by choice, both writers confronted the question of isolation, in their lives and art, and grasped its complexity in essentially different ways. However, both saw isolation as necessary and absolute. Their acceptance of the condition, the tragic loss it involves, and its artistic advantages was prior to their writing: as a literary theme, isolation sparks a narrative with bristling dramatic tension; and, as a condition of the artist, it affords a new way of seeing for in a deracinated world, loss through isolation is the only legal tender for objectivity and self-knowledge.

However, the theme of isolation subsequently disappears, at least in its earlier forms, in the fiction of George Orwell, who belongs, tangentially, in the British tradition with Shaw, Wells, Huxley, and Bennett, but who shares more clearly and immediately the vision of the

European political novelists of the thirties and forties, specifically, Malraux, Silone, and Koestler. These novelists saw the submergence of a "human society" (with its moral categories) and the annihilation of the individual consciousness by the entrance into history of a "mass consciousness," perpetrated on the world most violently by the new totalitarian systems--particularly Russian Communism, Italian Fascism, and German Nazism--and prepared for by history. Along with the shift of emphasis by these later, political writers--from individual motives, behavior, and values to the event of systematic and valueless domination and subjugation of the human world by prior political force (sanctioned by the "cult of history" which supersedes "mere" classes and individuals)--they assimilated the modes and devices of journalism in their desire for immediacy and urgency but also detachment and distance in their writing. This technical assimilation, stimulated primarily by their direct participation in political movements and ultimate disenchantment or their actual imprisonment under totalitarian conditions, significantly qualified the form of the novel and, correlatively, reflected an important thematic transformation.

Extending the tradition of these political writers, Orwell is apparently unique in modern British fiction, being the only British novelist of his time whose imagination was engaged primarily by the consequences of totalitarianism on

the individual sensibility in a country that was, actually, relatively free of totalitarian domination. In his essay on Arthur Koestler, he states that the success and convincing power of Darkness at Noon depends on Koestler's firsthand experience of totalitarianism. He observes that the bulk of English writing on this subject is so "dull or slick, so dishonest or naive because there is almost no English writer to whom it has happened to see totalitarianism from the inside."¹ But this had happened to Orwell. As Voorhees notes,

He had fought in the Republican trenches and in the streets of Spanish cities; he had been badly wounded; if he had not come as close to being shot by the Communists in a prison yard as Koestler had come to being shot by the Fascists, he had come close enough; certainly,² he had been forced to flee across the Spanish frontier.

These assumptions constitute the basis of my examination of the theme of isolation of the artist in novels about artists by James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, and George Orwell. Specifically, this study centers on the isolation of the artist, intrinsically, as theme and technique in their novels and, extrinsically, as conditions of their lives and of the cultural milieu. Correlative purposes are to define the positions of these writers in the broad

¹George Orwell, Critical Essays (London: Secker and Warburg, 1946), p. 131.

²Richard J. Voorhees, The Paradox of George Orwell (Purdue University Studies, Humanities Series; Lafayette: Purdue Research Foundation, 1961), p. 59.

tradition of modern British fiction (and in the case of Orwell, of Continental fiction) and to identify their uniqueness as artists. Therefore, I propose to consider the writers and their novels contextually, basing the choice of contexts on esthetic qualities peculiar to the work of each, on intellectual and personal influences on him, on conditions of his life, and on contemporary cultural and political facts. My intention is to indicate the importance of the theme of the artist's isolation in modern British novels that extend roughly through the first half of the twentieth century and that deal variously, yet representatively and crucially, with the theme.

Chapter I introduces the theme and includes a working definition of isolation; a summary of its cultural, historical, and esthetic sources and changes in this century; a discussion of its relation to the biographies and visions of the three novelists; and an identification of the general contextual patterns which may best define the theme in their work. Chapters II, III, and IV are examinations of the novels: Chapter II deals with Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist As a Young Man and Ulysses; Chapter III, with Lawrence's Sons and Lovers; and Chapter IV with Orwell's Keep the Aspidistra Flying.

The cleavage between life and letters early in the twentieth century was deep; and the precipitating revolution in morals and art which dramatizes this split records the

collapse of belief in most forms of public life and the concomitant emergence of new technical and thematic possibilities for the artist. A familiar portrait of the sensitive individual is the culture-ridden, Prufrockean wretch, deprived of myth and incapable of making fundamental insights into the nature of his world or himself. Another view is of the artist--proudly aloof, outraged, despairing, or hostile--the self-exiled seer who rejects traditional values, takes unprecedented risks with the social and moral forms of his own age, and vents his Christ-like martyrdom in cryptic patterns of what seems, in the popular view, to be alien, violent distortions of language and life; and, in the esoteric view, an heroic realization of moral and intellectual superiority.

Somewhere between these two views, or possibly in their juxtaposition, lies the "reality" sought by most early modern British writers. In the mainstream of British fiction, the artist generally focused his attention on the response of the individual to the assaults of an increasingly decadent, morally stifling, and esthetically disfiguring society and on the consequences of such assault in terms of isolation in both its aspects--necessary alienation and potential freedom. Many of the best novels of the first two decades of the century are stories of the survival, deformation, or destruction of individuality; examples are included in works by Conrad, Woolf, Joyce, and Lawrence.

In a world of receding values, the artist confronts a formidable enemy. When moral communication among individuals is impossible, a society they comprise has no center from which individual and social perspectives can be aligned. Then social action becomes outrage directed against individuals; and, conversely, any real individuality becomes social insanity. Merely to comprehend reality under such conditions requires an almost heroic effort, and artistic comprehension approaches the monumental. The artist must accommodate himself to the loss of a spiritual community and, at the same time, contact myth and revise it for the modern sensibility or find a substitute for it in some communicable, rationally meaningful way, such as stylization of language itself, the projection of action in violent and abstract ways, or the concentration of emotion in clear and economically constructed images.

The culmination of the gradual exhaustion of spiritual and real frontiers is marked best perhaps by World War I, when young men experienced the paralyzing fact of the complete disparity between abstract idealism and the real horrors they found in carnage of war and in the dehumanized societies to which they returned. The symbolic significance of the War will perhaps remain incalculable. As Hannah Arendt remarks,

It is almost impossible even now to describe what actually happened in Europe on August 4, 1914. The days before and the days after the first World War are

separated not like the end of an old and the beginning of a new period, but like the day before and the day after an explosion.³

If the full implications of the War as a demarcation between the old and new orders cannot be assessed with certainty, at least an understanding of some of the circumstances attending it can help to illuminate some of its symbolic features. For one thing, it marked the collapse of the nation-state and the rights of man. The recently organized European democracies and the entire political system of the Continent were thrown into such instability that they were vulnerable to the internal forces of destruction roused in desperate efforts of entire nations merely to survive, to the deracinating consequences of mass migrations of people whose home countries had been erased by treaties, to the devastation wrought by twenty years of civil wars, and to the deliberate opportunism of the totalitarian leaders, Hitler, Stalin, and their lesser counterparts.

The actual pattern of the war reflects its symbolic accomplishment in the complete destruction of traditional systems and conventional frames of reference. Stuart Hughes' summary is apt:

It demonstrated a failure of strategy and of military technique on a gigantic and unprecedented scale. In its bungling, infinitely wasteful character, it was more like the American Civil War than like its predecessors or successor among European conflicts. And like the Civil War, it soon became a war of attrition which,

³Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1958), p. 267.

after four long years of slaughter and discouragement, finally was to end only because one side gave out of men and material, overwhelmed by the numerical and industrial superiority of its adversary.⁴

Certainly, Churchill's comment indicates his perception of the war as the transformation of, presumably, a rationally explicable human world into a demonic maze without rational signposts, where political and moral consequences were no longer calculable by ordinary humanistic standards:

Events passed away very largely outside the scope of conscious choice. Governments and individuals conformed to the rhythms of the tragedy, and swayed and staggered forward in helpless violence, slaughtering and squandering on ever-increasing scales.⁵

The shock of the War was paralleled in the art world and is distilled in Virginia Woolf's remark that "on or about December 1910 human nature changed."⁶ As Walter Allen notes,

Her choice of date was not arbitrary. December 1910 was the date of the post-Impressionist paintings organized by her friends Roger Fry and Desmond MacCarthy It proclaimed that Impressionism was dead and that a well-established movement in vigorous reaction against it was in existence, rescuing the object from the circumambient air and light into which the Impressionists had all but dissolved it.⁷

Among the many significant events which helped to center attention on the individual in both aspects of his isolation

⁴H. Stuart Hughes, Contemporary Europe: A History (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1961), p. 37.

⁵Ibid., pp. 37-8. Hughes, quoting Winston Churchill.

⁶Walter Allen, The English Novel (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1954), p. 410.

⁷Ibid.

were the publication of Henri Bergson's Creative Evolution in 1907; significant expansion of Sir James Frazer's anthropological work; the founding of the Imagist Movement in poetry in 1908; the spread of the psychoanalytic work of Freud and his tour with Jung in 1909; and the first English translations of the influential Russians--Chekhov in 1909 and Dostoevsky in 1912.

If the First World War signalled the end of a world order, it also heralded the beginning of another, which was generated partly out of the political chaos that followed the bad peace and thus created an ideal climate for the growth of fascism and nazism on the Continent, totalitarian forms which had been prepared for by historical circumstance. However, an attendant political event, partly a correlative to and partly a consequence of the War, the Russian Revolution, inspired first a hopeful myth of social and individual reconciliation and a short-lived, fashionable attraction for Bolshevism among intellectuals all over the world, but soon hardened into the totalitarian system, Russian Communism. Although the modern origins of human displacement and "mass consciousness" can be traced at least as far back as the Industrial Revolution and the breakdown of class structures in Western culture, World War I and the Russian Revolution symbolize the literal transformation of these phenomena from partial, particular, and potential conditions to total, general, and actual ones, engulfing virtually all of Europe

and impressing on the entire civilized world the observable and existential significance of wholesale terror and the inevitable empirical and esthetic consequences for collective and individual human action and the creative imagination.

Hannah Arendt distinguishes between isolation, an extreme condition in a world still essentially human, and loneliness, a later, post-totalitarian condition marked by complete moral devaluation:

Isolation is that impasse into which men are driven when the political sphere of their lives, where they act together in the pursuit of a common concern, is destroyed. In isolation, man remains in contact with the world as the human artifice; only when the most elementary form of human creativity, which is the capacity to add something of one's own to the common world, is destroyed, isolation becomes altogether unbearable. . . . Totalitarian government, like all tyrannies, certainly could not exist without destroying the public realm of life, that is, without destroying, by isolating men, their political capacities. But totalitarian domination as a form of government is new in that it is not content with this isolation and destroys private life as well. It bases itself on loneliness, on the experience of not belonging to the world at all, which is among the most radical and desperate experiences of man. . . . To be uprooted means to have no place in the world, recognized and guaranteed by others; to be superfluous means not to belong to the world at all. [*Italics mine*] . . . What prepares men for totalitarian domination in the non-totalitarian world is the fact that loneliness, once a border-line experience usually suffered in certain marginal social conditions like old age, has become an everyday experience of the evergrowing masses of our century.⁸

The widespread condition of isolation in the final stages of its human manifestations achieved perhaps its clearest articulation in the era of Joyce and Lawrence. But the completed transformations in culture, technology, morality,

⁸Arendt, p. 478.

and art accomplished a devaluation of human drama and the mechanical value of force. This ultimate condition is totalitarianism in the human realm, and I propose an extension of the definition of totalitarianism from its strict meaning as a political system to include a condition that can and does exist on all levels of human experience in which the irrational and essentially anti-human forces have subverted the rational and humanistic patterns of behavior and human intercourse generally. Such a definition is consistent with Hannah Arendt's description: "Totalitarian movements are mass organizations of atomized, isolated individuals," and "their most conspicuous external characteristic is their demand for total, unrestricted, unconditional, and unalterable loyalty of the individual member. . . . Such loyalty can be expected only from the completely isolated human being who, without any other social ties to family, friends, comrades, or even mere acquaintances, derives his sense of having a place in the world only from his belonging to a movement. . . . Total loyalty is possible only when fidelity is emptied of all concrete content, from which changes of mind might naturally arise."⁹

In this century, two forms of totalitarianism emerged, nazism from historical circumstances, which culminated in catastrophe, and Russian Communism, imposed artificially in the name of Socialism. The first rose immediately out of

⁹Ibid., p. 324.

the frustration of efforts to reconstruct German society after the World War and the opportunistic infusion by mass leaders of old social and moral forms with new feeling. Hitler's special appeals were to nationalism, racism, and German "tradition" generally. The other, Russian Communism, implanted the ideals of Socialism and replaced the old aristocratic reference-frame for authority with a technological and economic one. In either case, ideals, ideas, or cults superseded the human personality; and, consequently, drama (significant force, power, or tension) in human terms was rendered meaningless.

Science in this century has kept pace with political history. Modern relativity and field theories have "dispensed with the notion of force except as a formula to indicate the appearance of objects together in a field . . . as only a name for the conditions under which things exist together. . . . Nothing could more effectively dismiss the romantic belief in freedom, individualism, and the importance of the decisive act--the heroism of Ahab and creatures whose destiny seemed in their own power."¹⁰

Thus, as in post-Einsteinian science, the "field" in post-totalitarian art (no longer a dramatic arena) "has become more important than the objects in the field: The notion of 'togetherness' has cosmic import,"¹¹ and the new

¹⁰Wyllie Sypher, Rococo to Cubism in Art and Literature (New York: Vintage Books, 1963), p. 325.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 326-27.

art is "a sign of a new law of necessity (ananke) that is thoroughly anti-romantic, assigning fatality to a very negative meaning in a totalitarian world . . . and with its aspect of neutrality, its resignation of what is individual or even personal, may be read as a recent form of despair or of a loss of a sense of freedom."¹² What seems left to the artists following the "renaissance" of the twenties is a "reality having an infinity of profiles: profiles that appear only by accident and are constantly mobile," and threatened with "being devoured in space by light."¹³

The monumental despair in the face of such utter frustration is reflected in Ignazio Silone's novel Fontamara. Set in Italy during the Mussolini era, the story is of the helpless, socially ineffectual, and culturally impoverished Italian farmers, whose already woefully burdened lives are completely crushed by fascist predators and by their own ineptness. The action involves a socialist-fascist encounter rendered in extremely ironic terms. Although the farmers are ignorant, they are not insensitive; and in their hopeless and sometimes comic quest for justice, in the willingness of their most courageous individuals to fight the System for the preservation of sacred (but prostituted) ideals; and in the final displacement of the farmers from their land, we have the last stages of destruction in the mass movement. It

¹²Ibid., p. 330.

¹³Ibid.

leaves the individual homeless and fully prepared for annihilation, yet profoundly indifferent to his destruction.

Irving Howe believes that George Orwell's 1984 is a "model of the totalitarian state in its 'pure' or 'essential' form and a vision of what this state can do to human life.

. . . [its theme is] the conflict between ideology and emotion and projects a nightmare in which politics has displaced humanity and the state has stifled society."¹⁴ Significantly, Orwell's earlier novels deal with the domination of individuals by systems--religion in The Clergyman's Daughter, industrialization in Coming Up for Air, and economics in Keep the Aspidistra Flying; 1984, then, seems to carry the vision behind the earlier works to its logical conclusion.

In his essay "Inside the Whale," Orwell asserts that the non-political British novelists and poets writing in the first two decades of the twentieth century (including Joyce and Lawrence), were conservative, if not actually reactionary, in their lack of direct political involvements, in their avoidance of central political emphasis in their art, and in their concentration on "moral-religious-cultural" themes. In an age prior to international depression and the ascension of the new totalitarian states, Orwell proclaims, "cosmic despair" flourishes best; and "disillusionment" is a fashion

¹⁴Irving Howe, Politics and the Novel (New York: Meridian Books, 1957), pp. 238-39.

that artists can afford after "moral and religious tabus of all descriptions had vanished, and the cash was rolling in."¹⁵ From Orwell's vantage of retrospection and conditioning political propensity, one can perceive in the concern of these writers to preserve the individual, to protect the integrity of his consciousness, and to portray his dramatic clash with a hostile, rapidly de-humanized and de-humanizing society, the heroic effort to acknowledge the validity of a world conceived in human terms--a world which, in political, sociological, technological, psychological, philosophical, and esthetic fact, was quickly becoming obsolete. (Ironically, Orwell attempts the same thing in his fiction.)

Granting possible esthetic qualifications regarding Orwell's judgment that Joyce and Lawrence belong in a residual "art-for-art's-sake" group or that they exude in their art and lives a "twilight-of-the-gods" aura, one can concede a significant degree of validity to his observation that what is noticeable about the twenties generation of English writers is the lack of attention

to the urgent problems of the moment [i.e., immediate political history], above all, no politics in the narrow sense. Our eyes are directed to Rome, to Byzantium, to Montparnasse, to Mexico, to the Etruscans, to the Sub-conscious, to the solar-plexus--to everywhere except the places where things are actually happening. When one looks back at the twenties, nothing is queerer than the way in which every important event in Europe escaped the notice of the English intelligentsia. The Russian Revolution, for instance, all but vanishes from the

¹⁵George Orwell, A Collection of Essays (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1954), pp. 235-36.

English consciousness between the death of Lenin and the Ukraine famine--about ten years. Throughout those years Russia means Tolstoy, Dostoevski, and exiled counts driving taxi-cabs. Italy means picture-galleries, ruins, churches, and museums--but not Black-shirts. Germany means films, nudism, and psycho-analysis--but not Hitler, of whom hardly anyone had heard until 1931. In "cultured" circles art-for-art's-saking extended practically to a worship of the meaningless. Literature was supposed to consist solely in the manipulation of words. To judge a book by its subject matter was the unforgivable sin, and even to be aware of its subject matter was looked on as a lapse of taste.¹⁶

It is not esthetically illuminating to view the work of the writers of the twenties as evasive and defensive; but it is, probably, historically valid and critically helpful to see them as defenders of a crumbling world order. They wrote of isolation in its most radical form--in the final stages of individual possibilities in a conceivably human world.

Similarly, it is historically and critically necessary to distinguish Joyce and Lawrence (in what Orwell calls the "Joyce-Eliot" or 1910-1920 group) from the school of writers of the 1930-35 era, who were stimulated by the new political climate. As Orwell puts it in "Inside the Whale,"

Suddenly we have got out of the twilight of the gods into a sort of Boy Scout atmosphere of bare knees and community singing. The typical literary man ceases to be a cultured expatriate with a leaning toward the Church, and becomes an eager-minded schoolboy with a leaning toward communism. If the keynote of the twenties is 'tragic sense of life,' the keynote of the new writers is 'serious purpose.'¹⁷

Acknowledging the wide variations among talents, Orwell

¹⁶Ibid., p. 233.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 236.

recognizes in this group Auden, Spender, Day Lewis, MacNeice, Isherwood, Philip Henderson, and other, minor figures. He perceives that the general tendency of these writers, which distinguishes them from the twenties writers, is a shift in purpose from a relatively non-partisan emphasis to an emphatically partisan attitude: "In other words, 'purpose' has come back, the younger writers have 'gone into politics.'"¹⁸ Esthetically, the "emphasis then was more on technique and less on subject matter than it is now."¹⁹

Orwell seems essentially correct in his judgment that the cult of Bolshevism among the writers of the thirties (not only in Britain but also in America--basically industrialized countries), which Marxized literature, depended on a fundamentally romantized myopic and idealized vision of Communism: Orwell aptly calls it "the patriotism of the deracinated." The idealistic and humanistic notion of international socialism (brotherhood, comradeship, etc.) was hardly borne out in terms of actuality, as Communism degenerated into an instrument of Russian foreign policy."²⁰ Furthermore, there is considerable validity apparent in Orwell's belief that the literature inspired by the academically fashionable English version of Communism may reflect unconscious mental dishonesty: To people who have been

¹⁸Ibid., p. 237.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid., p. 239.

insulated from the violence and illegality of totalitarian governments by the security of English life and who are too young to have "effective memories of the Great War . . . such things as purges, secret police, summary executions, and imprisonment without trial . . . are too remote to be terrifying. They can swallow totalitarianism because they have had no experience of anything except liberalism."²¹

In contrast to such "political" writers, Orwell did experience something besides liberalism, including imperialism in Burma and the Fascist and Communist clash in the Spanish Civil War; and the impact of these and other political experiences on his life and art is registered cumulatively in the very special "autobiographical" nature of his writings --both documentary and literary: He knew the distortions of sentimental liberalism and its pro-totalitarian qualities as well as the central tendency of the new totalitarianism--a "systematic excess of 'reason' in destroying human values."²² In his writing, from Down and Out in Paris and London to 1984, a perception of at least potentially total domination of the individual by the institutional world constitutes a consistent basis for urgent dramatic tension.

Thus, like Malraux, Silone, and Koestler, Orwell was a writer whose imagination was dominated, but negatively, by the myths of nationalism and the new ideologies and was

²¹Ibid.

²²Howe, p. 250.

obliged to accept the breakdown of traditional society as a long-accomplished fact. Going beyond them, however, he conceived, most notably in his last work, 1984, the ultimate consequences of such breakdown--the efficient abolition of personality--and as Irving Howe recognizes, he imagines the possibility of "politics as nightmare." For him the artist in the modern world must avoid incorporating his political convictions directly into his work, for this transforms art into propaganda; but, at the same time, he must not capitulate to total domination by the "system" or "cult" of estheticism.

Thus, considering the vast and pervasive revolution in life and letters which defines the first half of this century, one finds the theme of isolation in fiction radically transformed. Consequently, an examination of this theme in the lives, thought, and art of Joyce, Lawrence, and Orwell must be based significantly on the historical causes and effects of such change as well as on the particular qualities and circumstances of their experience, thought, and esthetic expression. Because my purpose is to attempt a valid consideration of both dimensions, I propose to examine the works of these men in historically, thematically, and technically coherent contexts with a minimum of distortion.

Although a concrete clarification of the assumed pertinence and validity of my contextual explication of the novels depends on examination of the works themselves, to propose a generalized identification of controlling contexts

seems appropriate here: Because isolation as a condition posits a relationship typified by conflict between the individual and society, transcendence of a stultifying social world by the individual, domination of the individual by a political system, or possibly all of these in varying proportions, psychological and sociological significance is obviously inherent in a study of the isolation of the artist theme. Therefore, modern psychological theory and sociological (or political) implications in the work of the writers constitute two common bases for my examination of the novels. My concern is not to analyze the psychology and social accommodations of the writers nor to translate psychology and sociology directly into esthetic terms, but rather to employ these categories as impartially and flexibly as possible as aids to esthetic judgment of the novels. Roughly paralleling Freud's consideration of "metapsychology," the term he coined as "the final result of psychoanalytic research--the extension beyond the realm of therapy into the field of descriptive psychology,"²³ my study also incorporates descriptive stratagems from other realms of the history of ideas, such as Jung's theories of myth and archetype, Frazer's anthropological studies in sympathy and taboo, Marcuse's philosophic study of the alignment of individual and phylogenetic psychology, and

²³Frederick J. Hoffman, Freudianism and the Literary Mind (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1959), p. 16.

selected writings on totalitarianism. Specific contextual identification of the art, life, and thought of each writer requires an inductive approach; therefore, concrete contextual identifications will be part of the textual analyses in the chapters which follow.

Before I turn to the novels themselves, I shall now compare Joyce and Lawrence in a single preliminary discussion, because crucial conditions of their lives, ways of viewing the world, and important generic patterns in their artist-novels coincide in some ways and reveal antithetical qualities in others; therefore, an initial descriptive and comparative approach may allow the advantage of reciprocal critical illumination of their work and afford critical economy as well. The introduction to Orwell will be separate because he belongs to the "new order"; however, in order to account for continuity in the tradition from Joyce and, especially Lawrence, to Orwell, I shall compare and contrast Orwell with them.

James Joyce and D. H. Lawrence, both aware of the loss of myth to modern man and concerned with accommodating their art to an irrationality peculiar to modern experience, sought separate but esthetically valid ways of presenting individual consciousness objectively in their novels. Moreover, Joyce and Lawrence were self-committed expatriates who left their homes actually and symbolically. In each case the impulse was dual--a rejection of institutionalized

oppression and stultifying emotional demands on the one hand, and on the other, a search for new human and esthetic perspectives by distance. A Portrait of the Artist As a Young Man, the product of ten years' refining, took its final form after Joyce's removal from Dublin; and Sons and Lovers was completed during the peregrinations of Lawrence and Frieda on the Continent. Neither writer returned to settle in his native city, and the theme of isolation in his work was intimately related to a profound sense of his original displacement and perception of rootlessness as a condition of his life.

Also common to these men is the belief that any possibility for order or meaning in the human world resides ultimately with the individual. A Portrait of the Artist and Sons and Lovers are examples of the Künstlerroman and thus include the double theme of isolation. Both conclude with the artist-heroes in total moral separation from other human beings and in complete conscious rejection of the residual absolutes of their heritage. (The italics are intended to account for a necessary qualification in the case of Paul Morel; this will be clarified in the discussion of Sons and Lovers in Chapter III.) They are not just lonely; they are also free. But the condition is complex and awesome; for, like Faust and their creator-prototypes, they know that the loss is the price of their freedom.

As examples of the Künstlerroman, these novels, as

Harry Levin notes, "convey the claustral sense of a young intelligence swaddled in convention and constricted by poverty, and the intensity of its first responses to esthetic experience and life at large."²⁴ Levin contrasts Lawrence's warmth to Joyce's reserve and suggests that Lawrence's dwelling "on the attractions of life, and Joyce's on its repulsions" derive from the influences of the "very different institutions behind them--evangelical English protestantism and Irish Catholic orthodoxy."²⁵ They differ further, he suggests, in their methods of characterization: Lawrence's characters "seem to enjoy an independent existence; in A Portrait of the Artist they figure mainly in the hero's reveries and resentment." To illustrate, he cites the delineations of the heroes' mothers: May Dedalus is wraith-like "beside the full-bodied realization of Mrs. Morel."²⁶

Levin's observations aid in distinguishing between the visions and methods of Joyce and Lawrence; and, in quest of definitions, one may consider a variety of conventional pairs of opposites: Apollonian and Dionysian, Classical and Romantic, Catholic and Protestant, and so on. These categories are helpful, but remain too general, only partially valid, or misleading by their conventionality.

²⁴Harry Levin, James Joyce: A Critical Introduction (Norfolk: New Directions, 1960), pp. 42-3.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid.

Perhaps the most economical approach is to consider the thematic shapes of the two books since they center on the same basic narrative. Both are stories of the young man's coming to a sense of separation from his world and to an awareness of himself in his moral dislocation. Loosely, we may distinguish the methods of the authors by considering Joyce's deductive and Lawrence's inductive. All experience, personal and mythic, is sifted through the mind of Stephen Dedalus in A Portrait and is accommodated to his consciousness before it is made available to the reader. Consistently, Joyce uses the stream-of-consciousness device. Lawrence, on the other hand, constructs a fully and objectively drawn environment into which Paul Morel is born; and his sense of dislocation, unlike Stephen's infant awareness of isolation on page one of A Portrait, is only suggested in his congenital habit of knitting his brows. The conflicting forces in Paul's world are objectified before his birth; but not apparently to Paul's consciousness; they are a strong under-current in all the action. In A Portrait the reader is "inside" with Stephen, sharing his acceptance, bewilderment, sense of betrayal, and epiphanical revelations on an extremely conscious level and in cryptic but graphic terms. Lawrence's technique is to keep the reader "outside," not unaware of the conflicts, motivations, and thematic developments, but unconscious of them: the result is a sense of a submerged force of motivation below the surface of portrayed action.

If further labelling is necessary or helpful, I suggest, with apologies to Kenneth Burke, that Joyce's procedure may be thought of as an "internalizing of the external" and Lawrence's as an "externalizing of the internal." The conclusions of the two novels bear out these meanings: A Portrait ends with the entries of Stephen's diary; and Sons and Lovers with an external action--Paul turns from his morbid introspection and walks toward the lights of the town. These tags may be related respectively to the terms mythic and magical (which I prefer to primitive as descriptive of the technique in Sons and Lovers: the latter connotes unconscious art) to suggest a generalized basis for my discussion of the novels. The center of reality in Joyce's book is in the mind of Stephen Dedalus, and this is where the materials of the polar forces, myth and sense experience, converge--first, to assault the sensibility; then, to undergo a refining and synthesizing process through conscious assimilation; and, finally, to emerge as verbal objectification. The mind of Stephen is, thus, first a repository and then a generator of new meaning created by the intellectual and emotional synthesis. In contrast, Lawrence's reality retains grounding in the external world, whose objects are sparked with symbolic meaning and whose inhabitants are motivated by underground passions. The real exudes a sense of mystery and force like the animistic world of conventional romance; yet, it remains, naturalistically, aligned to

immediate experience. He relies on the symbolic value that art evokes from the external scene to impel action and convey thematic significance. Therefore, if one looks for the "flow" of experience in these two novels, he finds it in the mind of Stephen in A Portrait and in the dynamics of scene, character, and incident in Sons and Lovers.

Joyce expands his method in Ulysses, which continues the story of Stephen Dedalus as the artist in his youth--a state of "becoming"--but includes the narrative of Leopold Bloom, the man who is--the ironically heroic man of the modern world in his complete commitment to the reductive conditions of experience and in his acceptance of the terms of such existence, so far as he can understand them. Bloom's life intersects with that of Stephen, and in the crucial intersection, there is significance for both: for Bloom, not only the brief encounter with Stephen but also their co-existence in the narrative contribute paternal and esthetic dimensions to his being. Reciprocally, Bloom and his world affect Stephen both as artist and as the son in quest of his spiritual father.

In contrast to Joyce and Lawrence, Orwell ultimately sees the loss of individual consciousness as inevitable; he accepts, as accomplished fact, the failure of theoretical social and individual alignment to be realized in terms of actual experience. Also, unlike the lives of the earlier writers, his life was considerably like a homecoming, actually

and symbolically. Outraged by British imperialism in Burma, he resigned from his police job there, rather than return after a leave, and went back to England. Although he subsequently joined the ranks of the down-and-out in Paris and London and participated in the Spanish Civil War, his devout patriotism held him in England during the years of the Second World War. When he left again, shortly before his death, his primary reason was his failing health. Also consistently, Orwell, in contrast to Joyce and Lawrence, sought moral and esthetic perspective not by distance but by actual and immediate involvement in political experience and observation; his writing has, consequently, a markedly reportorial quality; and his fiction often has less esthetic displacement of autobiography than that of Joyce and Lawrence. He deals no less urgently with the theme of isolation than they, but his social thesis inevitably conditions his treatment of the theme.

Furthermore, whereas Joyce and Lawrence believed in human order and meaning as viable on an individual basis, Orwell acknowledged the power of a system to annihilate the single sensibility. His artist novel, Keep the Aspidistra Flying, concludes with Gordon Comstock's tragi-comic capitulation to the economic demands of the English social system, which from the beginning had countered his artistic aspirations with total denial. However, Orwell's special device for gaining distance from the situation of the artist-hero

is a sharply ironic treatment: not only is the system corrosive, but also his hero displays an irresponsible "estheticism." Neither does Orwell probe into the unconscious of his hero, as Joyce did deliberately and as Lawrence did implicitly. For Orwell, the condition of isolation is complex and frustrating, but also finally impossible in the sense that the isolation which is both freedom and alienation is absolutely disallowed by a money-worshipping society. In order to survive even physically, Gordon Comstock must give up his art; and if he is to expiate his "sin" of following his natural, sexual impulses by marrying his pregnant sweetheart, he must submit to the economic standard that "sanctifies" the institution of marriage.

Orwell's hero, too, is partly a self-portrait: not the artist as a youth, but a near parody of the more mature Orwell. It is almost as if the novelist is reminding himself that complete insistence on "artistic freedom" is only a kind of enslavement different from that of economics--and partly self-imposed enslavement, at that. Thus, Gordon Comstock resembles a fugitive, a little ridiculous, but deserving of sympathy, who finally surrenders his sensibility to the prior control of the institutional world because of his innate, fundamental decency.

Orwell's journalistic technique, which precludes any preoccupation with deep-seated, unconscious individual motivation, keeps him "outside" the characters and, therefore,

identifies and controls his peculiarly ironic perspective. If the terms Apollonian and Dionysian, Classical and Romantic, Catholic and Protestant, mythic and magical approximate, respectively, the visions and methods of Joyce and Lawrence, then existential or relativistic suggests Orwell's characteristic view and technique. Comstock is aware of his isolation, his moral dislocation, but he is also blindly irresponsible in his total, and partially abstract, rejection of the system world and in his inability to exercise financial discipline in an economically dominated society. Therefore, he is a "failure" by his own standards as well as by those of society before he submits to the system.

Orwell's "external" stance suggests a general resemblance to that of Lawrence, whose technique is narrative and whose treatment is objective; but Orwell remains closer to the surface of action and character, thereby maintaining greater distance from both the hero and the hero's world than Lawrence does in his evocative, symbolic treatment. Also like Lawrence, Orwell concludes his novel with the hero's "return" to society; but, in contrast to Paul Morel, who merely anticipates possibilities for new self-discovery in the world as he heads for the lights of the town, Gordon Comstock is forced to a complete surrender of his artist-identity and privacy. For Paul Morel, the question of freedom is left open; but not so for Gordon Comstock.

Orwell's comic treatment of a tragic ending is a way of understating the horror that such surrender implies. If one looks for a "center of reality" in the novel, he finds it, perhaps, between two terms of a paradox; for since society in the traditional sense no longer exists in Orwell's fictional world, domination by the morally valueless system world is registered on the appetites and nerve-endings of the individual; and the action assumes, ultimately, a stimulus-response effect. The profound and complex psychological tension between individuals and societies--both fundamentally human--has necessarily disappeared in Orwell's post-totalitarian esthetic; for his hero, freedom, privacy, isolation, are unquestionably mere illusions.

CHAPTER II

JAMES JOYCE: ART AND TRANSCENDENCE

The dual theme of the isolation of the artist-- freedom and alienation--is prominent in James Joyce's novels A Portrait of the Artist As a Young Man and Ulysses. Dominating the earlier novel, the theme is qualified in Ulysses; and the change corresponds to Joyce's expanding imagination and his technical development. In his description of the growth of Joyce's imagination, Richard Ellman calls it the gestation of the soul, an esthetic which assimilates and subsumes the linear, episodic technique of Stephen Hero and proceeds vertically--in layers of significance--instead of sequentially. According to Joyce's own distinctions among the stages of the artistic growth process, the lyric, the epic, and the dramatic, and in consistence with the mythic sub-structures which he chose for these two novels, A Portrait and Ulysses correspond respectively to the first two stages.

The Daedalus-Icarus figures are fused into the character Stephen Dedalus, whose isolation is comprehended in his emotional and intellectual synthesis of mythic and

personal experience and verbally objectified in the earlier novel. This technique has been described in Chapter I of this paper as an "internalizing of the external." Thus employing the stream-of-consciousness method, Joyce favors a "group of scenes radiating backwards and forwards"¹ in time as experience merges into, and subsequently emerges from, the mind of Stephen. In this novel Stephen, the proud young spiritual rebel, succeeds (or seems to succeed) in his willful flight beyond the nets of family, country, and religion to achieve his spiritual freedom. That this condition did not constitute for Joyce the ultimate or ideal state for the literary artist is implicit in the title of his novel; and he protested when critics sometimes failed to understand his qualification--the artist as a young man. He did not abandon the method he had used in A Portrait when he wrote Ulysses, but it becomes a secondary part of his more expansive, cubistic or "vertical" method in the later novel, which includes the presentation of the private and public thoughts and lives of Leopold Bloom and his wife, Molly, and the variegated life and historical burdens of Dublin. Nor did Joyce alter significantly the characterization of Stephen as the young artist in the later book. The Odyssey, an epic, forms the narrative basis for Ulysses; and Leopold Bloom, whom Joyce conceived and consciously created to

¹Richard Ellmann, James Joyce (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 307.

overshadow Stephen as hero; Molly; and the public life of Dublin not only allow Joyce to protract the theme of isolation of the artist but also to resolve it as a spiritual or transcendental reconciliation between the aloof-artist-son and the "everyman-noman"-father within the confusion of a modern city.

My purpose in this chapter is to analyze the theme of the artist's isolation in A Portrait and Ulysses. I propose to define the ideological contexts for each inductively, as the thematic, narrative, and technical bases of the novels demand. Because A Portrait precedes Ulysses in date of complete composition and because the latter is a thematic and technical sequel to the former, I shall examine A Portrait first, in some depth, for it is the story of how the artist becomes self-exiled. The analysis of Ulysses will not be as exhaustive an explication: since my interest centers on the artist's isolation, I intend, rather, to consider the isolated conditions of the mutual foils, Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom, and the method and meaning of their reconciliation as son and father and as artist and non-artist. The larger epic structure of the novel I shall discuss more generally.

The double meaning of isolation is latent in the Daedalus-Icarus myth, the sub-structure of A Portrait. The episode of the flight of the artificer-father and his impetuous, over-confident son climaxes with the death of

Icarus and concludes with the "afflicted father," Daedalus, arriving safely in Sicily, "where he was received kindly by the king."² Appropriating this myth, Joyce combines the youthful rashness and impetuosity of Icarus with the artist identity of Daedalus in the character of Stephen Dedalus. This complex of identity and skeleton narrative are assimilated with the boy's immediate, sensory, psychological, and cultural experience. In the old myth, the isolation-freedom complex is clear in the death of Icarus; in Daedalus's loss of his son; and in his escape from the labyrinth, successful flight, and subsequent asylum in Sicily.

Since the father and son (artist and youth) are united in the figure of Stephen, the loss is an inner one as well as a real one and can perhaps be examined best within a psychological context. In his discussion of the child-archetype, Carl Jung considered its essential features of pastness, presentness, and futurity.³ In terms of the past, the child-motif represents the "pre-conscious childhood aspect" of the race; hence, it is a vestigial link to the instinctual roots of life. As a feature of the present, it is a corrective to the "one-sidedness and extravagances of the conscious mind."⁴ The child is, finally, potential future

²Edith Hamilton, Mythology (New York: The New American Library, 1940), p. 140.

³Carl Jung, Psyche and Symbol: A Selection from the Writings of Carl Jung, ed. Violet S. deLaszo (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1958), p. 124.

⁴Ibid., pp. 125-26.

and "paves the way for a future change of personality. In the individuation process, it anticipates the figure that comes from the synthesis of conscious and unconscious elements in the personality. It is, therefore, a unifying symbol which unites the opposites; a mediator, bringer of healing, that is, one who makes whole."⁵

Jung's description of the child-archetype takes on great significance in view of the conditions of the human world that Stephen is born to; and several key manifestations of childhood and child-likeness in A Portrait are perverted or perverting in one way or another. This indicates some kind of mutation of the child-past and-present. The infant Stephen, by intuition, suffers a morbid awareness not only of his isolation from his father, but also of what appears to be a sense of the father's grotesqueness: "his father looked at him through a glass: he had a hairy face." This establishes the sense of separation between generations and indicates an inner distortion of Stephen's child-identity. The distortion is further shown in the boy's super-refined, neurotic revulsion of things physical--the fat boy in the shower and the earthiness of the priests are two of many examples. Although this reaction to carnality is consistent with the Dedalus myth and is typical of the naive fastidiousness of innocence and youth, Joyce reveals its distorting power deliberately by making it unrelieved and by achieving

⁵Ibid., pp. 127-28.

connotative effectiveness in the imagery--the rats, chill, sewer, and so on.

Furthermore, Stephen has no real child-fraternity. The threats and tauntings of the other boys are persistent; and even their rare friendly overtures (like the playful caning by Heron) are related to earlier forms of bullying. It is only when Stephen performs an unusual and unnerving act, such as his appeal to the rector following the pandybat episode, that he earns favorable recognition from the boys. But the recognition, like the act, is exceptional, transitory, excessive, and finally meaningless. During his last summer in Blackrock, he plays with Aubrey Mills and his friends, but Stephen senses himself apart from them and later recognizes the empty romanticism of the games.

Besides the hostilities among the children, there are the more corrosive attempts at inversion of identities between generations. Stephen's summer playmates include Uncle Charley, a kind of senile delinquent who steals fruit from under the shopman's uneasy smile, and the flabby ex-athlete Mike Flynn, who "coaches" Stephen in the park and demonstrates his instructions by "shuffling along for a yard or so comically in an old pair of blue canvas shoes." These representatives of a preceding generation are assuming the roles of children; and their second-childhoods are shown degenerating into senility.

The most violent distortion of the child-identity in

the conflict between generations is revealed in the relationship of Stephen and Simon. The father attempts to impose his own childhood on Stephen; and, as Simon's behavior at Cork reveals, he tries to assume a youth for himself in the present, thus violating Stephen's right to a youthful identity. Stephen perceives, "epiphanically," as he stares at the word Foetus carved on a desk, that Simon has subverted or aborted his youth in this nostalgic trip to the past. The unnaturalness is captured in the fetus image and recorded in Stephen's mind: if Simon has reconstructed his own childhood, then Stephen is a kind of fetus.

Later, in the role of something like a nurse-maid attendant, Stephen follows Simon in humiliation from bar to bar. Here, he observes the grotesque childishness of the adult world and feels himself prematurely old; having successfully aborted Stephen's youth, Simon can now assume his own version of youth. What Simon actually accomplishes in all this is the dislocation of Stephen's identity by distorting the present, first by trying to make it over into the past, and then into the future. It is significant that Stephen leaves him, in disgust, in a public house. This symbolic dislocation is matched on a literal level by the series of moves--or descents--by the family. In terms of Jung's child-archetype as a function of personal and racial pre-consciousness, the implication for the human world of A Portrait would seem to be that the instinctual life--the

child force--is brutalized and subverted and expresses itself in neurotic and destructively aberrational ways.

If its vestigial function is thus subverted and distorted, the presentness of the child-impulse--as a corrective to the one-sidedness of consciousness--is necessarily distorted. The instability of Stephen's world is recorded in his complete lapse into sensuality, followed by as extreme a morbid self-consciousness and sense of his own damnation. Like the world he inhabits, he is a repository of violent extremes, of which he is sooner or later made intensely and fully aware. The build-up to the Cork episode begins with Chapter II, which records his collapse into sensuality. His physical appetites are omnivorous in his October reaction against the sham experiences and moral outrages he has suffered during the respectable and romantic world of summer. The move from Blackrock to Dublin marks the economic and social reduction of status, along with Stephen's witnessing Uncle Charley's mental decay, and the loss of his other summer companions. Following this is the Whitsuntide play, which for Stephen has a reality of its own in contrast to the fluid and betraying realities of his life. This assumption of the play's reality marks a dramatic reversal of the actual and the apparent and prepares the way for the epiphany in Cork. Understanding that the play is unreal, he can accept its inner reality; but the horrifying distortion of Simon's version of Cork gives the real scene

the lurid, ghastly quality of nightmare.

The reality of the external, "respectable" world has become intolerable for Stephen, and his visit to the brothel climaxes his rebellion against respectability. The association of the boy with social deviates or outcasts is a convention typical of fiction centering on an adolescent reading of reality and indicates the first stage of the youth's ridding his universe of inherited absolutes. It indicates not only rejection of conventional standards of truth and morality but also the individual's attempt to identify himself within a qualified human world. In some of Sherwood Anderson's stories, for example, the socially unacceptable associate is often a representative of an ethnic minority--as Burt and Bildad Johnson, the Negro stable boys. Faulkner's Uncle Willy is a Caucasian, but he flouts the idols of the tribe by openly using narcotics, marrying a Memphis prostitute, and squandering the family fortune on automobiles and an airplane, complete with flying lessons for his own pilot; his confidants and constant companions (though often unwilling ones) are Old Job and Secretary, "just irresponsible niggers." The homosexual motif sometimes makes the same point; and this, too, the norms of culture would like to deny. The ambiguity of Stephen's impulse--to escape and to find life--is captured in the maternal embrace of the prostitute.

The introversion of Stephen's consciousness, which

follows with graphic clarity in Chapter III marks the climactic intensity of his moral isolation. The retreat sermons function as an objectification of divine wrath and eternal punishment, which he experiences psychologically as guilt. Thus, the sense of his damnation expands to function on three levels--the supernatural, the literal, and the psychical. Like Aeneas, however, Stephen survives the terrors of the underworld; but, when he returns to the human world to do monkish penance, he is as much alone as ever. In the serenity of repentance, he becomes gradually dispassionate; and his interview with the director concerning the prospect of his taking holy orders resolves his increasing moral doubts about the Church. The temptation is great, for the priesthood promises safety from an assaulting, outrageous reality as well as power of office; but the spiritual inadequacy of the revealed Church would be a mask, not a meaningful realization of identity; therefore, Stephen rejects the idea.

The squad of brothers he observes marching in two's across a bridge is reflected to him from the shallow water below; and in the view through the water--instinctively repugnant to Stephen--he recognizes in shame his kinship with their earthiness. However, if he is forced by instinct to such recognition, he is turned from despair by a stronger appeal from language--specifically drawn by an abstract love for words: "Did he then love the rhythmic rise and

fall of words better than their associations of legend and color?" Here the dichotomy between flesh and spirit is sharp and clearly perceived by Stephen. Nevertheless, even though the dichotomy is matched by his split sensibility, he walks, unaware, toward the sea.

This builds to the major epiphany in the book. In his state of complete isolation, Stephen responds to a transcendent voice calling his name through the playful banter of some swimming boys. His vision, too, is double; the sight of the boys' naked bodies strikes in him a dread "of the mystery of his own body." Thus, in an increasing air of numinosity, the birth of the artistic consciousness occurs through the sights and sounds of the real world; and his simultaneous participation in time and eternity is symbolized by his wading along the shore, a conventional symbol for the mystical margin-union of reality (land) and mystery (sea). The culmination of this enlightening process is his vision of the bird-like girl. As an Aphrodite symbol, she presents to him a sea-vision he has never before seen. Water has been repugnant to him, but now it is transmuted into the white sea-froth, emerald sea-weed, and the ivory thighs of poetic promise. This is his sea-change, revealing the immediate and universal vision of the poet in an image uniting the sensuous and passionate with the ethereal and the spiritual. Here the child-motif functions in its aspect of futurity. Combining with the conscious

side of Stephen's mind, it provides a wholeness of vision that directs his way to the life of the artist.

The isolation of the artist theme dominates the final chapter, but constant appeals intrude from the conventional world, which Stephen has renounced: MacCann, Cranly, Davin, Moynihan, Temple, and the others are not only representatives of that world; they are also figures, limited by their commitments, of what Stephen might have been (in a sense, splinters, or rejected identities). Davin, the potential national poet of Ireland, significantly, refuses the invitation of the woman in the cottage--a translation into real life of Stephen's ideal of romantic consummation (the Mercedes story recurring in the book).

The mythic quality of A Portrait is not limited to Joyce's use of the Dedalus story to serve as mere outline, for the inter-workings of character, incident, and scene move by accretion toward myth to coincide with its classical mythic sub-structure. Just as Stephen's encounters and conflicts with family, acquaintances, school, Dublin, and the Catholic Church and his ultimate withdrawal from all these bring him to an awareness of his identity with Dedalus, so his peripatetic wanderings bring him to the sea. These wanderings constitute the working-out of the myth in earthly terms. Furthermore, the personalities of the other characters are also dissolving, disappearing into the institutional structures that Stephen rejects. The mother merges with the

idea of the Catholic Church; concretely, it is her appeal that Stephen take communion that he refuses to heed near the end of Chapter V; and his refusal to participate in this important ritual is his simultaneous refusal to serve his religion. The mother, then, is identified with the Virgin-Mother symbol of the Church. Consistently, the father, as critics have noted often, is the embodiment of Dublin; this implies his kingly identity as well as that of the destructive power that the city-symbol holds. Thus, Joyce unites myth and experience in a tightly woven, strictly disciplined structure that does capture the "uncreated conscience of the race."

Furthermore, the idea of the death of Icarus in Joyce's novel apparently has a double significance. The Icarus side of Stephen's character is active to the end of the book in the sense that he remains defiant toward parental, political, and religious standards and naively certain of his spiritual independence. In another sense, this recklessly aspirant, child-like impulsiveness gives vital force to the esthetic mind. Dedalus in the old story was motivated partially to devise a means of escape from Crete by the desire to free and save his son. In his use of the mythical artist-boy relationship, Joyce has translated it as a psychological complex that can represent and be morally comprehensible to the modern sensibility: the "boyiness" of Stephen as dutiful son, citizen, and devout Catholic is dead

to the world through his perception, pride, and renunciation; but, as the sensuously imaginative and emotionally vital aspects of the artist's mind, he is very much alive. Thus, it would seem that wholeness of personality and communion with the human world, for Stephen, are possible only in symbolical ways; and being an artist is his choice of those ways. The problem of isolation, then, as moral loss and artistic triumph is urgent and real. Although the artist enjoys a transcendent freedom the idea of transcendence conveys the sense of its own qualification: the implication is that the conditions under which art and sanity may survive enforce a kind of schizophrenia to cope with a schizophrenic age.

We have noted that Joyce's lyrical method in A Portrait involves an internalizing of the external. The assimilating, synthesizing mind of Stephen receives, contains, and projects all the experience in the novel. The final chapter, the diary entries, indicating that the exiled artist can now communicate explicitly only with himself, is Joyce's early employment of the interior monologue; and here it is a brilliant union of technical and thematic lyricism. Narratively, the novel is also lyrical because its mythic basis, the Dedalus-Icarus story is lyrical. In contrast, Ulysses is epic in conception and method, incorporating as it does the character Bloom, the religious-godless, extraordinary-common man, in Stephen's renounced city; Molly Bloom, the

eternal woman as Joyce imagined her; the colorful minor citizens of Dublin; and the concretely realized Dublin setting. Joyce juxtaposes, interweaves, and contrasts the "sensateness of modern materialistic civilization, the world of Leopold Bloom [and the] . . . abstract meditations of the medieval-minded Stephen."⁶

Perhaps it is not an over-simplification, then, to define Joyce's method in Ulysses, for descriptive purposes, as a convergence of the external and the internal. The epic effect is accomplished on narrative, technical, and thematic levels. The Odyssey forms the mythic foundation for a narrative that achieves a Bergsonian unity--a seemingly coincidental, accidental, or irrational convergence of experiences and recognitions by a number of characters and of various incidents (an effect achieved later in the lyrical mode by Virginia Woolf in Mrs. Dalloway). In his study of Ulysses, Kain calls the world of the novel one

hurrying through the infinite spaces of the universe at a staggering speed, its residents unaware of their destiny. In a small city, the central point of a small island, adrift in the midst of the limitless expanses of the seas, they live in their little orbits, and the generations of men are as grass."⁷

As in the Dedalus-Icarus myth, the narrative basis of A Portrait, the Odyssey establishes for Ulysses a prior condition of isolation: Harry Levin reminds us that the

⁶Richard M. Kain, Fabulous Voyager: James Joyce's Ulysses (New York: The Viking Press, 1959), p. 121.

⁷Ibid., p. 240.

"occasion of The Odyssey, though it remains a matter of dark reminiscence, is the fall of a city. It is a story of exile and, after a long circuit of misadventures, homecoming."⁸ Again, as in the earlier novel, Joyce accommodates the myth to the modern sensibility and conditions of environment; consequently, the heroic grandeur of Homer's Ulysses is scaled to the ironic dimensions of the Dubliner Bloom, complemented by the lofty pride and suffering of the artist-exile, Stephen Dedalus.

Depicting a world of isolates in cosmic flux, Ulysses weaves an epic texture by modality of the visible, the audible, the psychological, the intellectual, and the emotional. It is a reaffirmation of Joyce's vision of the schizoid character of modern experience, for the levels of significance in the novel--from the naturalistic to the symbolic--consist in the cubistic mode, Joyce's technique. Iterating the relativity of man and his values in the cosmos, Joyce goes beyond the lyrical tone and method of A Portrait to confront "the poetic and philosophic artist with the common man and the vulgar values of society,"⁹ Stephen Dedalus, the proud exile, for whom "history is a nightmare from which [he] is trying to awake,"¹⁰ meets Bloom, the

⁸Levin, p. 71.

⁹Ibid., p. 241.

¹⁰James Joyce, Ulysses (New York: The Modern Library, 1934), p. 34.

racial exile, who retains a somewhat absurd, anachronistic humanitarianism in a world where humanity is debased by historical circumstances and immediate environment. Stephen, the psychological captive of time, ironically seeks eternity (the esthetic ideal); and Bloom, the frankly nostalgic product and victim of his world, expresses and enacts both sympathy for and interest in the far from ideal facts of the present.

Joyce spoke of Bloom personally and considered him a mature refraction of himself; Stephen was his adolescent image, whose pride and renunciation have not effected the grand realization of his art prophesied at the end of A Portrait. Bloom and Stephen exist in Ulysses, thus, as opposites, yet also as son and father who ultimately achieve a reunion, prepared for by symbolic accretion and actual near encounters, and accomplished in a brief, real moment at the end of a long and active day for both. Their meeting implies an impingement of eternity on time, celebrated by a fittingly humble sacrament--the sharing of cocoa in Bloom's kitchen.

Joyce perfects several experimental techniques in his novel. One is the interior monologue, which Ellman aptly calls the "radical device of the undependable narrator with a style adjusted to him."¹¹ Examples include the styles of the Cyclops, Nausicaa, and Penelope episodes. Also,

¹¹Ellmann, p. 367.

Joyce's parodic styles in the Oxen of the Sun episode deepen the literary density of the book; and the impersonal, catechistic method of question and answer in the Ithaca section accomplishes an objectivity for the author, which is esthetically necessary because of the profound spiritual (emotional) meaning of the sacramental confrontation. The musical methods of counterpoint and subtle recitative thread the entire book and coalesce with the brilliant plays on words to effect continuity and vividness throughout.

This partial accounting for the stylistic variety in Ulysses is not intended to be complete; an exhaustive analysis of the styles is not pertinent to my purpose here. It is enough, perhaps, to note the multiplicity and mixtures of styles in order to account for one of the ways by which Joyce achieves epic density and to point out the technical competence and virtuosity of the novel. My purpose, rather, is to consider the thematic function of the Circe, ~~Eumaeus~~, and Ithaca sections as a climactic pattern of action which completes the enactment of the child-artist-hero progression, traced in A Portrait and found to end there with only an apparently successful extrication of the young artist from the familial and institutional demands of his heritage.

The Jungian psychological context employed for critical articulation in the analysis of A Portrait apparently remains valid as a way of dealing with the theme of isolation in these three episodes because of the spiritual quality of

the relationship of the characters Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom, whose states of isolation finally impinge symbolically on the epic situation and converge in transcendent unity in the quiet hours of the morning. To complete the cycle of what Jung terms the individuation process, the hero experiences a spiritual reconciliation with his world (his father); and the center of the personality shifts from the ego (a limited, infantile identity) to the self (a spiritual realization of an unlimited humanity). This psychological pattern is also known as the rebirth archetype, or the Night Journey, which proceeds through a stage of irrationality,

a transition toward severed relation with the outer world, and, it may be toward disintegration and death. The element in the pattern is balanced by a movement upward and outward--an expansion or outburst of activity, a transition toward reintegration and life-renewal.¹²

Considering the action beginning with the Circe episode and ending with the Ithaca section, we can detect the outlines of this pattern; and if we qualify our reading of the episodes as a variant of the pivotal action of the rebirth pattern (or perhaps more accurately, the climax and resolution) by recognizing its correspondence to the symbolic function of the child-artist-hero motif, we can identify the encounter of Stephen and Bloom as an epiphanical culmination of the action that began in A Portrait: Stephen, subsumed

¹²Maud Bodkin, Archetypal Patterns in Poetry: Psychological Studies of Imagination (New York: Vintage Books, 1958), p. 53.

as hero in the later book by the ironical Bloom, yet lends in his son-artist role a literary transfiguration to Bloom, the vulgarian-father. We have seen Stephen in his identity as the child-artist within Jung's psychological framework of the child-archetype in the stages of abandonment and invincibility. Now, in the climactic chapters of Ulysses, we see him, interacting with Bloom, in the respective contexts of fantasy (nightmare); of the external, quieter scene in the cafe--a kind of interlude and vicarious voyage; and finally of the domestic calm of Bloom's house; through this progression he undergoes a symbolic reunion with his world. From these episodes there emerges a meaning approximating Jung's notion of the ultimate, coherent realization of "the motifs of abandonment, invincibility, beginning and end . . . as distinct categories of experience and understanding."¹³

The Circe episode opens on a scene of nightmare inversion--grotesque images of the external scene and the human world, the predatory and humiliating atmosphere of Bella Cohen's brothel (Circe, the sorceress, who can transform men into swine, but is incapable of normal reproduction), and the carnival horror of mock trial and other forms of mortifying psychological exposure. This setting and action correspond to the period of masked license traditionally celebrated at carnival, the topsy-turvy atmosphere of the interim between the old and new orders of kingship; and, in

¹³Jung, p. 147.

psychological terms, it initiates a profound revolution of consciousness in the individual mind. It is the stage of irrationality that precedes a spiritual transformation of ego into self. The first sustained encounter between Stephen and Bloom in the brothel is reflected in a mirror, which framed also a super-imposed image of Shakespeare and some antlers--the cuckold's mark--that seem to fit Bloom (a reference to the afternoon engagement between Molly and Blazes Boylan). This surrealistic complex captures Stephen and Bloom in their characteristically limited, real roles and in their isolation.

The horror and chaos of the brothel scene must be relieved by the shattering of the ordinary, restricting categories of actual time and space, which capture the mind in infantile self-consciousness. In other words, Stephen must experience such release, though he does not realize in full empiric awareness his "awakening" from the nightmare of history and escape from the representatives of the guilt-inducing institutional forms that pursue him. For Bloom, release from the nightmare occurs in hallucination--a simultaneous vision of Stephen, his spiritual son, and Rudy, his real, dead son. Stephen shatters time and space when he compulsively breaks a chandelier in the brothel following the appearance of his mother's ghost:

THE MOTHER

(Wrings her hands slowly, moaning desperately.) O Sacred Heart of Jesus, have mercy on him! Save him from hell, O divine Sacred Heart!

STEPHEN

No! No! No! Break my spirit all of you if you can!
I'll bring you all to heel.

THE MOTHER

(In the agony of her deathrattle.) Have mercy on Stephen,
Lord, for my sake! Inexpressible was my anguish when
expiring with love, grief and agony on Mount Calvary.

STEPHEN

Nothung!

(He lifts his ashplant high with both hands and smashes
the chandelier. Time's livid final flame leaps and in
the following darkness, ruin of all space, shattered
glass and toppling masonry.¹⁴

He then flees from the brothel with what seems like all Dublin
in pursuit, but with the watchful Bloom paternally near,
urging him to escape into a cab. But Stephen must undergo a
symbolic death. As he describes his desperate condition:

My center of gravity is displaced. I have forgotten
the trick. Let us sit down somewhere and discuss.
Struggle for life is the law of existence, but modern
philirenists, notably the tsar and the king of England,
have invented arbitration. (He taps his brow.) But in
here it is I must kill the priest and the king.¹⁵

He is symbolically slain when Private Carr, in defense of the
king of England, strikes him and knocks him out. His
companions have deserted him, but Bloom stays to comfort and
rescue him.

Significantly, Stephen is hardly aware of Bloom as
his spiritual father--the object of his quest; but Bloom
sees Stephen at the conclusion of the Circe section, blended

¹⁴Joyce, p. 583.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 589.

in hallucination with the form of Rudy. Stephen lies prone after his altercation with Private Carr, and Bloom bends over him tenderly:

BLOOM

Poetry. Well educated. Pity. (Bends again and undoes the buttons of Stephen's waistcoat.) To breathe. (He brushes the wood shavings from Stephen's clothes with light hands and fingers.) One pound seven. Not hurt anyhow. (He listens.) What! . . . (Communes with the night.) Face reminds me of his poor mother. . . . A girl. Best thing could happen to him . . . (He murmurs.) . . . swear that I will always hail, ever conceal, never reveal, any part or parts, art or arts . . . (He murmurs.) in the rough sands of the sea . . . a cabletow's length from the shore . . . where the tide ebbs . . . and flows . . . (Silent, thoughtful, alert, he stands on guard, his fingers at his lips in the attitude of secret master. Against the dark wall a figure appears slowly, a fairy boy of eleven, a changeling, kidnapped, dressed in an Eton suit with glass shoes and a little bronze helmet, holding a book in his hand. He reads from right to left inaudibly, smiling, kissing the page.¹⁶

BLOOM

(Wonderstruck, calls inaudibly.) Rudy!

RUDY

(Gazes unseeing into Bloom's eyes and goes on reading, kissing, smiling. He has a delicate mauve face. On his suit he has diamond and ruby buttons. In his free left hand he holds a slim ivory cane with a violet bow-knot. A white Lambkin peeps out of his waistcoat pocket.)¹⁷

Furthermore, Bloom's solicitude and concern for the "undesirable" companions of Stephen are paternal. Stephen, characteristically, had articulated the nature of his quest

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 608-09.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 609.

earlier, in his interpretation of Hamlet as a "myth of paternity,"¹⁸ and had rationalized the vast distinction between physical and spiritual fatherhood, which "is a mystical estate, an apostolic succession."

The Eumaeus episode follows, a kind of interlude between the nightmare violence of the Circe section and the homecoming of Ulysses in the Ithaca episode. An ironic refraction of the voyage theme of the original narrative, the Eumaeus episode depicts the quiet companionship of Stephen and Bloom as they sit over coffee in a cafe, listening to the yarns of the navvies. The fragmentation of the voyage experience, its displaced reduction to the telling of tales by semi-literate sailors is an example of Joyce's expropriation of the classical myth, no longer viable in its archetypal heroic form, but pertinent to the present by contrast.

The rigid formality of style in the Ithaca episode both emphasizes the actual isolation of Stephen and Bloom and implies, chiefly by contrasts, their spiritual reunion--regardless of the linear, parallel, or fragmented nature of their co-existence. Joyce deliberately points up their differences of temperament, values, and qualities of mind and feeling: Stephen declines Bloom's offer to "wash his soiled hands . . . [because] he was a hydrophobe, hating partial contact by immersion in cold water (his last bath

¹⁸Ibid., p. 204.

having taken place in the month of October of the preceding year), disliking the aqueous substances of glass and crystal, distrusting aquacities of thought and language." Bloom, "waterlover, drawer of water, watercarrier returning to the range, admires . . . its universality," but is "impeded . . . from giving Stephen counsels of hygiene and prophylactic" by his understanding of "the incompatibility of aquacity with the erratic originality of genius."¹⁹ Following a long catalogue of their differences--from parentage, baptism, and educational careers--is the identification of their temperaments: "What two temperaments did they individually represent? The scientific. The artistic."²⁰ (Joyce is careful to clarify that Bloom's "tendency is toward applied, not pure, science.") Also, typically, Bloom's apprehension of "generic conditions imposed by natural laws . . . is substantial and not verbal." Stephen, in contrast, "affirmed his significance as a conscious rational animal proceeding syllogistically from the known to the unknown and a conscious rational reagent between a micro- and a macrocosm ineluctably constructed upon the incertitude of the void." Bloom is comforted in his own misapprehension, knowing "that as a competent keyless citizen he had proceeded energetically from the unknown to the known through the incertitude of the

¹⁹Ibid., p. 673.

²⁰Ibid., p. 683.

void."²¹ Here, we have Jung's idea of the culmination of the rebirth action as understanding (by Stephen) and experience (by Bloom).

These contrasts indicate that Bloom is Stephen's empiric complement and that, therefore, Stephen's spiritual rebellion and suffering, which climax in spiritual triumph and exile at the end of A Portrait, remain limited to an abstract awareness, not one realized in his experience. Thus, the epic vision comprehended in Ulysses belongs to Joyce, not to Stephen. Stephen's final state of isolation, which he resumes at the conclusion of Ulysses, is significantly modified by his co-existence with Bloom in the novel and their symbolic reunion, by the presence in the book of other characters who exist independently, outside (or beneath) his conscious mind, and by the external details of the city. Joyce concludes his novel with the fluid monologue of Molly Bloom, his version of the essentially mindless endurance of the ultimately affirming, natural, human world. The roles of Stephen and Bloom are opposite and complementary; and if one accepts Ellman's description of Joyce's art as a "gestation of the soul," the thematic advance of Ulysses beyond A Portrait is apparent--along with the technical advances required to match it. The novel is also understandable as a comprehensive assimilation of his earlier work: Levin describes it this way: "Ulysses puts the introspective

²¹Ibid., p. 697.

Portrait of the Artist against the exterior background of Dubliners.²² Both a record of the growth of the artist's imagination and a vast cumulation of esthetic comprehension of the artist's world, Ulysses protracts the theme of the isolation of the artist into perhaps its most radically abstract form; but it does not leave behind the images of the external, sensate world, which Joyce knew also to be his own.

²²Levin, p. 67.

CHAPTER III

D. H. LAWRENCE: ART, EXPERIENCE, AND SPIRIT

In his essay "Lawrence and the Immediate Present,"¹
Wright Morris contrasts Joyce and Lawrence:

On the one hand we have the master craftsman Joyce armed with nothing but silence, exile, and cunning, On the other we have such a figure as D. H. Lawrence, a man of genius, a novelist, and a poet, whose primary concern was not art, but life, a man who believed, with a devotion and example equal to Joyce, that if life itself could be led to the full [sic], art would grow out of it.

It is not necessary to sacrifice Joyce in order to praise Lawrence, but we can grant Morris his bias here and the defensiveness of his rhetoric, for his distinction is useful as a wedge to the meaning of isolation in Lawrence's thought and in Sons and Lovers, his artist novel. For Lawrence, isolation is the only positive condition for achieving identity that precedes and is maintained in all successful modes of human intercourse. In contrast to the adherents to the "cult of consciousness" (the term is Jung's), Lawrence affirms the unconscious life-force and appeals for acknowledgment

¹Wright Morris, "Lawrence and the Immediate Present," A D. H. Lawrence Miscellany, ed. Harry T. Moore (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1959), p. 7.

of naturalness in life. He saw the horror of modern civilization in the rape of nature and in the breaking down of sacred boundaries of individual identities among all existing things, which could lead only to complete leveling of values, mutual destruction between individuals, and suffocation of individuals by systems. The problem is central to Sons and Lovers; and by examining the implications of these beliefs, we may arrive at a descriptive principle for the basic rhythms of form and meaning in the novel.

Morris's judgment that Lawrence's first concern was for life, not art, helps to explain the lack of explicitly formulated literary criticism in Sons and Lovers in contrast to Joyce's exhaustive analysis of theory in A Portrait of the Artist As a Young Man. Paul Morel is a young painter, and his sources of inspiration, are most notably, the three women --his mother, Miriam, and Clara--in his life; but his whole experience in the larger social and natural world influences his decision to be an artist. The implication, then, here and in Lawrence's own life is that the work of the artist is related to the civilizing process and is closely aligned with his personal experience. As Graham Hough observes, he considered the artist "not only a sensibility and a revealing instrument, and his art is not only (in the literal sense) a passion, something experienced and transmitted as directly as may be--it is also a deliberate exploration and analysis

of discoveries."² And there is an "extraordinarily intimate connection between Lawrence's writing and his experience; what he writes as fiction must be retrospectively accepted as fact."³ Thus, Lawrence's own practice and view of art as, at least partially, discovery and his concern for its emerging from experience are paralleled in the case of Paul Morel. Therefore, though the artist motif may seem incidental in the novel, it is dramatized significantly in Paul's relationships with other characters and in the total action.

Lawrence believed that a vital and affirmative life is possible in a society if its members assume their natural and separate identities and respect the sanctity of uniqueness in themselves and in all other entities--human and non-human. "A vital life" suggests communion, and in Lawrence's ideal world communion is accomplished by unconscious sympathy; he says in "Why the Novel Matters":

These damned philosophers, they talk as if they suddenly went off into steam, and were then much more important than when they're in their shirts. It is nonsense. Every man, philosopher included, ends in his own fingertips. That's the end of his man alive. As for the words and thoughts and sighs and aspirations that fly from him, they are so many tremulations in the ether, and not alive at all. But if the tremulations reach another man alive, he may receive them into his life, and his life may take on a new colour, like a chameleon creeping from a brown rock on to a green leaf.⁴

²Graham Hough, The Dark Sun: A Study of D. H. Lawrence (New York: Capricorn Books, 1956), p. 11.

³Ibid., p. 38.

⁴D. H. Lawrence, Selected Literary Criticism, ed. Anthony Beal (New York: The Viking Press, 1956), p. 103.

Thus, the real presence of spirit is assumed by Lawrence, and this combines with a fierce belief in the sanctity of separateness to reach beyond the colossal structures of consciously created mythology, as a basis for fictional order, to the animistic realm of sympathy in nature and the operation of taboo in the social world. The unions, conflicts, and resolutions (when these occur) among the characters of Sons and Lovers can be seen as operating on these principles, which I propose to use as descriptive functions for registering the dialectical and processional rhythms of the action.

Roughly, the dialectic is the inter-action of conscious and unconscious forces manifested on numerous levels of the action; and these forces are for Lawrence frequently termed respectively will and sympathy. Process (or progress) is accounted for on several levels: the setting is modern; therefore, the civilizing process has reached a dangerous and destructive stage, having gone far to stifle and contort the natural, instinctual impulses of human beings. This process is established in the opening pages; the history of the pits is traced to the time of Charles II. Also, there is the human process, evolving through three generations for fullness and clarity in the background; but the foreground relationships of generations are between the Morels and their children. The processes in nature and in the social and family realms cumulate to become the impact of psychological pressure brought to bear on Paul in his experiential search

for his identity. Lawrence's method of relating this, as we noted in Chapter I of this paper, is inductive--an externalizing of the internal. Hough's description of the technique is apparently consistent with this: he calls Lawrence's technique "a means of exploring an experience that has not been fully understood."⁵ That is, it has not been rationalized; the method might be thought of as art as exploration or discovery; Lawrence himself put it this way: "It is the way our sympathy flows and recoils that determines our lives."⁶

Sons and Lovers is in two sections, the first moving from the marriage of the Morels through the death of William. The second centers primarily on the conflicts and alignments among Gertrude, Walter, Paul, Miriam, and Clara. The fully detailed account of emotionally charged events in the first part provides the powerful psychological pressure beneath the surface of Paul's development in Part Two; his tortured involvement with Miriam, the more satisfactory but impossible affair with Clara, his conflict and ultimate friendship with Baxter Dawes, and his final attempt to extricate himself from the death-grip of Gertrude mark the major stages of his growth.

My use of sympathy and taboo to describe the action, as determinants of motivation and fulfillment or frustration

⁵Hough, p. 42.

⁶Ibid. Hough, quoting Lawrence.

coincides with the conventional understanding of spiritual power of identity and taboo as explained, for example, in Frazer's The Golden Bough (but translated into modern psychological terms, since psychology is the modern repository for "magic") and in Freud's Totem and Taboo. Frazer's concentration on sympathy is in the efforts of primitive people to apply it as assurances of spiritual unity and separateness--to attract good spirits and ward off evil ones. In modern psychological theory, these efforts correspond to the psychic impulses originating in the unconscious realms of the psyche which bound the center of conscious functioning. According to Jung's description of the complete personality, one side of the ego (consciousness), the psyche extends into the supra-human sphere and, on the other, into the sub-human. Together, these extensions of the psyche are the collective unconscious: "In and through the self, the human personality is therefore related . . . to what we might call its innermost center as well as the universe of which it forms a particle."⁷

Imaginative sympathy, then, relates to the supra-human psychic impulse--the urge to idealize or spiritualize; and instinctive sympathy relates to the sub-human--what Lawrence calls "blood consciousness."

Taboo, also deriving from primitive culture, is a sacred ban imposed by the tribe against the violation of a totem; in other words, it amounts to an institutional

⁷Jung, pp. 281-82.

stricture against instinctive sympathy and is, therefore, a cultural demand for separateness, which has, in human history, resulted in confusion (most often inversion) of the two psychic urges--imagination and instinct. Freud noted that the "peculiarity of the totemic system which attracts the interest of the psychoanalyst" is the attendant law against sexual relations among members of the same totem,"⁸ specifically against incest. Fragments of totemism have passed over into modern social and religious institutions, "or it may exist in fixed forms but far removed from its original nature. The difficulty consists in the fact that it is not altogether easy to decide what in the actual conditions is to be taken as a faithful copy of the significant past and what is to be considered as a secondary distortion of it."⁹

These principles are to be functionally descriptive in my analysis of Sons and Lovers because, like Frazer's recognition of the ludicrously misguided logic in primitive attempts to control nature by sympathetic magic, Jung's understanding of the psychotic aberrations of emotion and spirit, and Freud's awareness of the irrationally distorting power of residual taboo, Lawrence's perception included the knowledge that distortions in the modern world have caused

⁸Sigmund Freud, Totem and Taboo: Resemblances Between the Psychic Lives of Savages and Neurotics, trans. A. A. Brill (New York: Vintage Books, 1946), p. 7.

⁹Ibid., p. 9.

perversions of sympathy and set up false and corrosive taboos:

It seems as if the history of humanity were divided into two epochs: the Epoch of the Law and the Epoch of Love. It seems as though humanity, during the time of its activity on earth, has made two great efforts: the effort to appreciate the Law and the effort to overcome the Law in Love. And in both efforts it has succeeded. It has reached and proved the Two Complementary Absolutes, the Absolute of the Father, of the Law, of Nature, and the Absolute of the Son, of Love, of Knowledge. What remains is to reconcile the two.¹⁰

In Sons and Lovers the brutal effacing of nature by the expansion of mining in the form of huge corporations and the accompanying destructive effects on the human world define the environment into which Paul Morel is born. Thus, the natural integrity of his character is abused before his birth. Similarly, his personal relationships are stifling and destructive; and his will is stunted. The blasted state of his world is dramatized in the splitting apart of his parents. Gertrude's initial attraction for Walter was instinctual and thus healthy; but both are products of the modern world. She is the overly fastidious, highly conscious, and socially ambitious woman--an improviser, who denies the value of ritual, which functions to instruct human beings to the meaning of natural, temporal order. In contrast, Walter Morel's life is ordered by ritual, as indicated in his daily descent into and ascent from the mine--the instinctual realm, subterranean and dark and in his regular

¹⁰Lawrence, p. 222.

patronage of the pub, significantly named Moon and Stars. In a real and symbolic way, this refuge in ritualistic debauchery records the destructive assault of civilizing forces. It is a distorted manifestation of the effort to find spiritual sanctuary.

Gertrude, as pure consciousness, loses her sympathetic attraction for and, consequently, her power of communication with Walter. As the embodiment of the instinctual life force, Walter, in his state of abandonment by the inspiring power of conscious direction, continues his ritualistic existence, with occasional expressions of his creativeness, and finally emerges to impel Paul to action. From the start, the lack of communion between his parents indicates the paradoxical quality of Paul's life. They are the split-off halves of his heritage, and truth for Paul lies with both and with neither parent's life and attitude. This dual interpretation of life succeeds in enslaving Paul consciously to his mother's influence and cutting him off from his father's because of the omnivorousness of consciousness. However, the central rhythm of the book is the gradual emergence of the life-affirming power that Walter Morel represents, which intervenes subversively in Gertrude's efforts to direct her sons' lives away from the mine.

Like Joyce, Lawrence saw the conflict between generations, specifically, the attempt of the parent to annihilate the boundaries of time between his life and that

of his children. This can be an effort to displace the child's identity by the parent's usurping the natural identity of the child, by his imposing his own past on the child, or a combination of these, as in A Portrait of the Artist As a Young Man. Perhaps the most illuminating contrast between Joyce's understanding of this conflict and Lawrence's is in their heroes' relationships with their fathers. As we have seen, Simon Dedalus was responsible to a great extent for the confusion and horror of Stephen's isolation in his active dislocation of the boy's youth. In contrast, Walter Morel, whose infrequent intrusions into the lives of his children are not finally damaging and are often healing; however, he is neglectful of or indifferent to their needs and is not a fully satisfactory father. But he saves Paul's life at the end of the book: Paul's conscious decision to go toward the lights of the town is a symbolic enactment of what has been a habit with Walter Morel for all the years of his married life. This influence recurs throughout the novel, but it is wholly dramatic; and, consistently, Walter Morel can emerge as a regenerating force only because he has passively protected his instinctual integrity and avoided the distortions of consciousness.

The greatest thwarting influence on the child is that of the mother. Gertrude's urge for the instinctual life is turned from its natural channel toward her husband and subverted to take an unnatural course toward possession

of her sons. Here, she dislocates the identities of William and Paul by her effort to replace their youthful roles with that of their father. The instinctual impulse, in this deflection, is transformed into an "imaginative" or aspiring one--social ambitions for her sons and a demand for priority of their spiritual love for her.

Morel's radical separation from family also has a damaging effect; his relative unconcern for his family is destructive by default. The distortion of his character is distinguished from Gertrude's in that it is external: his virile, faun-like nature has been transmuted into a Caliban nature by the assault of the natural time process, but more especially by the effects of the civilizing impulse that attempts to drive the instinctual life underground or to deny its existence. Gertrude's distortion is also partially a product of cultural distillation for she accepts the ideals of society and contributes to the pressures of a debased civilization; however, her distortion is inner. To a point, her influence on her sons is positive; and her occasional common-sense lectures on self-reliance, her resourcefulness, and strength of endurance are admirable. But her deformed instinctual nature makes her finally destructive.

Her failure to recognize the outlines of her true nature is beautifully dramatized in the much-explicated scene in which Morel locks her out of the house when she is

pregnant with Paul. As Dorothy Van Ghent's reading suggests, the natural setting combines with the real and symbolic fact of her pregnancy to lead her to a recognition and admission of her submerged instinctual role, but she fails to come to this. She reacts with fear to the natural, sympathetic appeal of the flowers, richly and vividly revealed in the moonlight; and her response, which is rejection and disgust, is concentrated in her muttering. Later, as she looks in the mirror and sees the pollen on her face, which should be a complement to her nature or an adornment, she considers it a disfiguring blot, something to be cleaned away.

The destructive pressure imposed by the swollen power of Gertrude's misdirected sympathy leads her to the effort to break the temporal barrier between generations for possession of her sons. This is intensified by the frustration associated with the confrontation of the incest taboo. The fragmentation of life on all levels for Paul is repeated in his effort to establish a satisfactory relationship with women, and William's fate is horrifying testimony to the dangers he faces.

Miriam and Clara can be seen as representing the splintered sensibility and social fragmentation. Miriam is the spiritual girl, who, like his mother, can inspire Paul. She is a positive force behind his art, and their realm of communion is in books and art generally. In fact, the only

satisfying aspect of their relationship is in just this. In her role as inspirational force, she expresses sympathy, but it is a perversion of the natural, instinctual one between the sexes, which Lawrence accepted as essential in this relationship. She is possibly an extension of such allegorical figures as Nathaniel Hawthorne's light women--Hilda in The Marble Faun or, more nearly resembling Miriam, Priscilla in The Blithedale Romance. They are, like Miriam, essentially bloodless, sexless, spiritualized versions of women. This comparison should not, perhaps, be insisted on too emphatically; but the suggestion of identity in their roles is there. If this is valid, then Lawrence's understanding of the artistic process as related to the civilizing process is qualified by sexual and social aberrations. The incest taboo also operates to prevent a satisfactory sexual relationship between Paul and Miriam; and Gertrude's instinctive dislike for Miriam is another dramatic example of the perverted and perverting forms of conflict their instinctual needs take. It is also significant thematically that Paul and Miriam make love in a stranger's house, where their experience is necessarily unsatisfying.

Contrasting with this is Paul's affair with Clara, the instinctual woman. Like Walter Morel, she is victimized by institutional life; but, being a woman, like Gertrude, she is separated from her husband, and she works for female emancipation. This is an unsuccessful effort to adopt a

life that denies natural affections; and the destructive effects of her "emancipation" efforts are clear in the ultimate impossibility of their affair's enduring and growing into real love. An early meeting with Paul is in the presence of a red stallion, a conventional symbol of instinctual energy. Their love affair is ideal at first, but it is brief. The scene of their first sexual union is out of doors, and the shower of flower petals that falls on Clara signifies a meaningful rapport with nature. However, like other disfiguring modern women, Clara finally desires to possess Paul; and other forces combine to bring the affair to an end. The taboo operates here also, for theirs is an adulterous affair. Related implications of adulteration enter as well to make the association impossible--notably Clara's ironic attempt to free herself from the system world by leaving her husband and her counteracting alignment with the organization for women's rights.

Many lines of conflict converge in their final parting, and the whole is objectified in Paul's fight with Baxter Dawes. Dawes is symbolically identified with Paul in several ways, such as his sexual relationship with Clara and his thwarted sensibility. He is also a variation of Walter Morel, in the sense that he is uncouth, a misunderstood and intractable husband, and basically an instinctual person. In the fight Paul is badly beaten, but only when he consciously relaxes his grip on Dawes in fear of killing him;

consequently, he is knocked unconscious. The fight itself and the ultimate triumph of Dawes, followed by Paul's returning Clara to him and the warmth of feeling that grows between the two men repeats in miniature the action of the novel. Paul's conscious withdrawal in the fight was taught him by Gertrude and frustrates his life similarly in all his experiences. Here, the action is psychological drama, meaningfully matched by actual events. At the end of the book Paul is suspended between the death-in-life urge of his mother and the life-in-death pull of his father. Though he has by no means resolved the conflicts in his fractured life, he does make the move toward life: "He would not take that direction to the darkness, to follow her. He walked toward the faintly humming, glowing town, quickly."

Sons and Lovers is also the story of the development of the artist, and the relatively muted theme here is in striking contrast to Joyce's version in A Portrait of the Artist. Perhaps there are several ways to account for this, but one obvious distinction is the importance of the unconscious as the source of vital creativity for Lawrence in contrast to the insistence on rationally integrated consciousness in Joyce's artist novel. Like the dramatic rhythms of the major themes and action in Sons and Lovers, that of Paul's role as artist is realized on every page of the book. Explicit references to his achievements in painting are woven into the texture of his associations with other

characters and not consciously separated from them. This is consistent with Lawrence's "primitivism" generally; and in his own experience, he did not formulate an esthetic consciously until he was well into his artistic career.

The significance of isolation as a moral fact and as a necessary condition for a meaningful life is central to Lawrence's thought and to his novel. Recognizing the disastrous consequences of recent history on individual and social identities, Lawrence still emphasized the value of isolation as a quest for the instinctual roots of life. The possibility of freedom and self-realization remains open for Paul at the end of Sons and Lovers; and though his quest is unresolved, he is at least free to seek that possibility. In "Morality and the Novel" Lawrence states that the "business of art is to reveal the relation between man and his circum-ambient universe, at the living moment."¹¹ Paul Morel, in his final scene, is on the brink of manhood, at that tenuous moment, according to Lawrence, "before he may become a social animal, [when] he innocently feels himself altogether within the great continuum of the universe."¹²

This poised conclusion of the novel exemplifies what Graham Hough considers the most serious limitation of Lawrence's thought. Hough notes that the characters in his fiction are never placed in fully realized situations, that

¹¹Ibid., p. 108.

¹²Hough, p. 121.

his vision of man's destiny, for "all the conflict and destruction by the way, reaches its consummation not in the tragic but in the idyllic mode with the really terrifying conflicts all vanished away."¹³ Granting that "to be alive in the flesh is magnificent" and that "Lawrence expressed his sense of it magnificently," Hough argues that this is not man's only supreme value: if it is, then "man is irrevocably immersed in the transitory and the contingent, irremediably at the mercy of physical accident and physical change." Man also desires the absolute, the changeless, the unconditioned, contends Hough; and his predicament of being caught between the two passions--for the moment and for the permanent--is the essence of tragedy; thus,

To inquire why the tragic sense is absent in Lawrence leads in the end to the discovery that he is not wholly free from the sentimental idealization that he wishes to destroy. The forms of life that Lawrence condemns are all actual enough; we recognize at once their counterparts in the contemporary world. Those which he exalts all lack reality. He projects them into some imaginary future. . . . Or he retrieves them from the past It is imaginative indulgence rather than the rigour of the whole truth.¹⁴

Hough's objection is reminiscent of Orwell's charge that Lawrence, among the other artists of the twenties era, directs our eyes away from the places "where things are actually happening." The criticism in both cases is apparently justified as recognition of a limitation of Lawrence's thought

¹³Ibid., p. 258.

¹⁴Ibid.

or vision; but, granting the limitation, one must acknowledge his masterful and clear artistic embodiment of his vision in Sons and Lovers. Though it is by no means the only scene in the novel to achieve the effect of the "living moment," Paul's suspension between life and death in the final pages of the book, followed by his deliberate, conscious move toward the town, conveys the sense of Lawrence's belief that isolation posits at least the possibility for vital expression of individuality in the human world.

CHAPTER IV

GEORGE ORWELL: THE ABOLITION OF PERSONALITY

Before 1936 George Orwell had wanted to write "enormous naturalistic novels with unhappy endings, full of detailed descriptions and arresting similes, and also full of purple passages in which words were used partly for the sake of their sound."¹ His participation in the Spanish Civil War marked a conscious change, a clarification of a frankly political purpose for all his subsequent writings, though he retained his naturalistic clarity. In "Why I Write," he stated that his experiences in the Indian Imperial Police and his poverty and sense of failure during his down-and-out days

were not enough to give me an accurate political orientation. Then came Hitler, the Spanish Civil War, etc. By the end of 1935 I had still failed to reach a firm decision. Every line of serious work that I have written since 1936 has been written, directly or indirectly, against totalitarianism and for democratic socialism, as I understand it.²

The qualification "as I understand it" is significant, for Orwell's idea of democratic socialism was thoroughly

¹Orwell, A Collection of Essays, p. 315.

²Ibid., p. 318.

heretical; and he insisted repeatedly that the literary artist, as artist, must remain free of all political orthodoxy, though he is obliged, as citizen, to participate directly in political action.

These contrasts indicate the ironical position of Orwell as a novelist and suggest the quality and degree of his isolation in both his thought and his writing. Lacking any regular training in history or economics, philosophy or sociology, and not having read widely or deeply in these subjects,³ he was gifted with an understanding of the political implications of his time. If his political philosophy can be defined, it is possibly best described as a combination of socialism and nostalgia, as Voorhees calls it.⁴ Orwell sensed the need for a fair distribution of wealth, but it must be motivated by genuine human decency--a quality he insisted upon even though he was aware of its increasing obsolescence, certainly in the official or public sphere. His observations made during his study of working conditions in northern England convinced him of the speciousness of theoretical liberalism. For instance, he discovered, contrary to the "folklore" of liberalism, that boys in the working class looked forward to the time when they could quit school and do "real work" and that slum landlords were

³Laurence Brander, George Orwell (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1954), p. 19.

⁴Voorhees, p. 90.

not often mean-minded plutocrats, but usually poor widows who rented one of their dilapidated houses, lived in the other, and had no money for repairs.⁵ So long as sociological theory and facts remained so disparate, real solutions to social problems could hardly be effected.

Similarly, his statement of literary purpose is ironical:

My starting point is always a feeling of partisanship, a sense of injustice. When I sit down to write a book, I do not say to myself, "I am going to produce a work of art." I write because there is some lie that I want to expose, some fact to which I want to draw attention, and my initial concern is to get a hearing. But I could not do the work of writing a book . . . if it were not also an aesthetic experience. Anyone who cares to examine my work will see that even when it is down-right propaganda it contains much that a full-time politician would consider irrelevant. I am not able, and I do not want, completely to abandon the world-view that I acquired in childhood. So long as I remain alive and well I shall continue to feel strongly about prose style, to love the surface of the earth, and to take a pleasure in solid objects and scraps of useless information. It is no use trying to suppress that side of myself. The job is to reconcile my ingrained likes and dislikes with the essentially public, non-individual activities that this age forces on all of us.⁶

Thus, Orwell's isolation consists partly in his marginality as an artist: frankly a thesis novelist, he insists--in the same paragraph--that his writing is an esthetic act. The effort to reconcile private and public attitudes, esthetic and propagandistic purposes, as we have noted, he consciously acknowledged after 1936. However, in

⁵Ibid.

⁶Orwell, A Collection of Essays, p. 255.

his novels, even those preceding his political commitment, "a central character comes up against evils or weaknesses in the structure of our modern life. In each novel it is the individual against the accepted view or the machine,"⁷ Persistently distinguishing between what is desirable or right and what is necessary or inevitable in modern human experience, Orwell handles the relationship between the individual and the system paradoxically or relativistically, and the "reconciliation" may often be intuitive. His sympathy is clearly with the individual; but in the chaos of the modern world, he often finds it necessary that the "fundamental decency" (a recurring phrase in his fiction) of the individual causes him to submit gracefully to any external, public condition, however cynical and oppressive, that will permit the preservation of human life, however mindless. He stated in "Inside the Whale," that

Progress and reaction have both turned out to be swindles. Seemingly there is nothing left but quietism --robbing reality of its terrors by simply submitting to it Give yourself over to the world-process, stop fighting against it or pretending that you control it; simply accept it, endure it, record it. That seems to be the formula that any sensitive novelist is now likely to adopt.⁸

In his study of Orwell, Richard Voorhees recognizes his co-existent paradoxical qualities of rebellion and responsibility. Certainly, from his earliest writings he

⁷Brander, p. 14.

⁸Orwell, A Collection of Essays, p. 255.

sought to expose the decadent destructiveness of institutional forms in English society--imperialism of the Empire, religion, economics, law enforcement, and so on. He saw the corruptness of official authority as reactionary and deadly to the individual's spontaneity, productivity, and dignity, and therefore, as potentially totalitarian. After his experience in the Spanish Civil War, he perceived the external threat to humanity posed by the new totalitarian states. The central characters in his novels, often partial refractions of himself, are individuals, trapped by old conservatism in the forms of institutions; and in the last novel, dominated by the new totalitarianism.

Domination or repression of the individual by cultural demands is the pro-totalitarian legacy of history and is inherent in all modern societies. Orwell was fully cognizant of this as well as of the inevitable consequences of the new totalitarianism that called itself Socialism: "almost certainly we are moving into an age of totalitarian dictatorships--an age in which freedom of thought will first be a deadly sin and later a meaningless abstraction. The autonomous individual is going to be stamped out of existence."

Obviously, the best ideological contexts for describing the isolation of the artist theme in Keep the Aspidistra Flying, then, are phylogenetic psychology and political theory of totalitarianism. In Eros and Civilization Herbert Marcuse concurs with Freud that it is a historical

fact that

civilization has progressed as organized domination. If absence from repression is the archetype of freedom, then civilization is the struggle against this freedom . . . [and] the return of the repressed makes up the subterranean history of civilization. . . . Society's motive in enforcing the decisive modification of the instinctual structure is "economic." For the vast majority of the population, the scope and mode of satisfaction are determined by their own labor; but their labor is work for an apparatus which they do not control, which operates as an independent power to which individuals must submit if they want to live Men do not live their own lives but perform pre-established functions. While they work, they do not fulfill their own needs and faculties, but work in alienation. The restrictions upon the libido appear as the more rational, the more universal they become, the more they permeate the whole of society. They operate on the individual as external objective laws and as an internalized force: the societal authority is absorbed into the "conscience" and into the unconscious of the individual and works as his own desire, morality, and fulfillment. In the "normal" development, the individual lives his repression "freely" as his own life: he desires what he is supposed to desire; his gratifications are profitable to him and to others; he is reasonably and often exuberantly happy.⁹

The subtle abolition of personality described here coincides with the condition prepared for by the cataclysmic First World War and the Russian Revolution and accomplished by the modern totalitarian movements:

The truth is that the masses grew out of the fragments of a highly atomized society whose competitive structure and concomitant loneliness of the individual had been held in check only through membership in a class. The chief characteristic of the mass man is not brutality and backwardness, but his isolation and lack of normal social relationships. Coming from the class-ridden

⁹Herbert Marcuse, Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), pp. 31, 41, 42.

society of the nation-state, whose cracks had been cemented with nationalistic sentiment, it is only natural that these masses, in the first helplessness of their new experience, have tended toward an especially violent nationalism, to which mass leaders have yielded against their own instincts and purposes for purely demagogic reasons. . . . In this atmosphere of the breakdown of class society the psychology of the European mass man developed. The fact that with monotonous but abstract uniformity the same fate had befallen a mass of individuals did not prevent their judging themselves in terms of individual failure or the world in terms of specific injustice. This self-centered bitterness, however, although repeated again and again in individual isolation, was not a common bond despite its tendency to extinguish individual differences, because it was based on no common interest, economic or social or political. Self-centeredness, therefore, went hand in hand with a decisive weakening of the instinct for self-preservation. Selflessness in the sense that oneself does not matter, the feeling of being expendable, was no longer the expression of individual idealism but a mass phenomenon.¹⁰

Orwell's artist novel, Keep the Aspidistra Flying, is a kind of pivotal book in the sense that Gordon Comstock is caught between the old, stifling social and moral forms and the new Socialism. However, written in 1935, the novel precedes Orwell's explicit anti-totalitarian purpose in his writing; consequently, Socialism is not fully assimilated into the dramatic texture of the book but exists tangentially in the character of Ravelston, a typical dilettante Socialist who can afford to be one because he enjoys enough inherited wealth to permit an abstract social idealism. He is the intellectual capitalist of the 1930's who plays with Socialism, chiefly as a safety-valve for his money-guilt. Gordon Comstock, like Orwell at this time, rejects theoretical

¹⁰Arendt, pp. 315-17.

Socialism--the "patriotism of the deracinated." Therefore, the major force against which Gordon attempts to struggle for his self-preservation is the decadent, economically dominated institutions in his society.

Although Gordon Comstock is partly a ridiculous figure and his own psychological distortions inhibit his artistic productivity, he is unable to be an artist largely because of his environmental predicament. His fate anticipates what Orwell was to state clearly in 1940 about the fate of the artist: "The literature of liberalism is coming to an end and the literature of totalitarianism has not yet appeared and is barely imaginable. As for the writer, he is sitting on a melting iceberg; he is merely an anachronism, a hangover from the bourgeois age, as surely doomed as the hippopotamus. . . . From now onwards the all-important fact for the creative writer is going to be that this is not a writer's world. That does not mean that he cannot help to bring the new society into being, but he can take no part in the process as a writer. For as a writer he is a liberal, and what is happening is the destruction of liberalism."¹¹ Orwell's sense of the plight of the artist under modern conditions is echoed in Gordon's remark to Ravelston that "there are only three alternatives," and "all three of them make us spew": Socialism, suicide, and the Catholic Church. He observes that although Catholicism "is

¹¹Orwell, A Collection of Essays, pp. 254-55.

a standing temptation to the intelligentsia," it is "a bit unsanitary under Mother Church's wing"; and Socialism is "a counsel of despair."¹² He concludes that these are only symbolic forms of suicide, after all; but he prefers not to commit actual suicide. Neither can he accept Socialism:

"There's only one objection to Socialism, and that is that nobody wants it That's to say, nobody who could see what Socialism would really mean." [Ravelston asks] "But what would Socialism mean, according to your idea of it?" "Oh! some kind of Aldous Huxley Brave New World; only not so amusing. Four hours a day in a model factory, tightening up bolt 6003. Rations served out in greaseproof paper at the communal kitchen. Community hikes from Marx Hostel to Lenin Hostel and back. Free abortion-clinics on all the corners. All very well in its way, of course. Only we don't want it."¹³

He prefers not "to give up my share of earth to anyone else. I'd want to do in a few of my enemies first."¹⁴ Gordon's choice has been, at first secret and later open, to wage war against the money-god; he is against a major, fundamental distortion of the modern age--the marriage of economics and religion and the attendant commercial prostitution of literature. These conditions are at least totalitarian in tendency, for they attempt to render the individual mindless by forcing on him distorted, inverted concepts; by manipulating language and idea into conformity with the economic standard; and by denying sanctity of individualism.

¹²George Orwell, Keep the Aspidistra Flying (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1956), p. 88.

¹³Ibid., pp. 87-88.

¹⁴Ibid.

Gordon's characteristic strategy is escape--escape from these conditions, which are real--first into art, with its implicit spiritual significance. His early decision to be a writer was a defiance of his family's desire that he "make good" in the money-world; and he speaks of driving his mind "into the abyss where poetry is written."¹⁵ Later, after his orgy of drunkenness and squandering, which costs him his "decent" job at the bookstore, he attempts to "go down, deep down, into some world where decency no longer mattered; to cut the strings of his self-respect, to submerge himself--to sink. . . . It was all bound up in his mind with the thought of being underground . . . that great sluttish underworld where failure and success have no meaning; a sort of kingdom of ghosts where all are equal."¹⁶

Both efforts to escape are doomed to failure: he cannot "ascend" into art or "descend" into destitution; and he ultimately succumbs to reality under pressures from within and without. Although Orwell treats this submission comically in the novel, it constitutes his understanding of tragedy: "A tragic situation exists precisely when virtue does not triumph but when it is felt that man is nobler than the forces which destroy him."¹⁷ Significantly, Gordon comments on his capitulation: "The money-god is so cunning. If he

¹⁵Ibid., p. 32.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 203.

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 218-19.

only baited his traps with yachts and racehorses, tarts and champagne, how easy it would be to dodge him. It's when he gets you through your sense of decency that he finds your helpless."¹⁸

The inversion of economics and religion, the controlling irony of the novel, takes form prior to the novel in Orwell's adaptation of I Corinthians xii, which is the epigraph. In Orwell's version, money replaces charity in the verse, and the inversion aptly reflects the moral displacement of the modern world and the psychological desperation of Gordon Comstock. Throughout the book Gordon is plagued by the inverted values: Money is a virtue, gratuitously given and held, which allows social, artistic, intellectual, and sexual success; and charity is an ignoble thing, which if one accepts it, is spiritually debasing and morally destructive. The physical setting corroborates the spiritual corrosion that such inversion implies; and Gordon's artistic sense is constantly distracted by the omnipresent billboards; thoughts of the shabby remnants of his family, reduced to sterility and threatened with extinction by their adherence to the money-code; the mean decency of the lower-middle class, in which he lives and is in constant fear of being spied upon and disapproved of; the contrasting conditions of his own poverty and Ravelston's affluence; the impossibility (because of his lack of money) of a satisfactory

¹⁸Ibid.

relationship with women; and restrictions imposed on literary publication by the book trade.

At least partly because his adversary, the money-god, is pervasive, yet abstract in outline, Gordon's battle is quixotic and hopeless. In his frustration, he observes that his interpretation of the external world is merely an objectification of his own feelings. As he says to Ravelston at one point, "It's all dictated by what we've got in our pockets."¹⁹ The over-riding irony is that the mainstream of life, the possibilities for survival, flow in an economic current; and yet the individual who plunges is drowned in the whirlpool of conformity. The living world is a dead world: economics has robbed religion of its spiritual content; and, therefore, robbed human life of true spiritual meaning; yet, that is where life is--in the money-world. Gordon's efforts to escape into an erstwhile spiritual sanctuary--poetic creation--degenerate into an attempt to submerge himself in the "ghost kingdom" of squalor.

The image that opens the book is a clock in the bookstore where Gordon works, sounding the hour of two, and answered by one across the street, which is flanked by the despised billboards. The final scene is of Gordon kneeling before Rosemary (nee Waterlow) with his ear against her stomach, listening to the surging blood of his child which she carries. Between these symbols, the machine and human

¹⁹Ibid., p. 234.

procreation, stands the aspidistra--the vile houseplant, organism appropriated by the mechanistic, deadening society, and thus transformed for Gordon into a hateful, indestructible symbol of social tyranny. Yet, it remains a symbol of life, however compromised; and, after his marriage, he insists on having one in every room of his "decent" apartment. Just before he throws his poem into the street drain, he sardonically recognizes that the aspidistra is the "tree of life."

In this tragi-comic world, then, artistic ambitions must be sacrificed. It is significant that throughout the novel Gordon does very little actual composition. In fact, in his effort early in the novel to write, he crosses out a couplet and adds or replaces nothing. He clings to his "masterpiece" even during his descent into squalor, but soon acknowledges the futility of it. Even before Rosemary becomes pregnant, he loses all his feeling for London Pleasures "as a poem," in his squalid circumstances:

The whole concept of poetry was meaningless to him now. It was only that if London Pleasures were ever finished it would be something snatched from fate, a thing created outside the money-world. But he knew, far more clearly than before, that it would never be finished. How was it possible that any creative impulse should remain to him, in the life he was living now? As time went on, even the desire to finish London Pleasures vanished. He still carried the manuscript about in his pocket; but it was only a gesture, a symbol of his private war. He had finished for ever with that futile dream of being a "writer." After all, was not that too a species of ambition? He wanted to get away from all that, below all that. Down, down! Into the ghost kingdom, out of the reach of hope, out of the reach of

fear! Under ground, under ground! That was where he wished to be.²⁰

However, he finds that escape, even into destitution, is not so easy. As he says, "Going to the devil isn't so easy as it sounds. Sometimes your salvation haunts you down like the Hound of Heaven."²¹ Rosemary finds him in his shabby room and gives herself to him. He submits to his long-frustrated desire for her, and later learns that it is spring; and, even spring in twentieth-century London, with its "vile dusty winds," "few sooty buds on trees," and resurrected aspidistra plant, means new life. Rosemary soon returns to inform him of her pregnancy.

The sacrifice of the poem for the child constitutes a major symbolic act in the novel. The spiritual vitality of poetry, like that of religion, has been distilled by modern civilization and claimed by economics. Esthetically, artistic creativity had been analogous to organic creativity, at least since nineteenth-century Romantic literary standards. After going to the library to see pictures of human embryos, Gordon decides that he must marry Rosemary and return to the money-world--"A panorama of ignorance, greed, vulgarity, snobbishness, whoredom and disease." His "hesitation had been a kind of make-believe. He felt as though some force outside himself were pushing him." But soon he admits, "It was what, in his secret heart, he had desired." Just before

²⁰Ibid., p. 237.

²¹Ibid., pp. 238-39.

he drops his poem down the drain-grating, he calls the poem the

"sole fruit of his exile, a two years' foetus which would never be born. Well, he had finished with all that. Poetry! Poetry, indeed! In 1935." . . . In the window of the nearest house an aspidistra, a striped one, peeped out between the yellow lace curtains He doubled up the manuscript and stuffed it between the bars of the drain. It fell with a plop into the water below. Vicisti, O aspidistra!

Thus, in spite of Orwell's steady, unwavering vision of the horror in modern experience and his awareness that isolation--privacy, freedom, spiritual sanctity--is no longer possible, he retained an intuitive margin of faith in humanity. As Gordon reflects,

Everyone rebels against the money-code, and sooner or later, surrenders He wondered whether every anchorite in his dismal cell pines secretly to be back in the world of men A typical lower-middle-class street. . . . He wondered about the people in houses like those Did they know that they were only puppets dancing when money pulled the strings? You bet they didn't. And if they did, what would they care? They were too busy being born, being married, begetting, working, dying. It mightn't be a bad thing, if you could manage it, to feel yourself one of them, one of the ruck of men. Our civilisation is founded on greed and fear, but in the lives of common men the greed and fear are mysteriously transmuted into something nobler . . . they lived by the money-code, sure enough, and yet they contrived to keep their decency. . . . Besides, they were alive. They were bound up in the bundle of life. They begat children, which is what the saints and the soul-savers never by any chance do.²²

These sentiments are Orwell's; and Gordon's musings are another way of his acknowledging the profound obligation of the artist to direct his attention to those places where

²²Ibid.

"things are actually happening." The affirmation is intuitive and highly qualified, but it is a variant of the tragic artist's reservation of faith in the human world--a reservation inherent in all tragedy that saves the artist from utter cynicism or black despair.

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