

IN ORDER TO CONTINUE THE TALE OVER THE TELLER:

DURRELL, CREELEY, LAWRENCE

by

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis concerns itself with prose fiction.

The function of prose is to tell a story. And the writing of a story is a legitimate means of engaging reality--is, in fact, one method of measuring what that term is. As value. To prove it out. The process, however, must be active and open-ended. Beginnings and endings do therefore not matter greatly, are at the most artificially imposed (omnipotence on the part of the writer here can lead straight to didactic arrogance if he assumes that his technology can provide him with the whole story, or if his vision leads him to apocalyptic pronouncements; either way the story then ends, cannot go on).

Since no one can presumably claim that omnipotence, our area of participation is literally in the middle, what goes on between things. What Charles Olson calls "contest." Can prose (as one tool among many) help to determine what reality is in that sense? Of what use is it, what is its value?

I see two extremist alternatives. One is to order the story--the "contest"--so that each cause-effect element within it is under direct conscious control of

the narrator: everything is knowable. The other alternative--what I call a totalitarianism of the unconscious--is where a process of organic free association is substituted for acts of choice, where responsibility for the knowledge of consequences is denied. Both are forms of escape, of wish-fulfillment.

The argument of this thesis comes out of a particular consideration of four prose pieces: Lawrence Durrell's Alexandria Quartet, Robert Creeley's The Island and two short stories by D. H. Lawrence, "Glad Ghosts" and "The Last Laugh". Out of these works I trace the history of my critical vocabulary. And in doing so come upon an argument for a use of prose which makes its chief responsibility that of helping to determine what possibilities there are for a man to do in order to continue doing, to tell a story--and to know that as an act of value.

DEDICATION

to Jerry Zaslove

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## NOTE

The following abbreviations are used for works often cited within the text of the thesis.

### Lawrence Durrell:

- Quartet = Alexandria Quartet
- J = Justine
- B = Balthazar
- M = Mountolive
- C = Clea
- Key = A Key to Modern British Poetry
- Spirit = Spirit of Place
- Corr. = A Private Correspondence (with Henry Miller)

### Robert Creeley:

- Graph = A Quick Graph: Collected Notes & Essays  
--from the novel, The Island, only the page numbers are given within Chapter Two.

### D. H. Lawrence:

- Phoenix II = Phoenix II, Uncollected, Unpublished and Other Prose Works
- Reflections = Reflections On The Death of A Porcupine and Other Essays  
--from The Complete Short Stories, Vol. III, the two stories "Glad Ghosts" and "The Last Laugh" are referred to by page number within their respective sections of Chapter Three.

Charles Olson:

Letters = Letters For ORIGIN, 1950-1956

Publication details of these works appear in the bibliography.

"To tell the story, is all one can do."

--Robert Creeley

CHAPTER I

LAWRENCE DURRELL AND THE ALEXANDRIA QUARTET: "A UNIVERSE  
AT REST, A UNIVERSE IN LOVE WITH ITSELF"

"The sort of pattern we make should be of interest to someone; or is it just a meaningless display of coloured fireworks, the actions of human beings or a set of dusty puppets which could be hung up in the corner of a writer's mind? I suppose you ask yourself the question." (C, p. 63)

It is the nature of allegorical soap-operas to know exactly where they are going. In the beginning there is a problem, in the end it is resolved. We know what will happen (how things "turn out"), but not precisely how the machinery will work. Usually, as in the fable, the end has a moral attached. The hero is set certain trials, surmounts them and learns his lesson from that experience.

Identification with the hero is what pulls the reader in. It is a form of initiation, in a sense of rites de passage, for in the period of trials the reader is free to indulge himself in the aura of uncertainty which the author, if he is skillful, throws up around the hero. However, the necessity of such a closed universe demands the correct ending: everything will turn out all right. It is, by definition, the way the world is. By definition.

Such a world contains everything and, in turn, everything in it is containable. I mean simply that cause and effect is under absolute, conscious control (although the reader may not wish to believe this as he reads, preferring rather to titillate himself with the possibilities of the unknown--until the end of course). The duel in the streets at high noon, the clash with the dragon, the lovers separated by misunderstanding, the tensions between intellect and feeling, the rebellion of youth against the father authority--are all elements of the plot. The Plot.

It controls all. Even the author--such a god that he is under these circumstances--once embarked into a universe which demands the apocalyptic ascent into heaven at the end of the story, must follow along. It is his job to see that there will be an ultimate justice in the machinery, that good will triumph, that effects control causes.

The word allegory: "L. allegoria; Gr. allégoria, description of one thing under the image of another... the presenting of ideas by means of such stories; symbolical narration or description." Symbol: "Gr. symbolon, token, pledge, sign by which one infers a thing...something that stands for or represents another thing; especially, an object used to represent something

abstract...." (Webster) The story is the world, which is known. The characters are representative of powers for good or evil in the world. What makes the story the world, what controls the end of the story, is magic. Frazer's first fundamental principle of that (in his chapter "The Roots of Magic"), the Law of Similarity: "like produces like, effect resembling cause...the magician infers that he can produce any effect he desires merely by imitating it in advance...."<sup>1</sup>

Life is change. But we wish to control that change, to achieve absoluteness and absolution by what we will to become. The hero and his womb-closed world, where movement up the scale of changes is so inevitable, these things are the representatives of our hope, the candles we burn to immortality. And who is to say that the possibility may not still be there--however small in this age of relativity--that there is a correspondence of power between the absolute world of our desires (where we "imitate" those desires "in advance") and the outside world of the unknown? A good soap-opera is sometimes almost believable.

"In the midst of winter you can feel the inventions of spring." (J, p. 11)

The sun's cycle of power and weakness. There is

an eternity here: spring into summer into autumn into winter into spring. Justine, the first book of the Alexandria Quartet, opens in "the midst of winter" (J, p. 11). Clea's last letter to Darley, at the end of Clea, describes Justine "on a bright spring morning" coming "towards me, radiant and beautifully turned out in a spring frock of eloquent design...." (C, p. 244). Of course Justine isn't the only character in the Quartet to profit by the turning of the seasons. Clea herself becomes "a real human being, an artist at last." (C, p. 245) And with Darley:

It came on a blue day, quite unpremeditated, quite unannounced, and with such ease I would not have believed it. I had been until then like some timid girl, scared of the birth of her first child.

Yes, one day I found myself writing down with trembling fingers the four words (four letters! four faces!) with which every story-teller since the world began has staked his slender claim to the attention of his fellow-men. Words which presage simply the old story of an artist coming of age. I wrote 'Once upon a time....'

And I felt as if the whole universe had given me a nudge! (C, p. 246)

There is no reason why the last paragraph of the Alexandria Quartet can't be read first: Once upon a time "the sea is high again today, with a thrilling flush of wind. In the midst of winter you can feel the inventions of spring."



arguments about a writer's conscious autobiography showing up in his fictions--I do want to reveal the kind of intentional correspondence going on between the author, his characters and the novel. Nothing does this better than a quote from Pursewarden:

No, but seriously, if you wished to be--I do not say original but merely contemporary--you might try a four-card trick in the form of a novel; passing a common axis through four stories, say, and dedicating each to one of the four winds of heaven. A continuum, forsooth, embodying not a temps retrouvé but a temps délivré. The curvature of space itself would give you stereoscopic narrative, while human personality seen across a continuum would perhaps become prismatic? Who can say? I throw the idea out. I can imagine a form which, if satisfied, might raise in human terms the problems of causality or indeterminacy....And nothing very recherché either. Just an ordinary Girl Meets Boy story. (C, p. 116)

Say maybe the Alexandria Quartet. Durrell, in the "Author's Note" to Clea, calls the Quartet a "word continuum." And in the prefatory "Note" to Balthazar says he is "trying to complete a four-decker novel whose form is based on the relativity proposition" where "three sides of space and one of time constitute the soup-mix recipe of a continuum. The four novels follow this pattern." In the first three, "time is stayed," whereas, "the fourth part alone will represent time and be a true sequel." Because "the subject-object relation is so

important to relativity" Durrell tries to get in both by making Mountolive a "straight naturalistic novel in which the narrator of Justine and Balthazar becomes an object, i.e. a character." And for the "Girl Meets Boy story": "the central topic of the book is an investigation of modern love."

That point wasn't hard to make; Durrell's ideas have their representatives within the novel. And the Alexandria Quartet appears to be headed into a serious consideration of the "contemporary" world, the world of Einstein, the world of no absolutes. A world where fixed causal beginnings and ends give way to an investigation of fluctuating processes. Where relationships are dependent upon three-dimensional movement within a universe so-defined by that constant of change--time--a universe of coming together and moving apart where there is no hidden framework beyond what is happening between things (Albert Einstein, in his "Note to the 15th edition" of Relativity, states: "I wished to show that space-time is not necessarily something to which one can ascribe a separate existence, independently of the actual objects of physical reality.")<sup>2</sup>

In short, the Alexandria Quartet purports to function in terms of a relativistic universe.

2. "...the symbolism contained in form and pattern is only a frame of reference through which, as in a mirror, one may glimpse the idea of a universe at rest, a universe in love with itself." (C, p. 123)

Durrell claims two important corner-stones from Einstein's General Theory: "its attitude to time, and its attitude to the subject-object relationship." (Key, p.28)

From the latter he extracts the idea of a reality processed from multiplicity of viewpoint. The argument runs roughly as follows:

The materialists were wrong when they assumed a complete separation between subject and object (the object's knowable state being totally independent from the subjective views of the observer.) If I take Plato's chair as the object, for example, the question of whether there is, somewhere--even if only in the mind--a perfect chair which is then absolutely REAL is a meaningless consideration. One can certainly believe that such a chair exists but it can't be produced (the problem of perfecting abstractions.) A chair is only what it is and what we know of that depends on its position in space-time relative to each observer perceiving it. There may not be drastic differences in such perspectives, but there will be differences. As Durrell points out: "Even if different observers all take their pictures

at the same moment of time, and from the same point in space, these pictures will not be alike--unless the observers happen to be moving at the same speed. Only then would they be identical." (Key, p. 28). Indeed, they could not be at "the same moment of time" and "the same point in space" unless they were moving at the same speed. And also, I might add, moving in the same direction. But without an absolute point de vue of the universe (in this sense an omniscient narrator), these problems cease to be troubling. There is no such thing as the total picture, one is in the picture, there, part of it.

The slight differences in perspective I spoke of (never the "same moment," the "same point"), are not, however, enough to normally bother us, we usually ignore them. The world is fairly consistent. Time becomes a past-present-future we can feel continuous with, act on, identify. But this isn't, in Durrell's words, "Einstein's time." He then quotes from The Mysterious Universe by Sir James Jeans: "It may be that time, from its beginning to the end of eternity, is spread before us in the picture, but we are in contact with only one instant, just as a bicycle-wheel is in contact with only one point of the road." Here is the possibility--what we so often wish for--a concept of an eternity with a beginning, an end and, presumably, us fitted into the

middle of this scheme. But Jeans then qualifies this, strangely enough from Plato's Timaeus: "'The past and future are created species of time which we unconsciously but wrongly transfer to the eternal essence. We say was, is, will be, but the truth is that is alone can properly be used.'" (Key, p. 29).

Which is a statement of relativity. What Plato does with that is not directly my concern. What Durrell does with it is to say: "It was a sort of time which contained all time in every moment of time" (Key, p. 29). And that is an interesting sentence because the time of the particular--Einstein's "event"--has been generalized, abstracted, made universal: "a sort of time which contained all time." The question is, how much does Durrell depend on abstraction for his sense of form and meaning (the category of Time: "from its beginning to the end of eternity")? Do we now have the eternal back as a kind of paradise regained through the back-door of twentieth century rationalization? I must quote Durrell quoting from Jeans once more, this time from the latter's Physics and Philosophy:

It seems at least conceivable that what is true of perceived objects may also be true of perceiving minds; just as there are wave-pictures for light and electricity, so there may be a corresponding picture for consciousness. When we view ourselves in space and time our consciousness are obviously the separate individuals of

a particle-picture, when we pass beyond space and time (presumably into the continuum which is formed of a mixture of both) they may perhaps form ingredients of a single continuous stream of life. As it is with light and electricity, so it may with life; the phenomena may be individuals carrying on separate existences in space and time, while in the deeper reality beyond space and time we may all be members of one body. In brief, modern physics is not altogether antagonistic to an objective idealism like that of Hegel. (Key, p. 30)

Well. This isn't really "modern physics" at all. When you start talking about "the deeper reality beyond space and time" Einstein is left in the energy of activity. I mentioned a hidden framework earlier. The above is a good statement of an intense desire for such a thing.

Durrell, however, isn't seriously a relativist anyway.

We first get wind of the "Heraldic Universe" in the early correspondence with Henry Miller. In a letter to Miller written in the fall of 1936 from Corfu, Durrell says, "To have art you've first got to...get it ready for misery. Art nowadays is going to be real art, as before the flood. What I propose to do...is to create my HERALDIC UNIVERSE quite alone...I AM SLOWLY BUT VERY CAREFULLY AND WITHOUT CONSCIOUS THOUGHT DESTROYING TIME ...the idea of duration is false...THERE IS ONLY SPACE. A solid object has only three dimensions. Time, that old appendix, I've lopped off." (Corr., p. 19) Apart

from grandiosely playing Zeus against Chronos, Durrell here first states his equation of "art" and "misery" (which theme follows him around like a faithful dog, especially in the Quartet: "but it hurts to realize").

Later, from Alexandria in the spring of 1945, he has moved to geometry. But the heraldic universe concept shows its real roots: Pythagoras and Plotinus. Not really surprising, coming out of Alexandria. My interest here is not in how he glosses from those two but in what Durrell thinks the Ideal is and how it is to be gotten at. Half-way through the letter he tells Miller:

I have unearthed some facts about a cabalistic group, direct descendants of the Orphics, who ...have been quietly at work on a morphology of experience which is pure Pythagoras.... They teach nothing; they assert nothing; they do not even correspond; they are pre-Christian adepts. I am going along to see Mr. Baltazian one of these days to find out all about the circle and the square. He is a small banker here. What they have to say is interesting: the pure symbol, which is non-formulable in the rational sense. You have to grow the extra-sensory awareness of the symbol and accommodate it in your experience--not express it.... It is a calculus of pure aesthetic forms, a game like a heavenly chess;.... Ah, but the purity of the symbol--I am just beginning to see it as the extension of the field of concepts.... I think I have mastered the first two thought-forms, whose 'contemptible' representation are the circle and the square. (Corr, pp. 201-202)

Durrell then proposes that his "Heraldic Universe" does not move towards the usual goal of mysticism:

"One-ness." Instead it moves away from any "state or stasis: a point of cooperation with time." And, "having passed through the impurities of the ONENESS of EVERYTHING, you are included in Time. Now FORMS EMERGE." Unfortunately, we are still working in terms of a hierarchy of spiritual progress: "1st State, 2nd State, 3rd State...." And also these forms, pure symbols, whatever-they-are, cannot be defined "except by ideogram: this is 'non-assertive' form" (Corr, p. 203)

The old problem, consciousness and action: how to have a totality without knowing it, how to get to the Ultimate and yet still keep things moving.

The Alexandria Quartet tries very hard to assert movement, to create the illusion that it functions in an open universe. In the "Author's Note" to Clea, Durrell claims that "it should be possible to radiate in any direction without losing the strictness and congruity of the continuum." The "Workpoints" which appear at the end of every book save Mountolive, attempt to throw off further plot possibilities. Yet there is undeniably a kind of apotheosis at the end of Clea, the "story of an artist coming of age" and supposedly then the beginning of a creation--which unfortunately we don't get in the Quartet because Darley writes only "once upon a time...." I'm not saying of course that the Quartet

couldn't go on. Soap-operas are notoriously infinite in terms of their one-dimensionality. But it would be a serial, the very thing the author does not want; ("even if the series were extended indefinitely the result would never become a roman fleuve [an expansion of the matter in serial form] but would remain strictly part of the present word-continuum.")

Why not, then? Because the Alexandria Quartet is not a "word continuum."

3. "As soon as this goes off to you I begin preparing myself for writing. I'm starting at Vol. I of the Encyclopaedia Brit. and reading through all the big subjects. History. Biology. Surgery. Philosophy. And anything else that interests me. It will take me an age...."  
(SPIRIT, letter to Alan G. Thomas, from Corfu, 1936, p. 38)

"The little steamer...entered the lagoon, there to lie in a furry cocoon of its own light: and to drop into the centre of the golden puddle it had created the long slow anchor-chain whose symbol itself is like a search for truth."  
(B, p. 15)

The Mr. Baltazian of the letter to Miller, although a banker, bears strong resemblances to Balthazar. Both run a cabal, both search for "truth," (and I think of Balthazar Claes, in Balzac's La Recherche de l'absolu, who strives after the philosopher's stone and is a victim of his devotion to 'science'). In the Quartet,

Balthazar searches for this key ("still hunting among these great paving stones for the key to a watch which is Time"--C, p. 56) and seeks a continuum of total spiritual experience ("so to ennoble function that even eating and excreting will be raised to the rank of arts"--J, p. 100). It is he who releases Narouz' harpoon into Clea's hand, ("'What are you doing with that?' I said idly. 'Seeing how it works.'"--C, p. 214), who constructs for Darley the "great Interlinear" and who correctly delineates the form of the Quartet: "...if you wished somehow to incorporate all I am telling you into your own Justine manuscript now, you would find yourself with a curious sort of book--the story would be told, so to speak, in layers. Unwittingly I may have supplied you with a form, something out of the way! Not unlike Pursewarden's idea of a series of novels with 'sliding panels' as he called them. Or else, perhaps, like some medieval palimpsest where different sorts of truth are thrown down one upon the other, the one obliterating or perhaps supplementing another....to apply to the reality of Alexandria...between Theocritus, Plotinus, and the Septuagent." (B, p. 155)

Not a moving relative universe but a fixed hierarchy of layers; pull out a "panel," examine it, push it back in, pull out another. Therefore the constant

insistence upon "symbols." The Quartet is a novel of representation; hidden somewhere in the woodwork are the "real" things. The city particularly has its transcendent--and transparent--reality. Pursewarden states: "'We were still almost a couple of hours' steaming distance before land could possibly come into sight when suddenly my companion shouted and pointed at the horizon. We saw, inverted in the sky, a full-scale mirage of the city, luminous and trembling.... The whole representation was as breath-taking as a masterpiece painted in fresh dew. It hung there... perhaps twenty-five minutes, before melting slowly into the horizon mist. An hour later, the real city appeared, swelling from a smudge to the size of its mirage.'" (B, pp. 13-14) In the "Note" to Justine Durrell claims, "Only the city is real."

In A Key to Modern British Poetry, Durrell dwells at length on Freudian dream analysis. He calls dreaming "poetical thinking." One of the important points which he takes from Freud is the latter's view that "In the Id there is nothing corresponding to the idea of time, no recognition of the passage of time...." (Key, p. 55) Durrell then constructs a dream on the principle of "Symbols" around which "associations" collect. Such "...symbols, taken one by one, can be made to fit into

a general pattern." (Key, p. 58) Two other points are also important here because they are extremely characteristic of Durrell's methodology in the Quartet: "The dream often substitutes the opposite of what it wants to say as a disguise," and, "The dream, then, operates upon a series of different levels, and if we once dispose of the top layer of associations we find another layer and another underneath, packed like chocolates" (Key, pp. 59-60).

What this adds up to, I think, is an archeological expedition, the study of ARTIFACT. The four dimensional fact of experience is stopped, forcibly, time is "destroyed"--"lopped off"--and the "palimpsest"--the "chocolates"--are examined one by one, each "layer" stripped carefully off. The image to me is of a crystal under a microscope. Indeed Darley uses much the same term in speaking of the Interlinear: "this mass of crystallized data...." (B, p. 155)

It is given to Balthazar to grapple with this problem and attempt an escape. He articulates the novel's theoretical ideal, but even in doing so he betrays the impossibility of such activity by his generalizations, his retreat into abstractions: "'To intercalate realities' writes Balthazar 'is the only way to be faithful to Time, for at every moment in Time the

possibilities are endless in their multiplicity. Life consists in the act of choice. The perpetual reservations of judgement and the perpetual choosing.'" (B, p. 193)

This feint towards a kind of existential freedom is a brave one but is in vain for several reasons. First of all it predicates a sense of individuality which the characters in the Quartet lack ("I see all of us not as men and women any longer...but as beings unconsciously made part of place, buried to the waist among the ruins of a single city, steeped in its values;"--B, pp. 192-193). Behaviorism runs rampant. True, the object of Darley's digging amongst the ruins is "really a search for my proper self." (B, p. 193) But that does not necessarily mean freedom of choice, particularly in the context of the second factor, the inevitability of the Quartet's universe. And for that, it is necessary to look at the third book, Mountolive.

Any pretensions towards a relative universe in the Alexandria Quartet must here be abandoned. In Mountolive --a "straight naturalistic novel"--the omniscient narrator has an absolute perspective on the world of the Quartet. Any ambiguities of possibility are polarized, motives are pinned down clearly, the characters are indeed "objects." For example, Mountolive and Leila have parted, he has left Egypt for his first diplomatic posting in Prague. For her, "...at last she would be free to possess

Mountolive as she wished--greedily in her mind." (M, p. 46) The narrator then makes this judgment of that action: "Nor was she wrong in realizing that had they been free to indulge passion at will, their relationship could not have survived more than a twelvemonth." (M, p. 46) HOW DOES HE KNOW THAT? The question is pointless.

And from the vantage-point of the omniscient narrator the reader can also play god. Dramatic irony is a functioning tool. But more important, predetermined causes and effects render the possibilities of the novel's environment inert. For example, Mountolive has found out about Justine and Nessim's political activities via Pursewarden's letter. The latter commits suicide. Mountolive is left with a problem: "They were puzzles now...something he had never properly understood, never clearly evaluated. Somehow his friendship for them had prevented him from thinking of them as people who might, like himself, be living on several different levels at once. As conspirators, as lovers--what was the key to the enigma?" (M, p. 173) And out of his own past comes an effect which we can be sure has a direct Freudian cause, his earache, ("the first time he had ever been attacked while he was outside the stockade of his mother's security"--M, p. 172). The answer? In terms of the

Justine-Nessim "enigma," the narrator assures us that, in this universe, all the information is available:

But perhaps the clues that he sought lay further back in the past--further than either he or Pursewarden could see from a vantage-point in the present time.

There were many facts about Justine and Nessim which had not come to his knowledge --some of them critical for an understanding of their case. But in order to include them it is necessary once more to retrace our steps briefly to the period immediately before the marriage. (M, p. 173, my italics)

The Alexandria Quartet becomes, then, a detective story, a conscious attempt to recover a motivational totality.

4. "Symbolism! The abbreviation of language into a poem. The heraldic aspect of reality! Symbolism is the great repair-outfit of the psyche, Brother Ass, the fond de pouvoir of the soul." (Pursewarden, B, p. 118)

It's clear that Durrell relies to a great extent on what he takes from Freud. Aside from the latter's ideas on time and the Id, there are also other Freudian concepts on which he leans heavily: the Oedipal relationship, the sexual questions of power between parents and offspring, incest, guilt. Mountolive's relationship to his own mother and to Leila, who is a kind of mother

confessor ("he could tell me everything"), Nessim's dependence on Leila ("I sometimes think I shall never be able to fall in love properly until after my mother dies"--M, p. 175), Narouz: "how heavy was the guilt one bore for filial disobedience!" (M, p. 269), Liza: "when the guilt entered the old poetic life began to lose its magic" (C, p. 167), Pursewarden: "One writes to recover a lost innocence!" (M, p. 95) and Clea: "the question of my own blasted virginity was the root cause of the business. You know it is a terrible business to be a virgin --it is like not having one's Matric or Bac." (C, p. 92) In effect the Quartet has the makings of an adolescent emotional orgy, "a puberty of the feelings which had to be outgrown." (M, p. 247) Clea puts it precisely: "Oh, isn't it disgusting? When will we all grow up?" (C, p.222, my italics)

But Durrell felt that Freudian allegory was too obvious if left unenhanced with a little mystery:

In all the marvellous pages of Freud we see the analytical intellect pursuing its chain of cause-and effect; if only the last link can be reached, if only the first cause can be established, the whole pattern will become clear. Freud believed that science could reach that cause by thought and experiment. To Groddeck such a proposition was false. The Whole was an unknown, a forever unknowable entity whose shadows and functions we are...the mystery behind. (Key, p. 75)

The Groddeck referred to is George Walther Groddeck, who, Durrell says, "is the first analyst to try to go beyond the ego in his conception of human personality.... Where Freud spoke of analysis in regard to the psyche ...Jung preferred to think in terms of creative synthesis. Groddeck went a step further than this. His concept of disease is metaphysical." (Key, p. 73) The "Whole" which Durrell mentioned is referred to by Groddeck as the "It." This totality, this "It," is forever unknowable as a first cause. Man is "a function of this mysterious force which expresses itself through him, through his illness no less than his health." Now. Durrell has this fascination with disease, it permeates the Quartet. What he gets from Groddeck is that, "Disease appeared to be one of the psyche's ways of expressing itself, that was all." (Key, p. 75) The Quartet is supposedly a series of novels on "modern love." Clea states of the word 'love': "...this dreadful word--this synonym for derangement or illness...like saying 'My poor child, you have got cancer!'" (C, p. 222)

The central characters in the Alexandria Quartet are all sick or handicapped. A list follows:

Balthazar -- false teeth, ugly hands, slashes his wrists over a love affair.

Justine -- "neurasthenia" ("we carried her disease backwards and forwards over Europe like a baby

in a cradle...."--J, p. 70) and a drooping left eyelid after a small stroke in Palestine. Clea -- describing her in Justine, Darley is afraid that the "outward structures of her life" might offer the appearance of "a disappointed and ingrown virgin who had deprived herself of the world because of some psychic instability, or some insurmountable early wound." (J, p. 113) We know Clea is going to get her wound and she does ("It is funny but I realized that precisely what wounded me most as a woman nourished me most as an artist"--C, p. 95).

Semira -- noseless. Amaril and Clea doctor her an artificial one.

Melissa -- ("with her sex broken"--J, p. 21), has only one lung, dies of a severe illness while Darley is in Upper Egypt.

Mountolive -- a limp in one leg, his earaches.

Liza -- blind, incestuous.

Pursewarden -- incest, suicide. Keats says of him that he is "like some Dostoevskian character beset by some nasty compulsion neurosis!" (C, p. 160) And Clea remarks that he is "quite simply, a man tortured beyond endurance by the lack of tenderness in the world." (J, p. 213) It is Pursewarden who

first voices what Darley learns after the episode with Clea and the harpoon: "Yes, but it hurts to realize." (C, pp. 118, 219)

Scobie -- has a glass eye, dislocated jaw, smashed frontal sinus, false teeth, spinal curvature and his "Tendencies" ("I suppose one shouldn't have Tendencies--any more than warts or a big nose. But what can I do?"--B, p. 27).

Narouz -- a hare-lip. And the "divine madness" that possesses him as a preacher at the Copt meetings.

Nessim -- he limps, loses an eye and a finger during his work in the ambulance corps, plus varied emotional problems.

Mnemjian -- a hunchback.

Capodistria -- a sexual monomania ("his psychological inheritance is an unlucky one with its history of mental disturbance and illness"--J, p. 30).

Pombal -- gout.

Leila -- badly scarred face from smallpox, periodic extreme emotional disorders.

Keats -- "My soul is quite clear. I suppose you could regard me as permanently disfigured."  
(C, p. 158).

Cohen -- dies of a "disgusting" disease.

Darley -- his intense preoccupation with time

and memory ("I had now come face to face with the nature of time, that ailment of the human psyche"--C, p. 10), the city as an absolute recoverable entity ("I had come to hug my own dreams of the place like a monomaniac"--C, p. 10). The trouble with Darley is that he has been infected by an impulse towards messianic abstraction ("...my own life [the staunchless stream flowing from the wounded side of Time!]"--C, p. 154).

And there are, of course, others. One-eyed Hamid, one-eyed Abdul, mad Taor, the divinely possessed Mazub, the elder Hosnani who spends his last days in a wheelchair and contemplates suicide, Panayotis, the dumb guardian of Justine and Nessim's summer house in the desert. And the city itself which is full of disease and disfigurement. There is the image of the camel hacked up, the strongly organic Arab quarter where the people are somehow sustained by their closeness to sickness and death, the constant images of circumcision, clitoridec-tomy (the practice Scobie opposes so vehemently) and the divine ecstasy of the dervishes as they scourge themselves with fire and sword. And finally there is the obscene bloody indulgence of incidents like the Mareotis fish-catch, the duck-shoot (writing to Alan G. Thomas from Corfu in 1936 Durrell makes the following comment about

hunting ducks: "Just a personified motor-horn, flying ham with a honk. No personality, nothing. And to bring them down is the most glorious feeling. THUD. Like breaking glass balls at a range. And the meat is delicious. I could slaughter hundreds without a qualm. They've no meaning, no real life. It's like shooting flying motor-horns honestly. Delightful."--Spirit, p. 48), and Narouz' pleasures: his harpoon, his whip (the blood of the bats), the mutilation of the servant boy.

What meaning has this crippled, gory, diseased world? Well, there's Anthony Burgess' opinion:

He couldn't find reasonable motivations or even credible actions for his characters, so he took a whip or knife to them, cutting off a nose here, an ear there, gouging out eyes...slashing flesh to a bloody blancmange. There were backgrounds of rape, sodomy, incest. The reader jumped, and he thought it was the characters moving. But the piling on of horror and perversity to keep the reader concerned inevitably resulted in diminishing returns. A character could no longer go into a tearoom for a pot of Orange Pekoe and a meringue: the snack had to be garnished with dying screams from upstairs, moans of tumescence behind the tea urn.<sup>3</sup>

There is that, all right, in the Alexandria Quartet. Yet I take Durrell more seriously, I take SENSATIONALISM more seriously: such desperate mechanical journalism does too often give us today our sense of what is alive. The Quartet attempts a totality of orgiastic multi-sensual profligacy. A world view that tries to wrench unto itself

the kind of energy that was present naturally in Villon (a particular favorite of Durrell's), in the great plagues of the middle ages, in the Dance of Death. That close-ness to being that exists in the Arab quarter of Alexandria. So Durrell does go back, to Paracelsus, to the dualistic certainty that to be cured one must first be sick. Capodistria writes to Balthazar:

Paracelsus has said: 'Innumerable are the Egos of man; in him are angels and devils, heaven and hell, the whole of the animal creation, the vegetable and mineral kingdoms; and just as the little individual man may be diseased, so the great universal man has his diseases, which manifest themselves as the ills which affect humanity as a whole. Upon this fact is based the prediction of future events.' (C, p. 176)

The disease is time, the cure is to begin, to be able to do, to have a continuity of possibility into the future (Justine: "I've always thought of acts as messages, wishes from the past to the future, which invited self-discovery."--J, p. 178). And this morality tale appears to have just such a solution--such a miracle--at its end. The lesson is that there can be no chronology of the absolute, that the world of sensation cannot have a recoverable past--memory--that, in Darley's words, "I began to see too that the real 'fiction' lay neither in Arnauti's pages nor Pursewarden's--nor even my own. It was life itself that was a fiction--we were all saying

it in our different ways, each understanding it according to his nature and gift." (C, p. 154) And we appear to be back to a relative universe, that is the cure. Or is it.

5. "As for the child I had conducted the whole rehearsal of this journey (of her whole life, in truth) in images from a fairy story.... There had been no other way to explain it to her, except in terms of myth or allegory --the poetry of infant uncertainty." (C, p. 13)

In his book Symbolic Wounds: Puberty Rites and the Envious Male, Bruno Bettelheim states: "Anthropologists today view initiation as a rite de passage which introduces the young into adult society. Earlier anthropologists did not generally concern themselves with the reasons behind the use of particular means; hence they left unclarified the role of central and formidable features such as circumcision and other mutilations."<sup>4</sup> What Bettelheim then proposes as a fundamental feature of human life ("these needs, it seems to me, are either permanent or must recur in each generation,"<sup>5</sup>) is something quite different from Freud's theory that societies are structured on the basis of fundamental mythic impulses such as 1) the homicidal brothers and, 2) the parental repression of rebellion (so that initiation

mutilations are a kind of punishment exacted on the young by the old out of jealousy and fear that the young will eventually replace the old.) In each of the latter cases the operative term is repressive authority. Power. We are familiar with this argument: it means social hierarchies, progress, law and order, change within the existing framework (otherwise, under the skin of such civilization lies the ever-present possibility for violence, for a replay of the Cain and Abel incident.) In terms of initiation rites, Bettelheim observes, "...according to that theory, the events comprising these ceremonies result from the father's jealousy of his sons, and their purpose is to create sexual (castration) anxiety and to make secure the incest taboo."<sup>6</sup> However, Bettelheim's investigations lead him away from Freud's premise that father-son repression is the chief modus operandi of entrance into adult society. He does not deny its existence. But he postulates that there are other, more "positive" sides to institutional and ritualistic impulses, specifically to those sexual activities that accompany the move from child to adolescent to adult on the individual plane (and which is in part bound inextricably up with the achievement of productive citizenship on the social level): "I believe the rites have little to do with any man-made conflict between the

old and the young, or with securing the incest taboo or with adherence to tradition. I believe instead that they are efforts to master the conflicts arising from man's instinctual polyvalent desires; also the conflict between such desires and role society expects him to play."<sup>7</sup>

Freud also has pointed to biological dualism (his famous term: "polymorphous-perversity"--without however the pejorative associations we usually attach to the term perverse). Yet with Freud, this became just one more impulse which, in the interests of individual and social stability, it is necessary to repress. The extreme polarization of male and female social roles that this sometimes leads to in a repressive society (the All-Man, the All-Woman), can often manifest itself, via sublimation, in aggression. Particularly during adolescence. In fact the--what I would call--neurotic preoccupation with sexual identity at the adolescent level is often an aggressive attempt at assuming such an identity by force if necessary (here I bag together these things: nationalism, ego-possession of a love-object, scalp-hunting puberty tests--war--environmental exploitation, authority and rebellion as ends in themselves.) Bettelheim cautions that it is not enough to see human attempts at maturation, at coming to terms with sexual

needs, only in this light: "We cannot be satisfied with an explanation that accounts solely for the destructive, sex-inhibiting, anxiety-evoking aspects of a great social institution, even if these play an important part. I am profoundly impressed with the great measure to which initiation rites seem to arise from efforts to integrate, rather than to discharge, asocial instinctual tendencies." And he further qualifies this view in an important way:

I think in our discussion of initiation and circumcision we have been far too engrossed in what looks like destruction (damage to the genitals) and have overlooked the more hidden fascination with pregnancy and birth. It may be that what has been linked narrowly and pessimistically with castration, truly a destruction of life, will come to be seen as resulting rather from the most constructive desires, those concerned with progeny, with new life.

Which is, I think, what the Alexandria Quartet honestly does try for with its allegorical woundings and partial incapacitations.

I have earlier quoted Darley's phrase, "...the old story of an artist coming of age." The story is itself, then, the rite de passage. The artist is wounded and by that suffering ("to the point where pain becomes art"--J, p. 15) comes to a kind of "self-realization." In fact, as I have pointed out, every character in the Quartet is hurting. Each one recapitulates some stage of the artist's suffering (Pursewarden: "the so-called

act of living is really an act of the imagination"  
 --C, p. 132) and the instrument of initiation is love  
 in all its adolescent extremism:

The symbolic lovers of the free Hellenic world  
 are replaced here by something different, some-  
 thing subtly androgynous, inverted upon itself....  
 I remember Nessim once saying--I think he was  
 quoting--that Alexandria was the great winepress  
 of love; those who emerged from it were the sick  
 men, the solitaries, the prophets--I mean all  
who have been deeply wounded in their sex.  
 (J, p. 12, my italics)

The three writers are the most extensively explored  
 initiates ("Arnauti, Pursewarden, Darley--like Past,  
 Present and Future tense! And in my own life [the  
 staunchless stream flowing from the wounded side of  
 Time!] the three women who also arranged themselves as  
 if to represent the moods of the great verb, Love:  
 Melissa, Justine and Clea."--C, p. 154). Arnauti drops  
 out because he is too "psychological." Pursewarden is  
 defeated by his guilt, although he makes a valiant attempt  
 to make--what Liza calls--"justifications for our love,"  
 ("That is why he was pleased to come here to Egypt,  
 because he felt...an interior poetic link with Osiris  
 and Isis, with Ptolemy and Arisinoe--the race of the  
 sun and the moon!"--C, p. 167) Melissa is not a good  
 "artist" because she cannot articulate well. Justine  
 over-articulates. At the end, Clea and Darley are the

only ones capable of rebirth from their wounds. They have recapitulated the others and moved beyond them.

Interestingly the male, Darley, is the one who delivers the baby. He cuts off Clea's hand (which is attached to the harpoon and cord)--thus wounding her--and pulls her out of the womb of the ocean pool (what I think here is the original image of the act of mutilation in the initiation rites: the cutting of the placental cord, a desire that male and female be able to recapitulate that process--more especially the male). And it is under the work of his hands that her lungs draw air. The imagery is painfully explicit: "Then, after a long time, we heard a faint whimper. It must have hurt, as the first few breaths hurt a newly born child. The body of Clea was protesting at this forcible rebirth. And all of a sudden the features of that white face moved, composed themselves to express something like pain and protest. (Yes, but it hurts to realize.)" (C, p. 219) And then Darley himself, waiting around at the end of the book for his own transformation, when it does come feels "...like some timid girl, scared of the birth of her first child." (C, p. 246)

In the Alexandria Quartet, the "streaming wound in the side of Time" leads to a good old-fashioned resurrection. Male and female processes are united in the creative act and so that portion of the Quartet's

allegorical drive ends conventionally, in a heaven of risen power ("And I felt as if the whole universe had given me a nudge!"--C, p. 246)--blood and guts leading to spiritual glory. (A Happy Ending totally predictable, totally wish-fulfilling. Frazer's Law of Similarity: that intense desire for the revelatory absolute so obvious in our contemporary world, where if the symbolical framework exists the experience is deemed to be there also.)

But there is another character in the Quartet who gets elevated. Clea says of him: "There is a kind of perfection to be achieved in matching oneself to one's capacities--at every level. This must, I imagine, do away with striving, and with illusions too.... He was quite successfully himself I thought." (C, p. 102)

Scobie and Pursewarden are the two characters in the Quartet most given to extended monologues. Pursewarden preaches. Scobie, ironically, is the real story-teller:

'Toby was once Driven Medical by his excesses-- I think I told you. No? Well, he was. Driven Medical.... Lord how he used to go it as a young man. Stretched the limit in beating the bounds. Finally he found himself under the Doctor, had to wear an Appliance.... He went about in a leopard-skin muff when he had shore leave until the Merchant Navy rose in a body. He was put away for six months. Into a Home. They said "You'll have to have Traction"-- whatever that is. You could hear him scream

all over Tewkesbury, so Toby says. They say they cure you but they don't. They didn't him at any rate. After a bit, they sent him back. Couldn't do anything with him. He was afflicted with Dumb Insolence, they said. Poor Toby!.... His father was an M. P. Very High Placed. Rich man's son. Toby tried to go into the Church first. Said he felt The Call. I think it was just the costume, myself--he was a great amateur theatrical, was Toby. Then he lost his faith and slipped up and had a tragedy. Got run in. He said the Devil prompted him. "See he doesn't do it again" says the Beak. "Not on Tooting Common, anyway." They wanted to put him in chokey--they said he had a rare disease--cornucopia I think they called it. But luckily his father went to the Prime Minister and had the whole thing hushed up. It was lucky, old man, that at that time the whole Cabinet had Tendencies too. It was uncanny. The Prime Minister, even the Archbishop of Canterbury. They sympathized with poor Toby. It was lucky for him. After that, he got his master's ticket and put to sea.' (B, p. 28)

The best narrative in the book. Prose which carries all its own energy, doesn't need extraneous SIGNIFICANT commentary or heraldic symbology. Scobie can manage his own coat-of-arms.

Unfortunately the Quartet will not let him be himself. He becomes a victim of its mythologizing, is raised into its panoplied, symbol-ridden universe along with all the other demiurges. Throwing up his hands Nimrod says, "And now...El Scob...." (C, p. 228) The inhabitants of the Arab quarter can perhaps be forgiven, sainthood to them is a useful, functional activity. But it has all been set long before they expropriate him.

First clue. Back in Justine, Darley observes, "No mythology of the city would be complete without its Scobie...." (p. 107) And the old man is afraid to open his eyes in the morning "for fear that they might open on the heavenly host or the cherubims hymning." (p. 106)

Second: "Origins he has none--his past proliferates through a dozen continents like a true subject of myth." (J, p. 108) (Incredibly enough, a Captain H. Dare actually wrote an article denouncing the lack of factual consistency and correct British Form in Scobie and the "by now mythical" Toby Mannering, in which he states unequivocally: "British standards are neither quixotic nor Levantine.")<sup>9</sup>

Third: "Scobie looks...older than the birth of tragedy, younger than the Athenian death. Spawned in the Ark...delivered before them by the sickening grunt of the keel on Ararat.... It was not blood which flowed in Scobie's veins but green salt water... His walk is the slow rolling grinding trudge of a saint walking on Galilee.... When he sings...it is in the very accents of the Old Man of the Sea. Like a patron saint he has left little pieces of his flesh all over the world.... Joshua the insolvent weather-man, the islander, the anchorite" (J, pp. 112-113, my italics).

But the allegorical label is made most explicit in Balthazar. Scobie tells Darley of his nightly forays along the docks, dressed in his ancient "female duds." He asks Darley to "confiscate" the clothes ("A thing like that could do me Untold Harm" he said. 'Untold Harm, old man.')(")and Darley agrees--although this of course has no effect whatsoever, Scobie's fate is predetermined. Walking back along the docks Darley hears "the latest jazz-hit to reach Alexandria:

Old Tiresias

No-one half so breezy as,

Half so free and easy as

Old Tiresias." (B, p. 36)

Scobie has the gift of prophesy (he predicts to Clea her struggle with Narouz' spirit) and according to his Arab parishioners--after his Ascendence--in Clea's words "...he had been able to change himself into a woman at will (!) and by sleeping with impotent men regenerate their forces. He could also make the barren conceive." (C, p. 72, my italics)

But Scobie isn't the only one in the Quartet subsumed under an Heraldic Aspect. The impulse for transmogrification is built implicitly into each character; everyone seems to represent something else:

Mnemjian -- (a male Mnemosyne?), "the Memory man, the archives of the city." (J, p. 32)

Balthazar -- with his "Mephistophelean air" (B, p. 16), the city's resident "Platonic daimon-- the mediator between its Gods and its men." (J, p. 81)

John Keats -- the Journalist ("an 'Agency Man'.... There was nothing wrong with John except the level on which he had chosen to live his life--but you could say the same about his famous namesake, could you not?") (B, p. 22)

Leila -- the "Dark Swallow." (C, p. 232)

Arnauti -- Failure of the Psychological Writer ("For the writer people as psychologies are finished... what now remains to the writer?"--J, p. 100).

Pursewarden -- Osiris Percy "Ludwig" van Beethoven Pursewarden, Keeper of the Strings, Classically Flawed Tragic-Major Artist. ("The king marries his sister because he, as God the star, wandering on earth, is immortal and may therefore not propagate himself in the children of a strange woman, any more than he is allowed to die a natural death" --C, pp. 166-167)

Darley -- Romantic White Knight and Future-Major Artist. (Pursewarden comments, "I always enjoy irritating him by quoting the poem by his minor

namesake to him."--M, p. 100. And Clea says to him, "That at least you have done for me--pushed me back into mid-stream again and driven off the dragon."--C, p. 223)

Mountolive -- the Man of Duty Who is Otherwise Impotent.

Narouz -- "The preacher...the simple-minded second son...." (M, p. 114)

Nessim -- the Political Activist Who is Otherwise Impotent.

Capodistria -- Sexual Gymnast turned Alchemical Mystic.

Pombal -- the French Lover.

Amaril -- Pygmalion, "building a woman of his own fancy...." (M, p. 139)

Liza -- Isis by way of Pygmalion. But she has a darker side: "marble whiteness of the sea-goddess' face...a Medusa among the snows...." (M, p. 146)

Justine -- a de Sade step-child, guilty until proven Innocent. Pursewarden tells her: "Try dropping this invented guilt and telling yourself that the thing was both pleasurable and meaningless." (C, pp. 51-52)

Melissa -- "Name of a sad herb, name of a pilgrim to Eleusis....Was she simply a nexus of literary

cross-references scribbled in the margins of a minor poem?.... Her name had been utterly worn out of use!" (C, p. 35)

Clea -- "the young unmarried goddess...." (B, p. 194)  
 From Innocence to Experience (Clea's own body simply struggled to disengage itself from the wrappings of its innocence as a baby or a statue struggles for life under the fingers or forceps of its author."--B, p. 43)

And everything becomes "mythical": the city, the child and especially Pursewarden, Melissa, Scobie and Narouz after their deaths. Melissa in fact is metamorphosed into Clea:

My heart heeled half-seas over for a moment, for she was sitting where once (that first day) Melissa had been sitting, gazing at a coffee cup with a wry reflective air of amusement, with her hands supporting her chin. The exact station in place and time where I had once found Melissa, and with such difficulty mustered enough courage at last to enter the place and speak to her. It gave me a strange sense of unreality to repeat this forgotten action at such a great remove in time, like unlocking a door which had remained closed and bolted for a generation. (C, p. 66)

The unknown loses to Significance in the Alexandria Quartet. There is a reason for everything.

The Quartet's claim to be a vehicle of indeterminacy, of open possibility, is invalid. The characters have

their roles, function as literary devices within a context of elaborate mythologizing. There is no "living confrontation" going on here, as the Durrell critic Alan Warren Friedman would have us believe in his book Lawrence Durrell and THE ALEXANDRIA QUARTET.<sup>10</sup> How can there be? The Quartet's world is closed. Even Friedman's chapter titles have that sense of sententious Generalization (writing about the Quartet drives one to capitalization):

- I. The Evolving Lawrence Durrell
- II. Justine and The Alexandrian Prism
- III. Balthazar and The Enigmatic Pursuit of Love
- IV. Mountolive and The Unreliable Narration of Facts
- V. Clea and The Regenerative Affirmation of Art
- VI. A Key to Lawrence Durrell

It is obvious that Mr. Friedman likes Durrell, has spent a great deal of time accumulating material for this book and sincerely believes that the Quartet is Great Literature:

Durrell, then...will employ, as it serves his purpose, a lush and baroque style partaking of both prose and poetry; a rich pattern of ideas and ideas about ideas; a multidimensional universe and vision transcending the ordinary limitations of time; an aesthetic dependent

for its values on private mythos (whose basic manifestation is eroticism) rather than on societal morality, on form at least as much as on content.... Thus, the Quartet is simultaneously promise and fulfillment, culmination and prophecy, a vast all-inclusive multiple genre bearing all the signs of an enduring and proliferating achievement. The force of its complex experience, compelling us with the color and intensity of a living confrontation, creates a world in which, perhaps for the first time, we can learn to become, in Durrell's words, our own contemporaries.<sup>11</sup>

Yet I can't help wondering what happens when The Evolving Lawrence Durrell meets The Alexandrian Prism, The Enigmatic Pursuit of Love, The Unreliable Narration of Facts and The Regenerative Affirmation of Art? Is this, then, the Key to Lawrence Durrell?

The Quartet does try to keep things moving, particularly in that section Mr. Friedman so aptly calls "The Regenerative Affirmation of Art." Darley states: "So this halcyon summer moved towards its end, free from omens...." (C, p. 200, my italics) True, Darley is a bit simple-minded even for a Future-Major Artist. But we know--via more dramatic irony--that something is up: "...it had all already happened, had been ordained in such a way and in no other...the scenario had already been devised somewhere, the actors chosen, the timing rehearsed down to the last detail in the mind of that invisible author...." (C, p. 193)

The omens: Scobie's prediction, the constant references to Clea's hands throughout the last book --indeed through the whole of the Quartet--("...I felt Clea's hand turn icy in my own."--C, p. 183; "Clea was still sitting in the gharry looking at her own hands"--C, p. 184; "It was Clea who first discovered the little island of Narouz"--C, p. 193; "She clapped her hands in delight"--C, p. 196; "'Hold my hand'...the dead are everywhere"--C, p. 198; "The dead handshake we exchanged only expressed a strange and truthful exhaustion of the spirit"--C, p. 208; "the fatal day"--C, p. 209; "Clea's brown wrist lay upon the tiller with a deceptive soft negligence."--C, p. 212)

And then of course there is the Rebirth scene replete with extra-terrestrial trappings ("...an early picture of the fall of Lucifer"--C, p. 214) which takes place in the ocean pool that is like "the nave of a cathedral" (C, p. 195), where Narouz "watched and waited in ambush ...." (C, p. 195) Most of the energy for this section comes from Francis J. Mott's book, beautifully titled The Universal Design of Birth (An Analysis of the Configurational Involvement of Birth and Its Relation to Emergence Generally).<sup>12</sup>

Well, Emergence Generally is certainly what happens at the end of the Alexandria Quartet. And why not? In

Clea, all pretence towards functional adaptation to a relative universe disappears. Darley discovers that Pursewarden's genius has uncovered a kind of neo-Platonic solution to Everything:

It was only now, tracing out the lines written by that rapid unfaltering pen, that I realized that poetic or transcendental knowledge somehow cancels out purely relative knowledge, and that his black humours were simply ironies due to his enigmatic knowledge whose field of operation was above, beyond that of the relative fact-finding sort.... Blind as a mole, I had been digging about in the graveyard of relative fact piling up data, more information, and completely missing the mythopoeic reference which underlies fact. (C, p. 153)

In one sense, agreed: we've had enough experience with technological thinking to know that a whole is greater than the sum of its parts--that the unknown is more than we can put together by strictly logical processes. But the Quartet doesn't stop there. "Transcendental knowledge" and "mythopoeic reference" become Platonic absolutes in its universe and its "invisible author" guides everything to an immaculate assumption (into the "kingdom of your imagination," as Clea tells Darley--C, p. 245).. The Quartet is a Comedy; all's well that ends well.

J. Christopher Burns in his article, "Durrell's Heraldic Universe," states: "The design of Darley's ascent is the essence of the content and not a superficial form to be dismissed as a nice trick. It may

indeed be described as an allegory so long as we do not expect to find vast and secreted moral implications. For the Quartet clearly and honestly provides all of the correlatives; it exists uniquely in its own solution."<sup>13</sup> (my italics the last sentence) Exactly, nowhere does it open outward. But the world does not continue on the basis of such sterility although, too often, we like to imagine that it does.

CHAPTER II

ROBERT CREELEY, THE ISLAND: '...this time in the story.'

" The locale is not a place but a place in a given man--what part of it he has been compelled or else brought by love to give witness to in his own mind. And that is THE form, that is, the whole thing, as whole as it can get.

I think we will be fools to be embarrassed by it. We know the other neatness possible, the way of the neat pattern, and the dodging which it must call for. Grace has no part in that. At some point reached by us, sooner or later, there is no longer much else but ourselves, in the place given us. To make that present, and actual for other men, is not an embarrassment, but love."

("A Note on the Locale"--Graph, p. 34)

"...how I love her, John, he said. But you know what good that does...."

(Artie, from The Island, p. 11)

An island, image of self-containment. The circle, that ancient sense of a totality. Within the closed form everything is accountable, knowable, placed there to be touched, possessed and consumed, part of. There is NO WAY OUT. Even, no outside view. Then how do things move away, what can come in from the outside?

Creeley doesn't see such finalities. In "Why Brother" he states: "An art begins prior to its conclusion...."

(Graph, p. 40). Stories do not stop, ascend or end in

apotheosis. He prefaces The Island with the following:

A suspiciously simple sense of life is that it is, in any man, conclusive. Oh, for him--of course; but for this world I wonder, or rather think it is only in the relationships men manage, that they live at all. People try with an increasing despair to live, and to come to something, some place, or person. They want an island in which the world will be at last a place circumscribed by visible horizons. They want to love free of a continuity of roads, and other places. This island is, finally, not real, however tangible it once seemed to me. I have found that time, even if it will not offer much more than a place to die in, nonetheless carries one on, away from this or any other island. The people, too, are gone.

The novel begins with movement: "From the north side of the island the carts began the journey into the city."

(p. 9) The city which is closed and infinite within its own comprehension: "Nothing changed. No one knew when the town had first come there, nor did any question it would not be, as ever, each time the sun returned to them over the edge of the mountains. There was no newness, no shifting strangeness, or oddness of people or of things." (p. 9) However the Americans have come in, yet only in a sense. Their entrance is not recognized as such, as a change, as some new thing from the outside. They are simply "taken in, and let live as all." (p. 9)

At first, there are four people within the circle: Artie and Marge, Joan and John. Later, this changes.

They have a closed, functional system: "John and Joan were to Marge and Artie, as Marge and Artie, to John and Joan. The society which they enjoyed seemed to enforce a coupling for a reference beyond that of nature, the buddy system in short...most happily for purposes of mutual defence." (p. 18) Tribal solidarity but with a particular sexual structure. In most cases it seems to be the men against the women. John and Artie are spoken of as "friends," having a kind of blood-brother conspiratorial impotence in the face of the women whose roles at first appear to be most strictly social--as Mothers, as Wives. Marge is heavy, inaccessible, sterile (even though--or perhaps because of--her pregnancy): "She was a thoroughly bored woman, waiting, so she implied, for an impossible excitement to arrive and arouse her." (p. 18) Joan too appears to have a kind of immutable power. John feels that she has a "childhood magic that he could not revoke, or even touch. Someone said, she uses it as a weapon." (p. 34) So that the two men have as one great bond in their friendship, a recognition of such impotence:

Artie, relaxed, gave him the same old story but John liked it. The night he himself was usually so far away from, bedded down in a loneliness with wife and tired kids, the writer on perpetual vacation on his wife's money, all the weary terms of a reality he had tried to make serviceable for all of

them, and she as well, working hard at it, both making huge mountains out of each and every molehill. Artie, slyly, saw John's excitement as he talked on, revived by the brandy, settled, at home now, and he made such a pleasure of it all, with an even kind acknowledgement of his friend's limits. (p. 12)

The "same old story" is, here, simply an inability to define by action. John is a passive receptacle; things filter through him without having any immediate effect other than to give him a kind of nervous unease ("He himself did nothing, certainly not now, a pure voyeur if a restless one."--p. 21) Whereas his counterpart, the "writer," has a definite role, a social function, is "more properly a writer than either John or Artie, being more than self-acknowledged and now famous...." (p. 15)

So that the relationships are stereotyped.

The people have no movement. Oh they do this, they do that--we are familiar with the lifeless responses of puppets; they have that conventional sense of modern sterility. Then suddenly into this comes the painting of the young bull-fighter killed in the arena.

As an image of where the characters' inertia has left them we may expect that it is just another convention: a token--in concentrated form--of literally where things are ("...dead like this, and he was, he had been badly used, an irony, that he was an ugly instance of sudden death in the memory, his shining suit of beauty.

It was also a very badly painted picture."--p. 36) What to do with something which seems so much of an END, a closed symbology? Joan asks: "Should I hang that thing up and not care? Look at it when you're not here? 'Hello, John.' 'Hello, Joan.' 'You look very dead today.' What do you want me to do about it?" (p. 38, my italics)

Which is the question. And immediately the conventional solution is offered:

It was time to go to work, to write the poem, story, novel, play, to earn the million dollars in the dream, once and for all to do it, day by day, forever and ever, to be able to say, finally, here's five thousand for you, and here's five thousand for you, and this five thousand is for me. Now everybody's got some. (p. 38)

A known reward for services rendered. Given such a vision for the novel does seem to point it and us down the familiar garden path, roses for everyone by the wishing well. No.

Remember that an association existing between images need not be 'logical.' That term is most usually an a priori designation for an assumptional rationality of progression. The fact is that we do not know what we know before we know it."

("Hart Crane and the Private Judgment,"  
Graph, p. 83)

The painting is a catalyst. Something begins to

happen after John discovers it. Death, it is the discovery of death. What will it lead to? The people of the island carry "...something to the sea in a box, the men to the front. No one dead, but something, generation after generation. They had death in the box and they were going to throw him into the sea." (p. 45) John says to Joan: "I love you...I want to be true. I want to learn what to do and when to do it. Nothing seems that which I am but I would try to find an acceptable form for it." (p. 43)

John and Joan have been seeking the security of a pattern of logical progression. If the present and future do not hold such a certainty, they then must retreat into the past: "They both ate great amounts of candy, usually in bed, after the children were asleep. They tried to move backward together...yet they were driven as well, compulsively, to be adult, grown-up, despite the loose world in which they lived. There cannot be childhood without the adult to define it, not at their age." (p. 35)

The form of the novel keeps that sense of chronology as a geographical space even as the characters within it begin to stir on their own, move away. They cannot really be children because they do have a past, it insists, comes at them with the same abrupt power of the unknown as does the painting of the dead bull-fighter. And the

message is the same: get moving, what do you make of all this?

Calling into the funnel of the dark, are you there. It's me. I'm here now.... (Who is speaking?).... There are two people in bed together in a bubble of night, pure air, no space but occupied. Skeleton laughter, harsh shatter.... The car sped into the darkness in the tunnel of its space, in, a toy projectile sped into the walls, which are supple and yield to the impact. A false door, a melting mirror. Something you went through years ago coheres and is present, leaning.... (Who is speaking?) .... There now. How was that. The memory.  
(p. 44)

And something else, what John calls the "shifting vagueness of friendship...." (p. 58) Artie makes out a list of what he "owes" John. The ties, the past, the account, a balance. John answers him: "You have it wrong, Artie, your whole system of calculation is wrong, Artie." (p. 59) The money is at first a barrier but not really, the sense of separation is more a result of the language between them breaking down. Dead symbols on a piece of paper. But Artie is there. When John is threatened, cannot handle the diffusion of the night in the brothel, Artie bridges the separateness; and their recognition is not impotence so much any more as brotherhood in the face of danger: "They are swimming together across a great space of water. He feels secure, however, he has no fear because he knows the man is with him. There is the familiar voice, and now his hand is being taken,

he is lifted from the danger of the water, so deep and far below him. He feels the movement of the hands as they grip him by the shoulders, now he is pulled clear, he feels the care." (p. 65)

The care, Artie is his friend. But it is not a solution. John has that stupid willfullness which makes it so difficult for him to see people--even (and especially) his wife--as anything but objects to be known and possessed. He can't see her as someone alive to herself. It is because her strangeness does threaten him with responses, with action: "...there she was with the friends, talking too, out there in that drifting, common world of all choices. Shocked, he tried to pull her back, and that was the fight again." (p. 73) So that friendship is a form of attack: "The friends were always the problem, talking, they would never stop, stumbling on, on to things they never intended." (p. 73) That is, more of the unknown.

And then, the outsiders.

Robert Willis is like "a huge endless wall." (p. 79) He is another kind of death. The narrator rightly refers to him as an "it": "Who were these people, it asked. What were these odors, these colors of things? In England--and the greyness of that place flooded into the room more awful than John had thought possible, the

dankness, the pain, the smallness, the tight drab limits of that life before him, with its duties, its mother, its pinched resentments." (p. 80) John tried hard to deal with the deadness that Willis brings in but cannot find any positive hold. Willis is a wall. Such a measurement is made more explicit by the contrasting presence of another outsider. Rene Lely, who, as John sees him, has "much to smile at, blessed in turn with clear use." (p. 87)

The problem is in some ways the same as that which confronts them in one of Rene's paintings: "They were given again the question of liking, or disliking, or rather of seeing or not seeing, whatever it was. The paintings offered no hold but that of shifting colors, weights, scratched, worn back to stains upon the paper, or an insistent line, a mass, suddenly present." (p. 86) Willis, however, does not have that much possibility, that much life. The Island turns to the ocean, outward, to an image of the sea itself holding all things (John: "In it all he wanted...a sense to allow him all of them." --p. 87) And it is the language which poses the question of methodology, how to contain deadness (Willis, his heavy, sinking weight: "It was painful, to be so heavy. The water had no care for him. He fought it doggedly ...with a persistent, sullen strength"--p. 83), to keep

things up: "That was sad, not to have wings after all, nothing but weight. Would the words ever hold that up, John thought. If the water wasn't a way, what would be." (p. 84, my italics) That night in the brothel it is Artie who holds John up.

To sink or swim, how to handle the intruders, the intrusions. John and Rene have a motive for taking Willis into the ocean: "Some revenge seeming reasonable . . . ." (p. 83) But that's not good enough. They can't leave him to sink, John can't--although Rene smiles, watches, seems then the saint, beyond it all, somewhat of a dead bastard himself. John cannot remain objective. Yet he does not move until forced to by "the terror of death only." (p. 84)

As abruptly as he entered, Willis leaves. Rene stays, Joan "thinks" she falls in love with him, all the time their confusions are compounded. John seems to be mastered by guilt. At this point he is annoying, the others are annoying, the book is annoying. Objects and events slip in and out of focus, energy catches in a whirlpool, is sucked under and comes up again, not really in another place.

But if the inability of the characters to be lineal and move nicely forward is frustrating, it is also disturbingly exciting. Something is happening, the novel's

language turns strangely, things are thrown out of its depths as more and more unknowns are simply--there.

And the image of that is, again, the ocean (as The Island moves outward from its center [the city] to its skin [the sea]):

Among the older men of the town there was memory of an older story, of a huge fish, a leviathan, which they had no measure for nor means to describe but as it had, once, appeared to them, one night. Was it a whale. They didn't know. It was very big, had come out of the depth of the water, suddenly, upon them. Its great bulk reared under their boats as they tried to beat it off with their oars. They fought it with what they could, oars, anything, beating at it in the shaken sea. That was the memory of it, then. A number of their boats had been smashed, the great fish went under the sea, they came home.

(p. 90)

The temptation is to say that here, finally, is a SYMBOL, a representation of some archetypal power within the novel. But what must really be done is to ask a question: how is the fact of any such unknown, coming abruptly and unlooked for, to be handled?

Joan's near-death throws everything up: "In the night, as he drove, sounds echoed, some crying, some the sea again, and the huge fish lifted and fell back. The water washed over. Out of it, too, came sudden sharp cries of another kind.... The sea when he came to it, was cut by a blur of shattered light, the moon clear above it, the hills in the blackness. He saw a shattered white face blurred with shifting water, a painful thing."

(p. 94) Information from one story to another.

"No, pieces was what they all surely were, chips, fragments, minor or major debris. Years ago he had asked his sister, older, when she had her first child, a son, if she had had any inclination to eat the after-birth. She shuddered, and refused him any answer. How could they find out if they wouldn't answer, would not leap at the chance, at last, to be a part, a real, live segment, of a larger thing. The sea shook the earth, but it stayed there. What was meaning to be if not at any time a meaning."

(p. 116)

In a letter to Cid Corman Creeley reaffirms his belief that "form IS the extension of content, that the materials of poetry or of prose (materials: the externals, the phenomena outside the given man, around him, OBJECTS) are that which the content IN the man uses to declare itself--that this declaration, this COMING OUT by means of the materials, MAKES the form--so it might go, that being my own thought as to HOW form discovers itself..."<sup>1</sup>

Again, John takes upon himself the easy stereotype of guilt. He is convinced he has somehow put the cyst inside Joan, that the many miscarriages he has induced in her have been a physical instance of his own deadness. Instead of a baby he has literally put death inside her. His own mother argues logically against this imposition ("such tumors could not be so caused...they contained

their own."--p. 111) But he has imposed upon her, has made a causality here. They cyst-baby parody is an actuality of their own history ("He thought that if she pushed, or strained, it would talk, obscenely, that it would spill out on them all the hate and pain he had, obscenely, forced into it."--p. 111)

And John has manufactured that history. His impotence is an inability to procreate a future by acting in the present. Instead, he provides "reasons" out of the past. He is left with the literal results: "So, slowly, they began to live together again, and then one night John woke, felt her close, warm, the excitement came, and he reached for her. Then, shaken, she showed him the face, white, hating. She took all the emptiness, and gave it to him. That was the history, what it meant. All that was inside was now out." (p. 114, my italics)

If that is the problem, what is the cure? John cannot hover in a state of suspended purgatory forever. It would be easy to see all the pieces as part of a gigantic jig-saw puzzle (especially easy if this were a novel of the blue-print kind), for the Solution look at the end: "I thought you were dead, he said, but I was wrong." (p. 190) Does The Island work that way? (The total puzzle: "This island is, finally, not real, however tangible it once seemed to me.")

Habit saves them from doing anything. They refuse to see any new faces, acknowledge a change, so much of their humanity mechanical, their dumbness a wall that the novel rages against, is somehow trying to articulate, to get out. Even the narrator is angered enough to come in: "But one can intrude here simply that all has become so small and detestable.... How stupidly she hates him, and how idiot-like is his pretension...." (p. 117)

Yet even within this seemingly sterile vacuum there is still the desire for continuance: "...they wanted to live in some consequent manner, you know." (p. 117) And the novel continues to throw out possibilities. What, then, to do with that?: "What then does one want to say. Distrust any purpose, any proposal? The sea, the sea crashes. Say, saying, say that, say it if you have to, say that. Say it." (p. 117) John says he is guilty. Death is the meaning of what is between John and Joan. They want out, to be in another place: "Let's all meet, somewhere, where only the dead won't come. Only the dead won't be there. Let's make it any time, but have just one thing true, just be alive and there." (p. 117)

The desire for life beyond the present (-death) comes down to the hope that "proposals" do work. That an individual's desire for pattern can be made, somehow through sympathetic magic, real. That one can have the power of action by manufacturing a representative program

in place of its substance. Action then becomes confused with repetition, coherence with mechanical ritual:

So I can see that street, after all, and even I know who will be there, or won't be, too late, will ask if another day will do, another place. Can't I see you next week, or then, or there, or wherever. Won't they say that. And you'll be given a plan to follow, and when you have got that done, you will be given a plan to follow, and when you have got that done, you will be given a plan to follow. (p. 117)

Habit saves them from doing anything.

"Now she did it again, but this time in the story."

(p. 118)

John tries to use words, to write it out ("...if you can distort it, whatever, or try to, just enough to make whatever is hidden in it fight back. Try to get it, get hold of it. If it hurts here, what is hurting."  
--p. 118) And this analytical therapy does work to a point, even if the homunculi he creates are "...twisted with all the concern of his assumption." (p. 118) Another instance of his attempted manipulation of cause and effect. Yet somehow, gradually, John and Joan stop worrying, the rhythm of The Island relaxes them, gives them a moment's grace--something I will here have to trace.

The word--'grace'--is a favorite of Creeley's. There is a story called "The Grace" in his collection of short stories, The Gold Diggers.<sup>2</sup> In it are a man, a woman, their very young son, the moon ("this rose, very gently, somewhere back of the house"), a road ("looked a liquid, or water there, translucent") and a candle ("She got up to light another candle and put it on the table behind him, but bitterly, he thought, and watched her sit down again.") Something is wrong with the place the people are in. The boy doesn't like it, he cries on and off upstairs, trying to sleep. His parents are upset, uneasy, disturbed perhaps by this infant articulation of their own uncomfortableness.

The beautiful movement of the story circles around images of touch: each element slides, mixes, does not quite meet (the moon, the road, their bodies, the past, the boy's crying). At each point of attempted contact, the boy cries. It is that cutting in of the present that destroys the man's own infantile fantasies of the absolute ("One would like to go back, he had said. One would rather not move away ever, or go anywhere but where one was.") The boy wishes to sleep but can't. The man wants to sleep with the woman but can't. Each is interrupted by the other's desire.

He tries to take the woman outside to a place "without malice." The lights of the small town in the

distance are a hope of that, of humans together ("He thought it might be like that, and felt, too, the moon was the sign.") And so they go out, "...off down the road, past the other houses, close, and then off through the fields, the moon there very much a whiteness and lying on the ground with grace." (my italics) Which they try, also, to do. But can't. The boy cries, pulling them away.

Inside the house once again the man blows out the candle, they go to bed, there is more moonlight, this time it comes into the house: "...the whiteness altogether actual, seeming even a drift, of some wave, in, to make the room a space, of an intention, or where one might come to live." Still they can't make it, he can't hold it, the moon begins to drop, the boy cries and his impotence turns to anger ("What's the matter.... What, he yelled, what, what, what...."). He runs at the boy, who is screaming, the two of them are yelling and of course it is useless, especially when he slaps the kid: two babies howling at each other. So that the moon isn't enough and they have to light a candle in order to see.

In the preface to The Gold Diggers, Creeley draws a distinction between "the short story or really the tale" and the novel. The latter is "a continuum, of necessity, chapter to chapter," whereas the story tends

to depend not on time but on an emotional totality  
 ("whatever emotion best can serve it"). He continues:

The story has no time finally. Or it hasn't here. Its shape, if form can be so thought of, is a sphere, an egg of obdurate kind. The only possible reason for its existence is that it has, in itself, the fact of reality and the pressure. There, in short, is its form--no matter how random and broken that will seem. The old assumptions of beginning and end--those very neat assertions--have fallen way completely in a place where the only actuality is life, the only end (never realised) death, and the only value, what love one can manage.  
 (my italics)

It's a matter of priority. Not that time does not exist (they are in the house, they are outside, they are in the house), but that its usefulness is subordinate to what can--or cannot--be done. Value. That determines meaning, not beginnings or ends. In fact Creeley does say: "Things continue, but my sense is that I have, at best, simply taken place with that fact. I see no progress in time or any other such situation. So it is that what I feel, in the world, is the one thing I know myself to be, for that instant. I will never know myself otherwise." (Preface to "Words," Graph, p. 8) Which leads him in The Gold Diggers' preface to state: "I begin where I can, and end when I see the whole thing returning."  
 (In The Island, the quote from Parmenides, under the title: "It is all one to me where I begin;/ for I shall come back again there.")

This does not mean nothing happens. In the novel narrative time is more obvious than in the short stories but only in a matter of degree. The point is still there; the importance is not what the outline is from A to B ('she said, he said'), but what important things are there in the middle (i.e., what are you going to do with that now?), to "break time back to a use which isn't crippling." ("How to Write a Novel," Graph, p. 22)

The diverse techniques used to confront time, in the long narrative, are ultimately makeshift; they solve very little. Flashback, recall by certain of the characters, juxtaposition (too simply) of 'time' sequences--none of much use. Because, to be in that passage, to make that the sequence (that the days go by), is a definite commitment, and not to be dodged easily.

But put the weight on the other sense, of things shifting, among themselves--and time there to be a qualification among many--it is a release.

A release, immediately, of the very things themselves--not gratuitously, since relation is aimed at--why they all keep together. And to the extent that time bears on that, all right, i.e., all right to make use of it. But not as the main line.

Time can't be used purely as an escape, an out (a happy ending or a cause-effect totality). The novel is on its own, whatever is inside will come out ("form is the extension of content") if let be. This is essentially the technique of poetry--no superfluosity, everything is important within, in relation: there are no repositories of power outside the poem, nothing symbolic held in another place which has energy more

than what the poem itself carries. The thing is to include as much as possible yet not have that, have anything, out of place. Grace. What a story, what words, can help one to do. (Lawrence: trust the novel, not the novelist.) The moon has grace, coming in the way it does, the people do not.

You are dancing, Artie, your arms and legs are whirling up and about and down and around, and you are not at all, as they say, out of place. The men playing for you are laughing, surely, and they emphasize what has to be your grotesqueness, but you go beyond them, and by some device you only know, you make them play for you, as you dance, and the woman, who was laughing too, has been made to follow...." (p. 156)

John buys a boat to get out onto the sea: "what did it look like, out there, or looking back, here, from there." (p. 123) It is the last thing he gets from the city (looking for Joan later he does not ask for help, is afraid even that the townspeople will see him). Once out in the harbour there is a way of looking back on the island: "he saw all the village above him, hanging in the vague air, growing smaller, as he himself did on the widening sea." (p. 130)

With so much space--his exposure is at once an escape and an uncomfortable freedom--John is still really trying for a retreat. There is that womb-image of the

bed traced:

...he wanted to keep there, in the warmth and quiet darkness. Pulling the covers more tightly down about his head, he shifted himself around, pushing deep under the blankets and sheet, into the end of the bed, so that his head now faced to the end and rested where usually his feet would. He held himself still, and listened. He could hear nothing. He opened his eyes as wide as possible. The dark looked to him as tiny flickered points of white, then intense dark brown red of a deep space. He shifted again, feeling the close weight of the bedclothes, then lifted his head and shoulders, crouching, to make a pocket for himself, feeling the length of his own legs, then crossed them, letting his body hang over their length, down, so that his head, pressed by the weight of the blankets, came close to his spread knees. Then, looking intently at the black space, listening, breathing, he waited for something to happen. (p. 134)

He can make nothing happen. But things happen in the novel. The bed becomes the secret hiding place of his childhood in the loft of a barn, or the place of shelter when he was sick. Then again a car, his and Joan's retreat, a cave, the possibilities of a coffin, a cemetery. All of which aren't enough ("you can't escape it by simply going away"--p. 135). The "it" is that the world has its own sense of importance (grace here, perhaps) and acts on that with or without his willing it. And it's impossible to have a space where there is no time (as well as the opposite of that) because things--of themselves--will not be held, immobilized ("they had left, first his father, then grandfather

and grandmother, and pets, various animals of his concern, things, balloons lost hold of, soaring up, to tiny disappearing specks in the wide sky."--p. 136) The sky, the sea: mirror images.

It seems to me wrong to kick at The Island because nothing 'happens' to the characters, or that they don't 'do' anything (John cure thysself, see a psychiatrist, get professional help). How loosely we sometimes trade on any action as a sign of 'self-realization.' It is an error. As it is an error to start foaming (my own first reaction) when Joan refuses to make contact with the publisher, Manus, refuses to put his stories into the world ("I can write but I can't do what you ask me to, that is, make you see them as my own necessity, and never as that literature we have, haven't we, been talking about...I can't let you have them, I don't even myself have them, in that way."--p. 140) As it is, in turn, John's error that he sees his own "necessity" as the sum total of his stories' energy. But it's his problem, his life--we can't do anything about that--just as he should leave the stories alone and let them be where they are, whatever their reasons and however they got there.

It really comes down to what we have gotten so used to--lineal action as a form of escape (the Alexandria Quartet, say, where what the characters do is equal to what the novel does). A murder mystery or a Finding

Yourself mystery, it's then all the same thing: the sum total of a series of self-conscious events (from A to Z: the 'plot'). But The Island is more than the sum of the movements of its characters, it too has its story.

" This day Joan noticed something odd about what they were carrying, and coming closer, found it was something not easily described about two and a half feet long, quite chunky, black in appearance but much like worn leather, and without any defined features although a roughly made head seemed there. What was it. No one clearly seemed to know, and all she got as answer was that they found it in the woods. Was it a saint? No, it was not a saint but it was something they had found in the woods. Why did they carry it in such a procession, so honoring it. Had they found it recently. They had found it quite awhile ago. It seemed best to have a procession for it, and they used as a date the day they had found it. But is it religious, Joan kept insisting, why do you take it to the church? They would not say, or could not. It was just what they did, and the priest blessed them all." (p. 149)

Something dropped into the midst of everything. The gypsies come suddenly and are gone as quickly. The educated foreigners in the town have trouble handling their presence, or the fact of any unknown ("It was very frustrating...."--p. 149) They want to analyze, they want a meaning beyond what they see. But there is "no purchase, then, and nothing to take from any of it as a meaning more than to be witness to it." (p. 150) The peasants

however, are not disturbed by the gypsies, nor necessarily of the unknown (as long as they can find some place for it, their methodology not being analytically functional --what are things made for--but rather, things are, there, from somewhere else; they have, I guess, "faith"). It looks like the usual case of Country Innocence vs. City consciousness ("It's that they're innocent, he said, the people here. They don't know when they're being taken. In the city they know better."--p. 152)

However, "...in the meantime things went on no matter, whether or not they understood. Nothing waited." (p. 154) In the "meantime," the middle, between the language of categories. The novel does not really seem to be proposing solutions to its problems. John is as ineffectual as earlier. The gypsies leave. Have they brought a message? Where are Artie, Marge, Joan, the rest? What keeps The Island together?

Can there be change without a loss? (or the other, what can be gained by a change?) It's a question of particularity. And, recognizing that, is the novel carrying all it has towards a focus of what is important (change as a fixing of value)?

At one point John takes this position: "There was no change to it, he thought. Bright, white, as the sun, all was covered perhaps, an impersonal intensity of

location. And so now here, now there. What was the difference." (p. 72) Earlier the narrator states: "I think of those changes by which an association is preserved, a process like that of decompression, for the diver, except that here the progress seems horizontal, insular, contained by oblique references to commitments already altered." (p. 32)

On the one hand a depthless immobility, on the other, a careful adjustment. The latter being a kind of force-field that pushed movement to be linear. Either way, nothing coming in from the outside.

John goes into his room, has in fact never left this womb; all that imagery is still with him: "There he knew where he was. He could find all the pieces, and put them like pins on a map, against the wall, and make his painful information clear there. There was no longer need of any view, anything seen from a window, because all that was, was in. He knew what to do with it."

(p. 179, my italics) It's called 'putting things into perspective.' The Island could do the following: make John get born, grow up, achieve the prize, self-realize. Or it could leave him there mumbling at the wall (moral: don't do likewise). It does neither.

Joan breaks his typewriter. He can now no longer play with cause and effect in his stories.

And instead of a deus ex machina coming in, she leaves (the accusation that she has "made" it "happen" --Artie making a pass at her--is a perverse instance of an attempted virility on John's part: "didn't you want me out of there so that you could make a play for the one friend I have here."--p. 180) He must go after her. Into the darkness, the moon, the sea, which are here powers of what he doesn't know and can't control (death, perhaps). These are no representations or symbols. He has to literally find her: "Walking, slowly, he tried to sense the probable place she might be, and where in the night she would go. He knew that without her actually there with him, there was no clear place she was." (p. 184)

What can be expected? Are there signs? He finds her image (within him) dead, goes down to the rocks, the cliff, and--for what he is able to see--she is there ("He knew she was there"--p. 187), dead, dead. Death: the kind of causality of John's imagination: "Behind him, on the hill, he knew the people were coming. He wanted to run back to meet them, to get their help, but instinctively he found himself afraid that they might think he pushed her. He knew that he had made her do it...."(p. 187)

She is dead: "He hated her." She leaves him with everything, has escaped away (all the images of what he sees the womb as, something to get back to, what he believes it is).

The place that he puts her in is, finally, the closed grave, along with all the other things, his hatred, his impotence, the need to act, now murder ("Say, saying, say it if you have to...say it"): "...he felt it coming through him for all the years and years of his impotence and guilt, and the self-hate that wouldn't let go when it had to, but waited until it had killed itself and everything around it." (p. 189) Murder.

But The Island is more than John's assumptions.

Creeley has elsewhere said: "Again and again I find myself saved, in words--helped, allowed, returned to possibility and hope. In the dilemma of some literal context a way is found in the words which may speak of it." ("Statement' for Paterson Society," Graph, p. 39)

That is, the last sentence here is John's: "I thought you were dead, he said, but I was wrong." (p. 190)

CHAPTER III

D. H. LAWRENCE: TWO STORIES: GLAD GHOSTS AND  
THE LAST LAUGH.

"...life's origins  
Awake discordant harmonies that move  
The entire world."

(Ovid: THE METAMORPHOSES, Book I)

"...Lawrence, who was actually only another accurate man...."

" Lawrence, the  
real one as  
one"

--Charles Olson

We are given to believe that the challenge of the unknown is to make it known. Recognition isn't enough, manipulation is a necessity (if something pleases us we want it to happen again, if it's unpleasant we want it eliminated). History is then a record of our successes and failures. Education and memory concentrate on the successes. Classification replaces experience, and possibility translates as 'the sure thing.' The socialized man (that person who is a 'product of his education,' a 'memory' man) does not want his given reality tampered with, would never dream of saying, as the old joke has it, "Mother, I'd rather do it myself." It's not hard to see that such an imagination (really, the lack of) tends to be highly inbred, second-hand, sterile. Experience becomes representational. There are no more unknowns, by definition.

So far my counter-argument to the above has been simply that, given the possibilities of an open world, things we don't know might be seen (the Alexandria

Quartet in containing all its own solutions is a rationally constructed totality; The Island opposes schematic lifelessness by being more than its conscious plot).

Some new life. Or at least, something other.

There are those, however, who do greatly fear anything unknown. It is a commonplace but it is also true.

Not Lawrence. He distrusted more the collective social assumptions about the world we seem so easily to arrive at. In the preface to Chariot of the Sun, a book of poems by Harry Crosby, he writes:

Man fixes some wonderful erection of his own between himself and the wild chaos, and gradually goes bleached and stifled under his parasol. Then comes a poet, enemy of convention, and makes a slit in the umbrella; and lo! the glimpse of chaos is a vision, a window to the sun. But after a while, getting used to the vision, and not liking the genuine draught from chaos, commonplace man daubs a simulacrum of the window that opens on to chaos, and patches the umbrella with the painted patch of the simulacrum. That is, he has got used to the vision; it is part of his house-decoration. So that the umbrella at last looks like a glowing open firmament, of many aspects. But alas! it is all simulacrum, in innumerable patches. Homer and Keats, annotated and with glossary. (Phoenix, II, p. 256)

It is the difference between wonder and fear. And fear is the language of the tribal desire for order, where the universe is given an anthropomorphic causality in order to be controlled. Which means: "order is fixed and complete. Man can't be any different from his image.

Chaos is all shut out." (Phoenix II, p. 257) The absolute. It is of such importance that Lawrence must here be fully quoted:

This is the momentous crisis for mankind, when we have to get back to chaos. So long as the umbrella serves, and poets make slits in it, and the mass of people can be gradually educated up to the vision in the slit: which means they patch it over with a patch that looks just like the vision in the slit: so long as this process can continue, and mankind can be educated up, and thus built in, so long will a civilization continue more or less happily, completing its own painted prison. It is called completing the consciousness. (Phoenix II, p. 256)

Wonder, on the other hand....

### GLAD GHOSTS

"'One has to choose to live,' I said, dancing on."

(Morier, p. 686)

The polarities in "Glad Ghosts" are early established and fairly obvious. Carlotta Fell: "At the Thwaite they always gave Carlotta the Still-life prizes." (p. 661) She is the daughter of a peer, has that interior deadness of the aristocracy which Lawrence has worked elsewhere (most notably in Lady Chatterley's Lover). Yet there is still a vague spark of life somewhere: "Her wistfulness and yearning 'for something else' was absolutely genuine."

(p. 661) But like her own mechanical artistry ("Then she went and did another of her beastly still-lives, a cactus-in-a-pot"--p. 661), she has virtually no movement.

Morier, however, does have the early makings of a Lawrencean hero: "Whereas I did care about some passionate visions which, I could feel, lay embedded in the half-dead body of this life. The quick body within the dead. I could feel it. And I wanted to get at it, if only for myself." (p. 661)

Carlotta and Morier have a subliminal understanding, a "curious abstract intimacy, that went very deep...." (p. 663), which continues even after she marries Lord Lathkill. But when the chips are down Carlotta is strictly a social machine. She will define herself in action only as a product of that state: "she would always act according to the conventions of her class, even perversely." (p. 663) Her voice is a "sad, clean monotone of finality, always like metal." (p. 665) She is a ghost, at the least a semi-ghost, perhaps a zombie. She is not really alive.

Her husband, Lord Lathkill, has the same problem ("He was so sure of circumstances, and not by any means sure of the man in the middle of the circumstances. Himself! Himself! That was already a ghost."--p. 664)

Fate plays a strong hand in "Glad Ghosts," indeed is a hidden protagonist. The Worths consider themselves "unlucky," it "runs in the family." (p. 665) Two weeks after they are married war is declared. Lord Lathkill, an army officer, is wounded in the throat and Morier notices that, "Since the war, the melancholy fixity of his eyes was more noticeable, the fear at the centre was almost monomania." (p. 666) A few years later their twin children are killed in a car accident in America. Then their baby girl dies of a "sudden illness." They retire to Riddings, the country house of Lathkill's mother in Derbyshire. The mechanical preordering of things seems even to have invaded the narrative of the story.

But such a determinism is not something that has simply been superimposed on the characters. It is not always outside them, there because of the 'plot.' It is also inside them, in their fear; that rules their lives. On his arrival at Riddings Morier observes of Lord Lathkill: "He seemed curiously smaller, shrunken, and his rather long cheeks were sallow. His manner, however, was much more cheerful, almost communicative. But he talked, as it were, to the faceless air, not really to me. I wasn't really there at all. He was talking to himself. And when once he looked at me, his brown eyes had a hollow fear. He was gazing through the windows of

nothingness, to see if I were really there." (p. 669, my italics)

The deadness of the environment is self-willed, self-induced. All of the house's inhabitants are really talking to themselves, their vocabulary is incapable of taking in anything else: "There was a curious, unpleasant sense of the fixity of the materials of the house, the obscene triumph of dead matter." (p. 669) The problem is also a familiar one in The Island. A different sense, however, in "Glad Ghosts," is that the "dead matter" has a more obvious particularity (I don't mean that as a value judgment). The dowager Lady Lathkill stares at Morier "fixedly for a long time...as a bird does, with shrewd, cold, far-distant sight. As a hawk, perhaps, looks shrewdly far down, in his search." (p. 670)

Set against this the possibilities for life are also particularized. The house's "ghost," Lathkill tells Morier, is "as rare as sovereignty in her visits, and twice as welcome. Her gifts are infinitely more worth having." (p. 671) She "invariably restores the family fortune. That's why we put you here, to tempt her."

Morier has the "flame of life." (p. 677) He is a catalyst; he must bring out the ghost, make her presence felt. He is what might be called live bait. And he

hopefully has, in Lawrence's terminology, power ("Power is the supreme quality of God and man: the power to cause, the power to create, the power to do, the power to destroy" --Reflections, p. 153) Carlotta, Colonel and Mrs. Hale, Lord Lathkill--all are as good as dead. Morier has to start them up again.

But he has two opponents. Lady Lathkill: "Her pink soft old face, naked-seeming, with its pin-point blue eyes, was a real modern witch-face." (p. 672) And the other ghost, Lucy, Colonel Hale's 'dead' first wife (who hasn't quite yet been put to rest). These he must help to destroy.

Lady Lathkill was Lucy's "great friend in life." (p. 679) She is now the one who gets "messages" from her. They are both strong Mother-figures. Colonel Hale comments of Lucy: "I suppose she mothered me, in a way." (p. 678) And Morier sees Hale as "eternally a careless boy of thirteen." (p. 680) His perversity is an incest of the imagination:

...directly after the wedding, such a state of terror came over me--perfectly unreasonable--I became almost unconscious. My present wife asked me if I was ill, and I said I was. We got to Paris. I felt I was dying. But I said I was going out to see a doctor, and I found myself kneeling in a church. Then I found peace--and Lucy. She had her arms round me, and I was like a child at peace. I must have

knelt there for a couple of hours in Lucy's arms. I never felt like that when I was alive: why, I couldn't stand that sort of thing! It's all come on after--after-- And now, I daren't offend Lucy's spirit. If I do, I suffer tortures till I've made peace again, till she folds me in her arms. Then I can live. But she won't let me go near the present Mrs. Hale. I--I--I daren't go near her." (p. 679)

Lady Lathkill and Lucy are vampires. Their reality as powers in the world exists because of the unhealthy and submissive imaginations of their victims. They are simulacra, compounded of the adolescent fears that keep Colonel Hale and Lord Lathkill in a perpetual state of childhood anxiety--a fear of the present, a fear of the future--because of the past. And Hale and Lathkill are willfully ready to give up the uncertainties of a life-in-action for the deadness of a Motherhood determinacy. As a result their women are also dead (for Lawrence male-female sexuality has basically this dynamic:

As we live, we are transmitters of life.  
 And when we fail to transmit life, life fails to  
 flow through us.  
 That is part of the mystery of sex, it is a flow  
 onwards.

.....  
 It means kindling the life-quality where it was not.)<sup>1</sup>

Carlotta's need is "that a man should take her in his arms and cherish her body, and start her flame again."

(p. 671) And Morier observes of Mrs. Hale: "The dark young woman thrust out her straight, dusky arm, offering

me sugar, and gazing at me with her unchanging, yellow-brown eyes." (p. 681) She is "a half-wild animal that is locked up in its own helpless dumb winter, a prisoner." (p. 683)

The signs in "Glad Ghosts" seem sometimes awkwardly explicit. This is largely so because the characters are a product of their own mechanisms. Yet for all their obviousness, the story does carry its own process. The power of Lucy's ghost is as real as the characters' lack of resistance to it. The contest is an open one and Morier is not oblivious to Lady Lathkill's invocation of that power: "She was speaking across to the spirits. Deep inside me leaped a jump of laughter. I wanted to howl with laughter. Then instantly I went inert again. The chill gloom seemed to deepen suddenly in the room, everybody was overcome. On the piano-seat the Colonel sat yellow and huddled, with a terrible hang-dog look of guilt on his face. There was a silence, in which the cold seemed to creak." (p. 684)

But whatever her outside power, its causality is human: "the cold effluence of these people had paralysed me." (p. 685) And that causality must be recognized and fought. Lord Lathkill (now called "Luke" is the first to make such a recognition:

I do understand poor Lucy.... She forgot to be flesh and blood while she was alive, and now she can't forgive herself, nor the Colonel. That must be pretty rough, you know, not to realise it till you're dead, and you haven't, so to speak, anything left to go on.... I've only realised how very extraordinary it is to be a man of flesh and blood, alive. It seems so ordinary, in comparison, to be dead, and merely spirit. That seems so commonplace. But fancy having a living face, and arms, and thighs. Oh, my God, I'm glad I've realised in time!" (p. 689, my italics)

To have "realised in time," that is the key, within the dimensions of movement, space, life, possibility. Pure spirituality--that absolute--is unapproachable. As Luke says of the risen Jesus (the 'official' one, not Lawrence's "The Man Who Died"): "How very awful, to have to say Noli me tangere!" (p. 689) Because he is the ego-image of the anthropocentric man. In aspiring to get 'beyond this world' he has tried to make himself more than his content, what he is (I mean mind and body), so that his form becomes untouchable. The body must suffer (that split with the mind being made): crucifixion. And if the man sacrifices his uncertainties--really his possibilities of transmitting life, his own living-and-dying processes in time--to some eternal Christ-ymbology, then automatically the woman's image becomes that of the Madonna, is therefore destroyed also. As Morier says: "...it occurred to me that in this crucifixion business the crucified does not put himself alone on the cross.

The woman is nailed even more inexorably up, and crucified in the body even more cruelly." (p. 690) Because if the man breaks his sexuality in this perverse way then he will never touch the woman and she will literally never conceive life. Luke tells Colonel Hale:

Haven't I done it myself? And don't I know now, it's a horrible thing to do, to oneself as much as to her? Her poor ghost, that ached, and never had a real body! It's not so easy to worship with the body. Ah, if the Church taught us that sacrament: with my body I thee worship! that would easily make up for any honouring and obeying the woman might do. But that's why she haunts you. You ignored and disliked her body, and she was only a living ghost. Now she wails in the after-world, like a still-wincing nerve." (p. 692)

"Glad Ghosts" takes up what The Island also considered. Carlotta is "filled with wonder. Could one so change, as to become another creature entirely?" (p. 693, my italics) Morier believes it is possible and sets that possibility against the determinism the characters have so far put in the story: "I had always believed that people could be born again: if they would only let themselves." (p. 693)

There is a rather extensive and complex Lawrencean vocabulary for what this leads to. That I won't here examine. (The main points: the "little [ego] death" of the male, his demonic journey beyond the self to the darkness of unconscious being, his rising again in power [process, in time], his battle with the malevolent mother-

figure, his contact with the female in the world of "flow and recoil" and his leaving to follow his "inmost need"; out of all this the possibilities of abstracting a pattern of constant, seasonal recurrence--the story of Dis, Demeter and Persephone.<sup>2</sup> Lawrence, however, is well aware of the dangers of making formulas. He lists his perspective to the foregoing in Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious and Fantasia of the Unconscious: "This pseudo-philosophy of mine...is deduced from the novels and poems, not the reverse. The novels and poems come unwatched out of one's pen. And then the absolute need which one has for some sort of satisfactory mental attitude towards oneself and things in general makes one try to abstract some definite conclusions from one's experiences as a writer and as a man. The novels and poems are pure passionate experience."<sup>3</sup> Which is one reason why I've tried to stay away from what might be called the D. H. Lawrence Philosophical Corpus [corpses being of interest only in retrospect.] Whatever Lawrence's rhetoric (and it's there--of Luke: "And as he quoted he rose curiously on his toes, and spread his fingers, bringing his hands together till the finger-tips touched....", then to Lady Lathkill: "Oh, mother dear, a man has to be in love in his thighs, the way you ride a horse." [pp. 695-696]), the story has its own power.

One of the changes that breaks the chain of willful causality is what Morier calls "the tender glow of compassionate life, that flowers again." (p. 695) Colonel Hale in particular realizes this, it is what defeats Lady Lathkill. But the real metamorphic power lies in the house, in the house's ghost. Images, images of power seep into the story: "She's supposed to be absolutely like a crocus...harbinger of spring in the earth...she rises in silence like a crocus at the feet, and violets in the hollows of the heart come out. For she is of the feet and hands, the thighs and breast, the face and the all-concealing belly, and her name is silent, but her odour is of spring, and her contact is the all-in-all." (p. 695)

And Morier himself, free from intent ("let me not interfere"), is visited by the ghost: "...at the very core of the deep night the ghost came to me, at the heart of the ocean of oblivion, which is also the heart of life. Beyond hearing, or even knowledge of contact, I met her and knew her. How I know it I don't know. Yet I know it with eyeless, wingless knowledge." (p. 698)

The universe is not anthropocentric, has instead a sentience more powerful, more meaningful than any humanistic interpretation of 'things' (Lawrence in "Aristocracy": "...the relativity of earth, moon, and sun, a

vital, even sentient relatedness..."--Reflections, p. 235)  
 The "shock of recognition" comes from "outside," from  
 "the beyond," from the "other"--from the ghost (and in  
 other stories from a fox, a cock, a horse, a serpent:  
 from the "lords of life"). And human beings are more than  
 their conscious symbologies (i.e., what they, as social  
 beings, stand for). Birkin and Ursula in Women in Love:

They threw off their clothes, and he gathered her  
 to him, and found her, found the pure lambent  
 reality of her forever invisible flesh. Quenched,  
 inhuman, his fingers upon her un-revealed nudity  
 were the fingers of silence upon silence, the  
 body of mysterious night upon the body of  
 mysterious night, the night masculine and feminine,  
 never to be seen with the eye, or known with the  
 mind, only known as a palpable revelation of  
 mystic otherness.<sup>4</sup>

Well, who comes to Morier? Carlotta and Mrs. Hale  
 are both presumably impregnated that night; nine months  
 later they have children (whose names are, in a somewhat  
 grandiose manner, Gabriel and Gabrielle respectively),  
 three days apart. As Morier leaves Riddings, Carlotta  
 murmurs, "At last it was perfect!" And he observes that:  
 "She seemed so beautiful, when I left her, as if it were  
 the ghost again, and I was far down the deeps of con-  
 sciousness." (p. 699) Morier has certainly spread his  
 "flame of life" around, metaphorically or otherwise.

There is a happy ending. Only Morier is left,  
 wandering the "uneasy and distant parts of the earth."

(p. 700) "Glad Ghosts" is flawed, has a great deal of Lawrence's rhetoric permeating it. But it escapes that on two counts: first, the characters are able to free themselves--and to be freed--from their own conscious causalities, and, second, the story, by letting the ghost in, is able to sense some thing unknown (so that the 'plot,' or whatever salvation the characters achieve, becomes of secondary interest). In "The Last Laugh," that partial sensing becomes a complete and full apprehension.

### THE LAST LAUGH

"Our universe is not much more than a mannerism with us now. If we break through, we shall find, that man is not man, as he seems to be, nor woman woman. The present seeming is a ridiculous travesty. And even the sun is not the sun as it appears to be. It is something tingling with magnificence."

(Lawrence, "The Crown," Reflections,  
p. 99)

"...Hoping as one always hopes, you know...that something wonderful is going to happen."

(the "Jewess," p. 636)

In this story there are transformations: changes from one form to another. There are paradoxes and contradictions (James can/can't hear). There are appearances, disappearances, ghosts, a machine, a god, a nymph, a storm. And, a miracle ("MIRACLE: n. ME myracle:

OFr; L miraculum < mirari, to wonder at < mirus, wonderful; cf. ADMIRE an event or action that apparently contradicts known scientific laws and is hence thought to be due to supernatural causes, especially to an act of God. 2. a remarkable event or thing; marvel. 3. a wonderful example ...."--Webster's). And there are very un-human-like humans.

Marchbanks: "he seemed like a satanic young priest... like a faun.... A sort of faun on the Cross, with all the malice of the complication." (p. 631)

James: "She had an odd nymph-like inquisitiveness, sometimes like a bird, sometimes a squirrel, sometimes a rabbit: never quite like a woman." (p. 631)

Lorenzo: "...who was grinning like a satyr and waving good-bye." (p. 630)

The policeman: "He was obviously afraid, like a frightened dog that sees something uncanny." (p. 638)

As James and Marchbanks (who is at first called only "the man in the bowler hat") leave Lorenzo's, Marchbanks warns her to "mind how you step!" (p. 630) She replies, "Don't mind me, I'm quite all right. Mind yourself!" (p. 631) At that moment he nearly falls in the new snow.

A good deal of the story's energy is in its imagery. The snowfall has, seemingly, given the world a new skin, has transformed a topography of certainty into a landscape of unknown possibility. Lorenzo (who disappears on the

first page of the story), calls it, "A new world!" Marchbanks says, "No, Lorenzo! It's only white-wash!" (p. 630) James at first seeks her hearing-aid machine because, as she says, "I believe I'm safer." (p. 631) The "new world" sends in new information. Each person tries to handle that in different ways.

Marchbanks first hears the laughing. He calls it "extraordinary." But James, even with the aid of her machine, cannot hear it. The effect on Marchbanks is strange, the laughter somehow possesses him so that: "His face wreathed with a startling, peculiar smile, seeming to gleam, and suddenly the most extraordinary laugh came bursting out of him, like an animal laughing." (p. 633) At this point the young policeman enters and James asks Marchbanks to describe the laughter for them. He answers, "Ask me to describe it!.... It's the most marvellous sound in the world." (p. 633)

It is impossible to attribute a human causality to this story's "extraordinary" content (now right away let's admit the 'critical' thematic categories: 1) the biographical--in an unpublished essay called "Literal: 'In accordance with, involving or being the primary or strict meaning of a word or words; not figurative or metaphorical,'" Brian Fawcett lists in a footnote the following possibilities: Lorenzo--the satyr is Lawrence, Marchbanks

is Middleton Murry and James is Dorothy Brett, ear trumpet and all; 2) the Lawrence Formula--Lorenzo is transmogrified into Pan, Lawrence's "incalculable" god [Phoenix II, p. 424] [full of "power" as I noted that term a few pages back], James is an Ovidian Daphne, pure ["Having held herself all her life intensely aloof from physical contact, and never having let any man touch her....--p. 634], yet with the perceptions, the "sharp eyes of a deaf nymph, deaf to the world's noises"--p. 634, and Marchbanks is the willful man consciously Seeking Himself and thereby detoured down the garden path ["...a door at the end of a garden path, white with untouched snow, suddenly opened, and a woman in a long-fringed black shawl stood in the light"--p. 635]). "The Last Laugh" is working beyond the gravitational pull of an anthropomorphic center. For example, the term "man" resists its conventional usage, its social definition. Marchbanks asks James what she has seen in the holly. She replies,

"A man."

"Where?"

"There. Among the holly bushes."

"Is he there now?"

"No! He's gone."

"What sort of a man?"

"I don't know."

"What did he look like?"

"I can't tell you." (p. 635)

Description isn't enough, direct perception is necessary. And there are a great many other questions which can be answered only in a relative sense. After Marchbanks has followed the dark woman--who speaks to him "in a low, meaningful, falsely shy voice"--because he feels he has possibly been the one knocking at her door "without knowing," the "Somebody" she has been expecting, James questions the policeman:

"Is he going in?" she asked quickly.

"Looks like it, doesn't it?" said the policeman.

"Does he know that woman?"

"I can't say. I should say he soon will,"

replied the policeman.

"But who is she?"

"I couldn't say who she is." (pp. 636-37)

James and the policeman are left alone. She disconnects her machine, the "tubes of secret light" fade. And she is transformed: "the inert look had left her full soft cheeks. Her cheeks were alive with the glimmer of pride and a new dangerous surety.... The second of ancient fear was followed at once in her by a blithe, unaccustomed sense of power." (p. 637) Her possibilities

seem suddenly awesome. But the momentary fear of what she can do (fear being that sensing of the ultimate 'end' of action--what we are told to fear--death) is made irrelevant by her realization that she doesn't have to conclude anything, even, use her new-found power to the full:

The young policeman.... If she wished she could easily kill him.... So it seemed to her. But why kill him? He was a decent young fellow. She had in front of her eyes the dark face among the holly bushes, with the brilliant, mocking eyes. Her breast felt full of power, and her legs felt long and strong and wild. She was surprised herself at the strong, bright, throbbing sensation beneath her breasts, a sensation of triumph and rosy anger. Her hands felt keen on her wrists. She who had always declared she had not a muscle in her body! Even now, it was not muscle, it was a sort of flame. (p. 637)

She is alive. She has the "flame," in her turn is more than the descriptive term 'woman.' And her world is thrown open: "the whirling snowy air seemed full of presences, full of strange unheard voices. She was used to the sensation of noises taking place which she could not hear. This sensation became very strong. She felt something was happening in the wild air." (p. 638, my italics)

What is happening?

Ghost voices cry in the air, "He's come back! Aha! He's come back!" (p. 638) Thunder and lightning. And suddenly she hears it, the laughing: "It came from the

church: a sound of low, subtle, endless laughter, a strange, naked sound." (p. 639) The policeman cannot speak, act, is fearful, "cowed." The "Church" of "Glad Ghosts" is now inhabited by "ghosts moving, big and tall." The altar cloth is thrown out and, as James later tells Marchbanks, "A leaf of the church Bible blew right in my face: from the Book of Job...." (p. 644) The wind runs "over the organ-pipes like pan-pipes...." (p. 640) A wind, warm, "smelling of spring."

There is the question of the "almond blossom" scent. It is here and it is in the last sentence of "The Last Laugh" (Lawrence in "Notes for Birds, Beasts, and Flowers": "The almond was the symbol of resurrection").<sup>5</sup> But whatever the token of change, who or whatever its author, its causality is determinable only in the effects; I know nothing more of this Pan-Dis-god at the story's 'end' than at its 'beginning.' In the morning the policeman, who has stayed in James's sitting-room because he was frozen in "mortal fear" the night before, is lame.

And James (who laughs at her self-portrait painting with its "nice brown hair and its slightly opened rabbit-mouth and its baffled, uncertain rabbit-eyes"--p. 640), can now hear everything "quite well." For her "suddenly the world had become quite different....the old, mouldering London sky had crackled and rolled back, like an old skin, shrivelled, leaving an absolutely new blue heaven."

(p. 641) A slit made in the umbrella; chaos pouring in:

"It really is extraordinary!" she said to herself. "I certainly saw that man's face. What a wonderful face it was! I shall never forget it. Such laughter! He laughs longest who laughs last. He certainly will have the last laugh. I like him for that: he will laugh last. Must be someone really extraordinary! How very nice to be the one to laugh last. He certainly will. What a wonderful being! I suppose I must call him a being. He's not a person exactly.

"But how wonderful of him to come back and alter all the world immediately! Isn't that extraordinary...." (pp. 641-642)

The return of whatever reality the society has banished (painted over) has and does alter the world (which is why "he" must come in a changed form which would be unrecognizable even to the Grand Inquisitor). James has seen herself as ridiculous, her role in the love-game as "absurd." She thinks it would be "wonderful if he just touched her. Even touched her. She felt, if he touched her, she herself would emerge new and tender out of an old, hard skin." (p. 643) Metamorphosis.

For this the socially defined man is now inadequate. James tells Marchbanks that the policeman "was only incidental." And says then of his Jewess of the night before, "So, I suppose, was the woman in the shawl." (p.644)

Marchbanks notices her "change" (he himself has missed it, is still the same). He reproaches her for her loss of familiar identity: "You've got no soul, you

know." (p. 645) And she replies, "Oh, thank goodness for that!.... Having no soul. I never had one really. It was always fobbed off on me. Soul was the only thing there was between you and me. Thank goodness it's gone. Haven't you lost yours? The one that seemed to worry you, like a decayed tooth?" (P. 645) He hasn't, doesn't even know what she is talking about. She has a new vocabulary.

But the policeman has been changed. His "left foot" is "curiously clubbed, like the weird paw of some animal." (p. 646) His lameness, however, resists rational analysis. It has just--happened. So that Marchbanks can get nothing out of him as to "how it happened."

The question is foolish, ridiculous, "absurd." It is a statement of Marchbank's own actuality. The "low, eternal laugh" which then comes is a measure of how such attempts at a humanly imposed causality rebound off that umbrella Lawrence has spoken of and at the same time of how strong the universe really is. For Marchbanks it is the last laugh: he "gave a strange, yelping cry, like a shot animal. His white face was drawn, distorted in a curious grin, that was chiefly agony but partly wild recognition. He was staring with fixed eyes at something. And in the rolling agony of his eyes was the horrible grin of a man who realises he has made a final, and this time fatal, fool of himself." (p. 646, my italics)

He sees "him": "I knew it was he!" And falls, "like a

man struck by lightning." (Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said/ Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge? JOB:38:1-2)

James asks the policeman, "Is he dead?" And he stammers back, "Seems like it."

We are, the world is, more than what we are told, the anthropomorphism we are given. Power exists not only within us but also, elsewhere: that being something of wonder.

**So that:**

CHAPTER IV

IN ORDER TO CONTINUE: The Argument

"The seer and speaker under the descent of the god is the 'poet,' whatever his form, and he ceases to be one only when his form, whatever else it may nominally or superficially or vulgarly be, is unworthy of the god: in which event, we promptly submit, he isn't worth talking of at all. He becomes so worth it, and the gods so adopt him, and so confirms his charming office and name, in the degree in which his impulse and passion are general and comprehensive--a definitional provision for them that makes but a mouthful of so minor a distinction, in the fields of light, as that between verse and prose."

--Henry James

"We describe our time as one in which relationships, rather than the hierarchies to which these might refer, are dominant."

--Robert Creeley

The world, which at times seems to be contained, isn't. It does get away from us. Systems (philosophical, political, religious) claim a totality which they lack, their dimensions, once defined, cannot hold what is outside, in. Yet as long as a man believes in the absolute and does not push his vision for proof, he may for a time ignore the "'special laws of nature,' which, to use Kant's phrase, are 'accidental to our reason' . . . ." <sup>1</sup> Eventually, however, the unknown--simply what is more than we know--happens, is encountered, does not fit the system, the world view. What then.

One reaction is complete disengagement. In Frank Kermode's words: "what they, the dying men, can do is to imagine a significance for themselves.... One of the ways in which they do this is to make objects in which everything is that exists in concord with everything else, and nothing else is, implying that this arrangement mirrors the dispositions of a creator, actual or possible."<sup>2</sup> A god-like schizophrenia.

Such escapism is an easy out. But the assumption of god-head (Lawrence: "when man became conscious, and aware of himself, his own littleness and puniness in the whirl of the vast chaos of God, he took fright, and began inventing God in his own image"--Phoenix II, p. 258) guarantees complete control of cause and effect only within the confines of the manipulated form (and perhaps not easily at that): an illusion. In the "outside" world the assumptions do not necessarily hold. There are those, however, who are desperately occupied with the unknown, how to meet it, what is to be done to be included; versus that technology which assumes its knowledge to be absolute, of the world as some thing to be totally exploited.

The question then is: how is the world, as opposed to how is it supposed to be. Einstein concluded that the wholeness of the universe does not equal a simple addition of its parts, that it does not exist within an absolute framework which can be reduced to a fixed scale

like a jig-saw puzzle. He saw only the immediacy of mass and energy in motion, the relationship of those things constantly in flux. A universe where there is no Platonic idea forever at repose somewhere, no transcendent reality: "I wished to show that space-time is not necessarily something to which one can ascribe a separate existence, independently of the actual objects of physical reality. Physical objects are not in space, but these objects are spatially extended. In this way the concept 'empty space' loses its meaning."<sup>3</sup>

It sounds like chaos: things happening so quickly and in all directions at once that a man does not know where he stands, cannot even fix that point because it changes from now to then faster than he can make meaning of those two terms. Some throw up their hands and long for another Elizabethan Chain of Being. Lawrence, however, showed that we cannot go back that way:

Now comes the moment when the terrified but inordinately conceited human consciousness must at last submit, and own itself part of the vast and potent living chaos. We must keep true to ourselves. But we must breathe in life from the living and unending chaos. We shall put up more umbrellas. They are a necessity of our consciousness. But never again shall we be able to put up The Absolute Umbrella, either religious or moral or rational or scientific or practical. The vast parasol of our conception of the universe, the cosmos, the firmament of suns and stars and space, this we can roll up like any other green sunshade, and

bring it forth again when we want it. But we mustn't imagine it always spread above us. It is no more absolutely there than a green sunshade is absolutely there. It is casually there, only; because it is as much a contrivance and invention of our mind as a green sunshade is.

(Phoenix II, pp. 258-59)

*Aut in Phoenix II, in Phoenix, pp 250*

Whatever the functional methodologies we adopt, we must remember that when dealing with alien objects--with the "living chaos"--how we change things determines how we ourselves are changed, so that manipulation is not advanced lightly. We ourselves are alien objects.

Such an interrelated, moving universe. Form is then what a man knows (not what he is told, the emphasis necessarily being on the process of investigation between /among himself and as many other things as possible). But with great care. To fix things until they gel and lose movement is to deny them life, to kill, to impose one's willful order, to make them unreal. The price paid is that objects deny this willfulness, will eventually assert their own reality. The recoil of the ecological environment. Or, Cezanne's apple. (Here I must quote in full a poem by Jacques Prévert, "Promenade de Picasso":

Sur une assiette bien ronde en porcelaine réelle  
 une pomme pose  
 face à face avic elle  
 un peintre de la réalité  
 essaie vainement de peindre  
 la pomme telle qu'elle est  
 mais

elle ne se laisse pas faire  
 la pomme  
 elle a son mot à dire  
 et plusieurs tours dans son sac de pomme  
 la pomme  
 et la voilà qui tourne  
 dans son assiette réelle  
 sournoisement sur elle-même  
 doucement sans bouger  
 et comme un duc de Guise qui se déguise en bec de gaz  
 parce qu'on veut malgré lui lui tirer le portrait  
 la pomme se déguise en beau fruit déguisé  
 et c'est alors  
 que le peintre de la réalité  
 commence à réaliser  
 que toutes les apparences de la pomme sont contre lui  
 et  
 comme le malheureux indigent  
 comme le pauvre nécessiteux qui se trouve soudain à la  
     merci de n'importe quelle association bienfaitante  
     et charitable et redoutable de bienfaisance de  
     charité et de redoutabilité  
 le malheureux peintre de la réalité  
 se trouve soudain alors être la triste proie  
 d'une innombrable foule d'associations d'idées  
 Et la pomme en tournant évoque le pommier  
 le Paradis terrestre et Eve et puis Adam  
 l'arrosoir L'espalier Parmentier l'escalier  
 le Canada les Hespérides la Normandie la Reinette et  
     l'Api  
 le serpent du Jeu de Paume le serment du Jus de Pomme  
 et le péché originel  
 et les origines de l'art  
 et la Suisse avec Guillaume Tell  
 et même Isaac Newton  
 plusieurs fois primé à l'Exposition de la Gravitation  
     Universelle  
 et le peintre étourdi perd de vue son modèle  
 et s'endort  
 C'est alors que Picasso  
 qui passait par là comme il passe partout  
 chaque jour comme chez lui  
 voit la pomme et l'assiette et le peintre endormi  
 Quelle idée de peindre une pomme  
 dit Picasso  
 et Picasso mange la pomme  
 et la pomme lui dit Merci  
 et Picasso casse l'assiette  
 et s'en va en souriant  
 et le peintre arraché à ses songes

comme une dent  
 se retrouve tout seul devant sa toile inachevée  
 avec au beau milieu de sa vaisselle brisée  
 les terrifiants pépins de la réalité.)<sup>4</sup>

Creeley says that "the question becomes what is real--and what is of that nature?" ("Introduction to 'The New Writing in the USA,'" Graph, p. 46), "Nothing will fit if we assume a place for it" (Graph, p. 42), and Robert Duncan, in "Ideas of the Meaning of Form," talks of "the world of thought and feeling in which we may participate but not dominate, where we are used by things even as we use them." (quoted in Graph, p. 44) Creeley's essay also quotes a piece from Charles Olson's "Equal, That Is, To The Real Itself." Its importance is such in terms of what I will move to that I must bring it in here:

All things did come in again, in the 19th century. An idea shook loose, and energy and motion became as important a structure of things as that they are plural, and, by matter, mass. It was even shown that in the infinitely small the older concepts of space ceased to be valid at all. Quantity--the measurable and numerable--was suddenly as shafted in, to any thing, as it was also, as had been obvious, the striking character of the external world, that all things do extend out. Nothing was now inert fact, all things were there for feeling, to promote it, and be felt; and man, in the midst of it, knowing well how he was folded in, as well as how suddenly and strikingly he could extend himself, spring or, without moving, go, to far, the farthest--he was suddenly possessed or re-possessed of a character of being, a thing among things, which I shall call his physicality. It

made re-entry of or to the universe. Reality was without interruption, and we are still in the business of finding out how all action, and thought, have to be refounded.... (Graph, p. 46)

Which leads me to questions about the dynamics between man and matter. Olson says, "all that TIME IS, is RHYTHM" (Letters, p. 83), and elsewhere, "he who possesses rhythm possesses the universe."<sup>5</sup> What he calls a "human universe," by which he means that a man is a total part of his context, in fact makes that context by the way he works in it. But a better term is the one used by Olson in the previously quoted piece from "Equal, That Is, To The Real Itself": feeling. D. H. Lawrence said "...any novel of importance has a purpose. If only the 'purpose' be large enough, and not at outs with the passional inspiration" (Reflections, p. 104).

In the context that is here evolving, a rational reality divorced from feeling is false, categories are false, education is false (cultural memories artificially implanted from without--that is, take-my-word-for-it--vs. experience from within-out.) How, then, to deal with the unknown? Categorical, subjective-objective perspectives are done away with in a continuum. Knowledge is a matter of how one moves. An immoral act would be, to refer back to Creeley, assuming a place for something before it, by its own motion, got there (a relative "there" of course).

Place. Where are we, where am I. How do I fit. The easy temptation here is to be prescriptive, to "assume" a space. But a discussion of conduct cannot come outside of an experiential context. Einstein has shown that "empty space" is a meaningless (dead) construct.

The particularity that Olson constantly stresses boils down to, I guess, a form of self-knowledge. But only in the way I've tried to suggest: knowledge is movement is (inter) action yet is: "a position, about man

and what i take it  
is the

most valuable thing i can give you in critique of it is  
to try to throw light on how you have or have not  
accomplished  
a stance (which is only and always a man's own rhythmic  
position)  
.....  
(that is, there is truth,  
in one sense only, that, you are it if you make  
yourself clear..."

(Letters, p. 83). Clearly, there I think that says. Olson makes such a "stance," such a position of movement, of event, a moral one in this way: "THE MORAL IS FORM & nothing else

and the MORAL ACT is the honest--'sincere'  
motion  
in the direction of FORM"

(Letters, p. 82).

And the gap which has existed between subjective and objective 'truth' (Olson himself traces this back to Socrates), is eliminated: "the scientist will be again solely the artist,

simply, that the scientist himself has found the one mystery left is form, and the morphology of same" (Letters, p. 95).

A moral act. Can a man here claim himself by intent? It is a matter of how contemporary criticism does separate things into categories: intention, subject matter, style, other generalities. In The Rhetoric of Fiction, a book which has had a great impact at the universities, Wayne Booth says: "...to show that an author's intentions are serious and that his subjects are vital or real says very little about his artistic success. To deal with a subject that is in some way important may be a necessary step toward writing well, but it is certainly not sufficient. To defend the moral intent of the author is in itself no more conclusive than to show that he wanted to write a masterpiece.... The moral question is really whether an author has an obligation to write well in the sense of making his moral orderings clear, and if so, clear to whom."<sup>6</sup>

Booth's concern becomes something else with Olson: "...the degree of apprehension of the reality contemporary to us. For that reality, at any time, is demonstrably there, and demonstrably is properly engaged (this any of us comes to find out not by any eclecticism, but by that act I make so much of recognition. And recognition rests solely on the work--the amount of price paid by you, or

me." (Letter, p. 99) If a man makes as much of the world clear to himself as he can, he will at once have made himself clear to himself and also, clear to the world. In fact, have made the world clear. The dangers of a prescriptive readership become then not so strong.

And where Booth assumes that the engagement is the old subject-object one, which is a consciously created thing ("the author makes his readers...makes them see what they have never seen before, moves them into a new order of perception and experience altogether--he finds his reward in the peers he has created"),<sup>7</sup> essentially a manipulative activity, Olson directly attacks the concept of the passive consumer. A man cannot be made to see what he cannot move himself to see. Spectatorship vs. ownership: "you can not own a poem until you use it...." (Letter, p. 103).

The emphasis on "the reader" betrays Booth's position. He looks back over the causal course of an "art work," back to the author's "purpose" ("to make it all accessible to someone else--his peers, himself as imagined reader, his audience.")<sup>8</sup> It becomes "something communicable." The temptation is to add, like a disease. What happens if that generalization, "the reader," doesn't know that what he's got in his hands is a communication, or can't know that it is moving him "into a new order of perception and experience altogether"? The Rhetoric of Fiction seems

to propose then that the fault lies with the artist, his inability to communicate, particularly to whatever or whoever are his "peers." What I would call a best-seller aesthetic. (And this leads me straight to what Herbert Gold delineates, talking of the novel in his essay "The New Upper-Middle Soap Opera"--art as a method of making one's peergroup, art as a form of socialized medicine:

As we are seen in the upper-middle soap opera, Americans no longer seek the girl, the adventure, the career, or the prize of self. Now we need to get the Belongingness. Groupy man is the New American. Faith, defined as trust in a given society, becomes the prime mover. Plot, a direction of growth in time, a movement made possible by significant risks and commitments, gives way to plot defined as an anthology of cautionary anecdotes. The hero learns just how right it is to be right. Already secure in advance, a reader watches the protagonist join the company of men by the curious process of getting to be at one with the reader's own moral evasions.)<sup>9</sup>

Olson, finally, does not credit Booth's problem, he refuses it because it cannot be real: too much energy has been wasted on that idea, the Writer/ the Reader. A proper care with the process of doing is itself the only end one can have. Indeed, it is the particularity of what a man can do: "you can't put us down with schemas ...we do what we are obliged to do: measure us by what you have done with what you've had to do with...." (Letters, p. 93) Criticism is, as writing is, a matter

of personal relevance. So that such problems as the disparity between intent and achievement disappear, the worries over subject matter, the writing of a "master-piece."

"...HOW A THING IS SAID is as important as WHAT IS SAID...it is WHAT IS SAID." (Letters, p. 93) Not, simply, "style." Something more. A man is defined by his actions and action leads outward, away from psychological wrangling over causal intent, towards proof. The moral is form. That is, a poem, a story, a novel. And the value is more than how it got there, it is how one uses it, is in turn used by it. Something quite different from the masturbatory value of, say, a Harold Robbins' novel, or the quantitative production of academic articles (the Chairman of the Board of Governors of one of the local universities, speaking to a convention of campus policemen on "academic freedom" stated: "The price that is paid for this great freedom, is that it will not be translated into action. In a place where reason is king, action can only impair someone else's right to reason.")<sup>10</sup>

One of a writer's chief temptations is didacticism. In writing a novel, say, he may make that a vehicle for what he considers motion instead of allowing it movement on its own. And when the inertia within a novel is made an absolute (the a priori good hero for example), things

go dead. Newtonian mechanics: for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. Lawrence, however, says that this is never quite possible. The novel, like all real things, resists containment, has somehow a life of its own more than the manipulative power of the novelist. There is his famous cry:

Oh, give me the novel! Let me hear what the novel  
says.

As for the novelist, he is usually a dribbling liar.

(Reflections, p. 123)

What the novel has inherent in its structure, Lawrence feels, is a high degree of possibility, of flux. It deals with the energies moving within it in terms of relative relationships:

The novel is the highest form of human expression so far attained. Why? Because it is so incapable of the absolute.

In a novel, everything is relative to everything else, if that novel is art at all. There may be didactic bits, but they aren't the novel. And the author may have a didactic 'purpose' up his sleeve. Indeed most great novelists have, as Tolstoi had his Christian-socialism....

(Reflections, p. 104)

Lawrence then makes his accusation against Tolstoi specific: "Vronsky sinned, did he? But also the sinning was a consummation devoutly to be wished. The novel makes that obvious: in spite of old Leo Tolstoi. And the would-be-pious Prince in Resurrection is a muff, with his

piety that nobody wants or believes in. There you have the greatness of the novel itself. It won't let you tell didactic lies, and put them over" (Reflections, p. 104).

Bad guys and good guys, speeches in the mouths of plastic saints, deliberate editing of action, motivation frameworks, moral censorship, these are some of the familiar impositions the novel is constantly subjected to. Usually either for one of two reasons: a) the audience has decided what kind of reality it wants, or, b) the writer has decided what kind of reality he wants. Both demands oppose a constantly moving, open-ended universe of possibilities.

The easiest areas of plot manipulation--of godly planning--are where the story or novel starts and stops. There, conformity to some exterior idea is most easily imposed. Actions are judged, the characters receive judgment, are pardoned or condemned. Gratuitous transformations abound. It is the field of the deus ex machina.

Robert Creeley states that prose often easily leads to mechanical endings because of its 'logical' nature, its sentence-bound syllogistic structure:

In prose, the lean toward a 'solution' or a stasis of idea most usually marks the book as a failure; I mean, insofar as a writer of prose is willing to give space to this fixing of idea as the logical 'end' of movement, etc., just so far we usually won't go along with him. And I would figure that we are right.

But we deny him, even so, the way out of it, this fix, or what could get him beyond these 'logics.' ("Notes for a New Prose," Graph, p. 12)

[Let me right here confront the implied distinction between prose and poetry. What follows is all I will say of that. For the rest, I refer back to Henry James on the first page of this section. Creeley: "Poetry as the formulation of content, in stasis; prose, as the formulation of content, in a progression, like that of time. This is a simple way of putting it. But sufficient to show that while poetry depends on the flux contained, held within the form, in stasis, prose may intend such a limiting but cannot justify one. It has no beginning or end. It has only the length it happens to have. 'Might be continued....' Just here is the key to its possible reach, that, in spite of itself, it has to continue.... So, in some sense, the usual idea of beginning and end have put upon prose an order alien to its nature."--Graph, p. 13]

I want to leave consideration of "the way out of it" for awhile and further investigate the problem.

Our rationalist, mechanical, "Age-of-Enlightenment" legacy is still very much with us. What it often leads to in the novel might be summarized as follows:

Human beings appear to have fixed personalities; the age of character analysis. Action and plot are linear

(cause works from the novel's past to its future) and the discovery of character motivation is most often "what happens." Freudian psychological realism. The character plays himself against an unbending universal framework (our passion for analysis leading to "adjustment"), self-revelations are within such a context; the reality within has a subject-object correspondence to the reality without. Divisions between the outside world and the inside world are precise, materialistic. And the narrator is usually omnipotent.

Such a mechanistic universe has definite bonds which are hard to break away from. Form is not so much a man, but his role, his character. Allegorical messages abound. It is 'natural' for the narrator to create an ending; in fact he is bound to do so by the inevitable nature of his omnipotence. In the beginning there is a genesis, in the end there is a revelation, the effect is most often a clichéd catharsis. The point being that the form of the novel is consciously filled that way.

I'd like now to take Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment and examine how its ending tries not to be one. The greater portion of the novel is of course a comprehensive and labyrinthine exploration of psychological motivation. Yet Dostoevsky wants out of this closed, cause-and-effect universe into something wider, something less congested

by the desire to recover a totality of motivation by rational investigation. How he must push the novel that way I find very interesting.

Raskolnikov is in prison for his chosen role of murderer ("it was only in that that he recognised his criminality, only in the fact that he had been unsuccessful and had confessed it"),<sup>11</sup> having temporarily lost the thread of his plot. To this point he has decided to kill, has done this, has allowed himself to get caught. He has also been unable to kill himself, that being the alternative reaction to his act of murder. So he is in prison, mulling over what went wrong with his "theory" and why he is now at a dead end.

What can happen?

One: there is Sonia waiting in the wings also at loose ends. Her role is The Innocent Prostitute Saved by The Grace of God. Two: the hero, Raskolnikov--and he is a hero because he too has somehow miraculously retained his innocence through all this--can't be left sitting in jail without some kind of revelation. But although Raskolnikov doesn't yet know what's up, the omniscient narrator does: "He didn't understand that that consciousness might be the promise of a future crisis, of a new view of life and of his future resurrection."  
(p. 467)

Future resurrection, there is the clue:

He stole a rapid glance at her and dropped his eyes on the ground without speaking. They were alone, no one had seen them.... How it happened he did not know. But all at once something seemed to seize him and fling him at her feet.... But at the same moment she understood, and a light of infinite happiness came into her eyes. She knew and had no doubt that he loved her beyond everything and that at last the moment had come.... They were both pale and thin; but those sick pale faces were bright with the dawn of a new future, of a full resurrection into a new life.... he had risen again and he knew it and felt it in all his being.... (p. 471, my italics)

What all this is in aid of is a revelation: the move from conscious theorizing to spontaneous feeling. "Everything, even his crime, his sentence and imprisonment, seemed to him now in the first rush of feeling an external, strange fact with which he had no concern. But he could not think for long together of anything that evening, and he could not have analysed anything consciously; he was simply feeling. Life had stepped into the place of theory and something quite different would work itself out in his mind." (pp. 471-72)

How does this happen? Yes, I want it to happen, the world to be that way. But it is the narrator who makes it happen, not the novel. Dostoevsky uses quite a few tricks to make it seem real--he refers to resurrections, Lazarus, the gospel and "the seven days." The energy of the novel, however, is hitching its way forward via a

thinly veiled parabolic machine. The end is edenic; paradise restored, moral allegory. True, Dostoevsky does try hard to rescue Raskolnikov from this limbo, to convince us that where one story ends another begins: "But that is the beginning of a new story--the story of the gradual renewal of a man, the story of his gradual regeneration, of his passing from one world into another, of his initiation into a new unknown life. That might be the subject of a new story, but our present story is ended." (p. 472) But the "new story" isn't one because what happens is already known. Nothing goes onward in heaven.

Moral allegory, rites de passage. How desperately we want parables. How else to make sense of the world, to believe in moral progress, justice, a relationship of changes which moves us on to better things. Or even just a more comprehensive view of the world ("the author makes his readers...moves them into a new order of perception and experience altogether...") Yet when the novelist introduces such things by a deus ex machina it is a simulacrum of change only and not change itself. The shape is there but it doesn't move. Frank Kermode states:

Yeats, in a famous phrase which has occasionally floated free of its context, said that the System enabled him to hold together reality and justice in a single thought. Reality is, in this expression, the sense we have of a world irreducible to human plot and human desire for order; justice is the human order we find or impose upon it. The System is in fact all Justice; in combination

with a sense of reality which has nothing whatever to do with it, it became a constituent of poems. The System is a plot, a purely human projection, though not more human than its apparent antithesis, reality, which is a human imagining of the inhuman.<sup>12</sup>

A theoretical mathematician assumes relationships in his work (if a equals b then....). At some point, however, he must grapple with the real world, show his content has included enough possibilities in order to work within the world, to answer the question then what with a prediction. Olson says, "What belongs to art and reason is/ the knowledge of/ consequences."<sup>13</sup> Yet that mathematician cannot force his predictions on the universe. So I take it ENDS, apocalypses, are not what we are after. (Yeats: "The danger is that there will be no war....Love war because of its horror, that belief may be changed, civilization renewed."<sup>14</sup> Frank Kermode, while stating that, "The most terrible element in apocalyptic thinking is its certainty that there must be universal bloodshed"<sup>15</sup>, also points out that an apocalyptic thinker like Yeats, was, in his art, generally able to transcend his own willfulness: "Only rarely did he forget that whatever devotes itself to justice at the expense of reality, is finally self-destructive."<sup>16</sup> The absence of finalities does not mean that, speaking of the novel, it is then formless, can have no 'end' or no 'beginning'-- no more than any man tries to live a formless life. As

the saying has it, "within limits." The point is how wide are the novel's limits and how can they be flexible, moving, changing. NOT STATIC, NOT FIXED (in the sense a fight is fixed: phony).

Kermode worries that the contemporary experimental novel is in danger of getting too chaotic and hastens to admonish: "As soon as it speaks, begins to be a novel, it imposes causality and concordance, development, character, a past which matters and a future within certain broad limits determined by the project of the author rather than that of the characters. They have their choices, but the novel has its end."<sup>17</sup>

Where is the "end" of the novel? Simply, where it stops. Why does it stop where it does then. Usually we feel it to be correct that actions terminate in climaxes. And, if we want, a dénouement can bring the motion to a halt gently. But things must STOP. Lessons must be learned, or at least the novel must come to a logical conclusion. What does this mean in terms of "the project of the author"? Should he arbitrarily terminate what has been set in motion, perversely impose his will over his "passional inspiration"? Yet any such imposed cessation becomes obvious in the way Lawrence has shown; if left to itself the novel will stop when it is ready (and may begin again).

The emphasis then is on the middle, the changes that go on between things. The "project of the author" is therefore, in Olson's words, "the writer's contesting with reality...." His full statement is in "The Escaped Cock: Notes on Lawrence & the Real":

I take it that CONTEST is what puts drama (what they call story, plot) into the thing, the writer's contesting with reality, to see it, to SEE;

that climax is not what happens to the characters or things (which is, even at its finest, no more than a rigged puppet demonstrandum) but is, instead, the issue of this contest, the ISSUE of the man who writes - 'a broken stump' said my peer, 'this is what plot ought to be'.

The issue is what causes CHANGE, the struggle inside, the contest there, exhibited.

At root (or stump) what is, is no longer THINGS but what happens BETWEEN things, these are the terms of the reality contemporary to us - and the terms of what we are. If form is never more than an extension of content then the proposition reads thus: content (contest leading to issue arriving at change equals) form.<sup>18</sup>

Writing is a form of recognizing the unknown, of engaging it. The project is vital to the person doing that in the sense that it is an arena for his participation and not his personal pleasure-dome, psychoanalytical couch, predisposed reality, whatever. Therefore Olson's word process, his constant hammering at use, his emphasis on particularity. Of what use words are. As Malinowski de-

scribes the 'primitive' sense of that:

A word, signifying an important utensil, is used in action, not to comment on its nature or reflect on its properties, but to make it appear, to be handed over to the speaker, or to direct another man to its proper use. The meaning of the thing is made up of experiences of its active uses and not of intellectual contemplation....A word means to a native the proper use of the thing for which it stands, exactly as an implement means something when it can be handled and means nothing when no active experience is at hand. Similarly a verb, a word for an action, receives its meaning through active participation in this action. A word is used when it can produce an action, and not to describe one, still less to translate thoughts....<sup>19</sup>

Olson: "to find the secret of it, which means, of course, to recognize it, then to admit it, then, of all, to participate." And he emphasizes, "there is one requirement, only one requirement....the clue: open, stay OPEN, hear it, anything, really HEAR it. And you are IN" (Letters, p. 79).

Remove the barriers: preconceptions aren't any experience, order and chaos are not antithetical. Change. Contest. Does that particular novel have it and what am I, here reading it, going to do with it.

I have drawn a relationship between writing a novel and how that action may be how one is. Is this autobiography (the search for a fixed past and that contesting with the present)? Is it a fictional contest between what is wish-

fulfillment and what is real?

Autobiography means the traced life-story of oneself. First of all is a man capable of making his own story, can he know himself in that way. Ortega y Gasset states:

I invent projects of being and doing in the light of circumstance. This alone I come upon, this alone is given me: circumstance. It is too often forgotten that man is impossible without imagination, without the capacity to invent for himself a conception of life, to 'ideate' the character he is going to be. Whether he be original or a plagiarist, man is the novelist of himself ....Among...possibilities I must choose. Hence, I am free. But, be it well understood, I am free by compulsion, whether I wish to be or not.... To be free means to be lacking in constitutive identity, not to have subscribed to a determined being, to be able to be other than what one was....<sup>20</sup>

To be "able to be other than what one was" requires, in a sense, a knowledge of what one was. One has a past and one invents a present in order to have a future. The ideation of a "character" for ourselves knits these concepts together with the thread of consistency. Which is the inconsistency in the above argument: the ideation of character necessarily means, in part, the fixing of a "constitutive identity," a "determined being." Our previous choices (what we think are choices, act on) influence what we will recognize as choices in the future. The habit of thinking is: if I do this now that will mean certain things must be done later. There may

be several possibilities as to what those "certain things" are, but they are not, in practise, equally choosable. Or a man may try acting strictly on impulse, but then there is nothing he can say about himself, there is nothing known in his sense of himself. He will have no story.

The proof of a man, then, is not in his role, his character, so much as in his story. And the story will be more than the sum of one character, indeed, that fixed sense of character is hopefully to be gotten away from. As the novel strives to be more than the sum total of the author's conscious project. It is the same process, in this sense, "man is the novelist of himself." Then, as Creeley says, "To tell the story, is all one can do." (Graph, p. 52)

And so the writing of a novel, or the action of a life, is not simply a matter of determining a fixed, consistent causal history. On the other hand that does not mean either that it is impossible to point to an identity, to demonstrate the interrelated influence of events, of relationships in flux. Things do not always separate, move apart, just as they do not always stay together. Ernst Cassirer, discussing the problem of talking of "individuality" in modern physics, of fixing points of reference (the quantum mechanics of light: Bohr's

Principle of Compatibility where a photon "works" both in terms of a particle theory and a wave theory), states:

Summarizing all these considerations, it will be seen from a new angle that the real difficulties of quantum mechanics are due to a tendency toward a radical indeterminism, or to a demand that the causal concept be abandoned. The essence of the causal concept remains untouched as long as this essence is grasped in its true universality--that is, defined only by the demand for strict functional dependence. If the individual elements of determination available to quantum mechanics are used...in keeping with the limits fixed by the uncertainty relations, a functional relationship, precisely definable, will always exist between them.<sup>21</sup>

When I was a kid I coined the term 'relative absolute' on a paper I did for an English teacher. The teacher commented that the terms were opposites and, when put together, were "meaningless." I said previously that chaos and order are not antithetical. Cassirer is talking about the limits of point of view. A man standing on the earth sees the sun rise in the east and set in the west, and to him, within those limits, that is an absolute. The Flat Earth Society still exists. As long as a man does not want to go to the moon it is all right for the sun to rise in the east and set in the west. As long as the members of the Flat Earth Society do not wonder why their horizon is so small, as long as they do not see it as small, they will be happy. But let the standing man

decide to go to the moon, or let the earth stop rotating on its axis and the limits, the reality of such seeing, must be expanded--a world view.

Creeley says, "we do not as yet get the basic fact, that reality is just that which is believed, just as long as it is, believed." (Graph, pp. 12-13) But belief has its limits. It must be constantly tested in the world. From inside out, a "way out." Such a natural movement is how one is not afraid to contest with things, to engage them, to fall away. Not by making them final, apocalyptic, captured and contained in the conscious self or the wish-fulfilling desires of the primitive unconscious. But to be free with them, in movement. The world, which at times seems to be contained, isn't. To tell that story.

NOTES

Chapter One

<sup>1</sup> Sir James George Frazer, The New Golden Bough, ed. and with Notes and Foreword by Theodor H. Gaster (Garden City, New York, 1961), p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> (New York, 1961).

<sup>3</sup> "Durrell and the Homunculi," in Saturday Review, March 21, 1970, p. 30.

<sup>4</sup> Revised Edition (New York, 1962), p. 16.

<sup>5</sup> Bettelheim, p. 17.

<sup>6</sup> Bettelheim, p. 19.

<sup>7</sup> Bettelheim, p. 148.

<sup>8</sup> Bettelheim, p. 22.

<sup>9</sup> "The Quest for Durrell's Scobie," in Modern Fiction Studies, Vol. x, No. 4, Winter, 1964-65, p. 382.

<sup>10</sup> (Norman, Oklahoma, 1970), p. xvii.

<sup>11</sup> Friedman, from the Preface, pp. xvi-xvii.

<sup>12</sup> (Philadelphia, 1948). For further information on source material for the Quartet, see William Leigh Godshalk's article "Some Sources of Durrell's ALEXANDRIA QUARTET," Modern Fiction Studies, Vol. xiii, No. 3, Autumn, 1967, pp. 361-374.

<sup>13</sup> in Modern Fiction Studies, Vol. xiii, No. 3, Autumn, 1967, pp. 387-388.

Chapter Two

<sup>1</sup> in Origin II, Summer, 1951, p. 92. The letter is dated Sept. 30, 1950.

<sup>2</sup>(New York, 1965), pp. 91-97.

### Chapter Three

<sup>1</sup>"We Are Transmitters," Selected Poems (New York, 1967), p. 105.

<sup>2</sup>cf., the poem "Purple Anemones" in The Complete Poems of D. H. Lawrence, ed. Vivian de Sola Pinto and Warren Roberts, Vol. I (New York, 1964), p. 307, and the story "The Man Who Died in St. Mawr and The Man Who Died" (New York, 1953), pp. 163-211.

<sup>3</sup>(New York, 1960), p. 57.

<sup>4</sup>(New York, 1950), p. 366.

<sup>5</sup>Phoenix I (New York, 1964), p. 65. I'd like to acknowledge a debt to Mr. Fawcett's essay for reminding me of this quote.

### Chapter Four

<sup>1</sup>quoted in Ernst Cassirer, Determinism and Indeterminism in Modern Physics (New Haven, 1956), p. 114.

<sup>2</sup>The Sense of An Ending (New York, 1967), p. 4.

<sup>3</sup>in Relativity, Note to the 15th edition, 1952 (New York, 1961).

<sup>4</sup>Selections from PAROLES, in English and French, English translations and Introduction by Lawrence Ferlinghetti (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1965), pp. 124-127. The English translation follows:

#### Picasso's Promenade

On a very round plate of real porcelain  
 an apple poses  
 face to face with it  
 a painter of reality  
 vainly tries to paint  
 the apple as it is  
 but

the apple won't allow it  
 the apple  
 it has its word to say about it  
 and several tricks in its bag of apples  
 the apple  
 and there it is turning  
 on its real plate  
 artfully on itself  
 blandly without budging  
 and like a Duc de Guise who disguises himself as  
     a gas duct  
 because they want to draw his portrait against his will  
 the apple disguises itself as a beautiful fruit in  
     disguise  
 and it's then  
 that the painter of reality  
 begins to realize  
 that all the appearances of the apple are against him  
 and  
 like the unfortunate pauper  
 like the poor pauper who finds himself suddenly at the  
     mercy of no matter what benevolent and charitable  
     and redoubtable association of benevolence charity  
     and redoubtability  
 the unfortunate painter of reality  
 then suddenly finds himself the sad prey  
 of a numberless crowd of associations of ideas  
 And the apple turning evokes the apple tree  
 the earthly Paradise and Eve and then Adam  
 a watering-can a trellis Parmentier a stairway  
 Canadian Hesperidian Norman apples Reinette apples and  
     Appian apples  
 the serpent of the Tennis Court and the Oath of Apple  
     Juice  
 and original sin  
 and the origins of art  
 and Switzerland with William Tell  
 and even Isaac Newton  
 several times prizewinner at the Exhibition of Universal  
     Gravitation  
 and the dazed painter loses sight of his model  
 and falls asleep  
 It's just then that Picasso  
 who's going by there as he goes by everywhere  
 every day as if at home  
 sees the apple and the plate and the painter fallen  
     asleep  
 What an idea to paint an apple  
 says Picasso

and Picasso eats the apple  
 and the apple tells him Thanks  
 and Picasso breaks the plate  
 and goes off smiling  
 and the painter drawn from his dreams  
 like a tooth  
 finds himself all alone again before his unfinished  
 canvas  
 with right in the midst of his shattered china  
 the terrifying pips of reality.

<sup>5</sup>"Human Universe," Selected Writings, ed. and with an Introduction by Robert Creeley (New York, 1966), p. 61.

<sup>6</sup>(Chicago, 1961), p. 386.

<sup>7</sup>Booth, p. 398.

<sup>8</sup>Booth, p. 397.

<sup>9</sup>The Age of Happy Problems (New York, 1962), p. 69.

<sup>10</sup>quoted in the Georgia Straight, June 24-July 1, 1970, p. 21.

<sup>11</sup>translated by Constance Garnett (New York, 1962), p. 467. Further references are given within the text by page number.

<sup>12</sup>Kermode, p. 105.

<sup>13</sup>"The Praises," In Cold Hell In Thicket (San Francisco, 1967), p. 33.

<sup>14</sup>quoted in Kermode, p. 98.

<sup>15</sup>Kermode, p. 107.

<sup>16</sup>Kermode, p. 105.

<sup>17</sup>Kermode, p. 140.

<sup>18</sup>in Origin II, Summer, 1951, p. 77.

<sup>19</sup>quoted in C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards, The Meaning of Meaning (New York, 1959), pp. 321-322.

<sup>20</sup>quoted in Kermode, pp. 140-141.

<sup>21</sup>Cassirer, p. 188.

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