THE CHARACTER

OF

CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH FICTION

VOLUME I

by

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P R E F A C E

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Chapter 1:

Introduction

The word "contemporary" is used in the title of this study. This word, like "modern", has acquired a qualitative sense which will be discussed in Chapter 2, but it is to the chronological sense that the title refers. Contemporary writers are those "of the same historical period": in this study the period from 1950 to 1969.

Nineteen fifty provides a convenient starting point for the study of post-war writing, for the Second World War produced few new writers of interest, and the five years following it were, on the whole, unexciting from a literary point of view. It was not until the 1950s that a new generation of novelists began to make its mark on the literary scene. It is with these writers that this study is chiefly concerned, for they reflect the character of the period more accurately than do the older writers.

It would, however, give a false picture of the contemporary scene if the post-war writings of authors who were already established during the 1930s and 1940s were to be ignored. Of these writers, a number had already produced their most important work by 1950, so can be considered as pre-war writers, and not as contemporaries. Norman Douglas, E.M. Forster, C. Day Lewis, Eric Linklater, Richard Llewellyn, Charles Morgan, George Orwell, Dorothy Sayers, Julia Strachey, Helen Waddell and Anthonia White have published little - in some case nothing - since 1949, so have been excluded from this study.

There are some writers who have continued to publish regularly, but their influence on the contemporary scene has been negligible. This group includes A.J. Cronin, C.S. Forester, Stella Gibbons, David Garnett, Naomi Jacob, Rosamund Lehmann, Sheila Kaye-Smith, Rose Macaulay, Ngaio Marsh, R.H. Mottram, Victoria Sackville-West, G.B. Stern, L.A.G. Strong, Frank Swinnerton, Angela Thirkell, Sylvia Townsend-Warner, Rebecca West and P.G. Wodehouse. They are all outside the main stream of contemporary fiction, and their novels are of interest chiefly for the contrast they make with the novels of younger writers.

Of the remaining writers who were established before the war, a number are still sufficiently important and influential to be included in a survey of post-war fiction. Some have produced their major novels since 1949 so must properly be included: Lawrence Durrell, Anthony Powell and C.P. Snow are the chief of these. Richard Hughes, after a long silence, published an important novel, and interest in Christopher Isherwood and Jean Rhys was revived when they too published new novels after a long silence.

A few writers have continued to explore the themes and materials which occupied them before the war and have been seemingly little affected by the changes in the post-war world: Henry Green, L.P. Hartley, Philip Toynbee, Elizabeth Bowen, and the historical novelists Robert Graves, Margaret Kennedy and Henry Treece are the best-known writers of this group. Where relevant, their works will be referred to, but no attempt is made to discuss them in detail.

The last group of novelists who were established before the war but are still publishing, are primarily social novelists. Their books reflect the changing social scene, and they are more "contemporary" than most of the novelists listed previously. Nigel Balchin, John Brophy, Joyce Cary, Norman Collins, Monica Dickens, Pamela Frankau, Graham Greene, James Hanley, Storm Jameson, Pamela Hansford Johnson, Compton Mackenzie, Somerset Maugham, Nancy Mitford, Nicholas Monsarrat, J.B. Priestley, Margery Sharp, Nevil Shute, Alec Waugh, Evelyn Waugh and Henry Williamson belong to this group. A number are referred to in this study, but they represent the older generation of writers, and the emphasis has therefore not been placed on their work, but on the work of younger novelists. The true "contemporaries" of the thesis title are the writers who published their first books after 1949.

Although the title refers to novels written in English by British-born novelists, some consideration has been given to writers in English, particularly Commonwealth writers, who have contributed to the character of contemporary English fiction. Reference is made, too, to dramatists and poets , and to foreign novelists, where their work throws a light on contemporary English fiction.

The economics of the fiction trade have imposed certain limitations on the choice of novels for this study. Ian Watt [1] estimated that the annual production of works of fiction was about seven in the years between 1700 and 1740. By 1800 the figure had risen to forty a year. In 1968,

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1 The Rise of the Novel, 1957.

there were 31,420 books published in Britain, of which 2,094 were novels.[1] A. Burgess[2] sums up the present position with the remark that ". . . the twenty years since the Second World War - has produced more novels than any corresponding period in history . . . ." It would obviously be a sisyphean task to attempt to read, let alone discuss, this mountain of novels.

The task has been made easier by the activities of the South African Board of Censors. Since the Board was instituted in November 1963, it has banned more than 11,000 books - over two a day. A high proportion of these are works of fiction, but they cannot all be dignified with the name of "novel". The Board bans roughly two kinds of books: those that offend the national susceptibilities, and those it considers to be pornographic. There is therefore a regrettable lacuna in this survey of contemporary English fiction.

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1 M. Bradbury, What is a Novel?, 1969.
2 The Novel Now, 1967.

Chapter 2:

The Modern and the Contemporary

F.R. Karl[1] sums up the most characteristic quality of contemporary fiction with the observation that: "the contemporary novel is no longer modern". "Contemporary" is here used in the chronological sense, but "modern" is used in the sense defined by Stephen Spender[2] to characterise a certain quality of writing. To avoid confusion between the chronological and qualitative uses of the words, the latter will be written with an initial capital letter, even where quotations are cited where the writer does not use this convention.

Stephen Spender divides the writers of the first half of the twentieth century into two groups: the Moderns and the Contemporaries.

He lists the leading Moderns as Joyce, Eliot, Pound, Yeats, Lawrence and Virginia Woolf.

> The Modern . . . thinks of his own existence and way of feeling and thinking as being acted upon by the specifically modern world, which seems to him unprecedented. He is obsessed by the idea of living in a modern situation which is unlike any past one. . . . He feels cut off from the past as a result of his being so much the product of modern circumstances. At the same time he looks back and feels that as a writer he is in the line of the past and in some, perhaps mysterious, sense that he belongs to a past tradition. Yet, being entirely conditioned by the present, he cannot simply adopt the form and manners of past writers in order to connect himself with the past. He has, as it were, to create his own soul-relating experiences which are entirely of the present to values which are of the past.

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1 F.R. Karl, <u>A Reader's Guide to the Contemporary English Novel</u>, 1963.

2 S. Spender, 'The Obsessive Situation', <u>List</u>., 11.10.62, 18.10.62, 25.10.62.

Spender regards Shaw, Bennett, Wells, C.P. Snow and, "in their different ways", Kingsley Amis and John Osborne as Contemporaries.

> They attack the modern world but they do so by standards which are of it. . . . Essentially, Contemporaries believe in progress. . . . What they write is rationalist, sociological, political, and responsible. . . . The Contemporary is involved in conflicts, but fundamentally he accepts the forces and the values of today which are fighting one another, with the same weapons of power, ideology, and utilitarian philosophy and progress for different goals.

Stephen Spender quotes an illuminating remark made by H.G. Wells on the writer: "In his heart he classes himself not with artists but with the teachers and prophets." The Moderns would have disagreed. The basic difference between the two movements lies here, in their respective views of the nature of the writer's relationship with society and his function in society. The Contemporaries engage in a direct, prosaic way with their social and political circumstances and, if they protest against these circumstances, do so with some degree of revolutionary optimism in the possibility of amelioration, an amelioration that literature can help to bring about. The Moderns distrust or detest their circumstances, to the extent of abandoning the hope of acting on them in a practical way. Instead, such writers seek a radical transformation of conventional forms of communication, through which to express poetically an inner crisis of sensibility, a crisis which often manifests itself in the search for a tradition which has been lost or broken.

Stephen Spender has been quoted at some length, for the distinctions he makes have been followed by most critics writing on the twentieth century novel. It is unfortunate that the words "contemporary" and "modern" should now have

both a qualitative or critical meaning, and a chronological or everyday one. Alternative labels have been suggested - such as "imagists" or "prose-realists", but they have not been generally adopted, although as D. Lodge [1] points out: "The analysis of language is in fact the most precise way of indicating the difference between Modern and Contemporary writing . . .". "Experimental" and "traditional" are sometimes used[2] but the objection to these is that they suggest qualities of the novel which show the effect but not the cause, the means rather than the ends, of the differences in the two movements. It is true that the novel of the Modern movement is characteristically experimental, and the novel of the Contemporary is characteristically traditional, but these are surface differences. They arise out of two different responses to the same situation: to the predicament in which twentieth century society finds itself. Both groups are acted on and conditioned by their worlds, but their reactions are sharply different.

Stephen Spender's distinction between the Moderns and the Contemporaries has been generally accepted, but the chronology of the two movements is disputed. Bernard Bergonzi[3] puts forward a popular view that Ulysses "indicated exhaustive finality and the end of a line of development". Frank Kermode[4] says "the 'Nineties were certainly precursors, but anybody who thinks about what Modernism now means will rightly look more closely at the period between 1907 and, say, 1925". At the other extreme

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1 D. Lodge, Language of Fiction, 1966.
2 R. Rabinovitz, The Reaction against Experiment in the English Novel, 1950-1960, 1967.
3. B. Bergonzi, 'The Novel no longer Novel', List., 19.9.63.
4. F. Kermode, Continuities, 1968.

Cyril Connolly[1] places the limits between 1880 and 1950, but his use of the word "modern" is unusually wide. Perhaps the most acceptable is the view that between about 1922, the year in which Ulysses was published, and 1942, the Modern movement was at its height.

Although critics differ as to its beginnings, they all agree that the Modern movement in English literature has not survived the war as a mainstream literature. The movement lost energy after Virginia Woolf and James Joyce and began to produce what J. Gindin[2] calls "well-executed trivia". The 1930's and 1940's were a time of transition, with the Contemporary novel rapidly gaining ground over the Modern novel. As Margaret Kennedy [3] points out, it was not the fault of the original Moderns that their followers created a vogue for the "novel of sensibility" as it came to be called: "Amongst novelists the good news spread that they need no longer provide plot, comedy, tragedy, love interest nor catastrophe in order to get top marks."

J. Gindin[4] considers Elizabeth Bowen and William Sansom to be among the last of the true Moderns. G.S. Fraser[5] suggests that Rosamund Lehmann and Elizabeth Bowen mark the return to traditionalism and he mentions four novelists who were transitional: Graham Greene, who wrote symbolic melodramas and literary thrillers, Christopher Isherwood who developed the documentary novel "in which the writer makes use of his own personal experience and observation of various social positions to underline the lesson of the world's insecurity and the need for some positive and

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1 C. Connolly, The Modern Movement, 1966.
2. J. Gindin, Postwar British Fiction, 1963.
3. M. Kennedy, The Outlaws on Parnassus, 1958.
4. op. cit.
5. G.S. Fraser, The Modern Writer and his World, 1953.

constructive political faith", Rex Warner who wrote social allegories, Evelyn Waugh and Anthony Powell who wrote "farcical comedy with bitter undertones". George Orwell, although not mentioned in this context by Fraser, would of course be linked with Christopher Isherwood, but Orwell is no longer transitional. He is one of the first of the new Contemporaries.

T.R. Fyvel[1] explains the resurgence of the Contemporaries in social terms:

> Just as the writers of the 'twenties tried to hold society at arm's length, so those of the 'thirties searched, some of them desperately indeed, for ways of becoming integrated in their society - only it was still too early . . . . For the younger English intellectuals were not only being drawn towards <u>politics</u> but, by contrast with the 'twenties, back into active contact with <u>society as a whole</u>. This happened via Left-wing commitment, or through journalism, or often through both . . . .

By the end of the Second World War there were few Moderns left, and the Contemporaries were forming the mainstream.

Henry James and H.G. Wells, D.H. Lawrence and John Galsworthy, Virginia Woolf and Arnold Bennett demonstrated that neither movement was tolerant of the other, and both sides attracted partisans whose violence widened the rift. F.R. Leavis and Wyndham Lewis attacked Virginia Woolf and James Joyce, but it is their successors and imitators who have been the target of post-war writers and critics such as C.P. Snow, Pamela Hansford Johnson, William Cooper and John Wain. C.P. Snow, who came into prominence as a critic in 1949, can be regarded as the leader of the group.

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1 T.R. Fyvel, <u>Intellectuals Today</u>, 1968.

In The New York Times Book Review,[1] C.P. Snow gave some reasons for his dislike of the Modern novel. Snow, like Leavis, sees the duty of the novelist as being not only to face the problems of our technological age, but also to interpret them and to inform his readers. The Moderns ignored their moral and social duty: they were not teachers or prophets. P. West[2] says of Snow and Leavis that they are "inclined to let the novel be dull if only it will be comprehensible and moral". D. H. Lawrence[3] warned of the dangers of imposing morality on the novel: "If you try to nail anything down, in the novel, either it kills the novel, or the novel gets up and walks away with the nail. . . . When the novelist puts his thumb into the scale, to pull down the balance to his own predilection, that is immorality." Extreme views on the nature and purpose of the novel are too limiting. The truth lies somewhere in between the novel as poetry and the novel as a morality, for the novel loses its richness and variety, its "novelty" where its boundaries are too strictly defined.

Linked with the charge that the Moderns neglected their moral duty is the charge that the Moderns alienated the reading public. The Moderns retreated into aesthetics, forming an exclusive literary clique which cared nothing for popularity. The exclusiveness of the Moderns seems to irritate Snow as much as their lack of civic conscience and he suggests, *inter alia*, that this is as indefensible for novelists as it is for scientists. In an article in 1958[4] Snow declared: "I do not believe that, within the

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1 *NYTBR*, 30.1.1955.
2 P. West, *The Modern Novel*, 1965.
3. Quoted by J. Colmer in *Approaches to the Novel*, 1966.
4. *TLS*, 15.8.58.

foreseeable future, the novel in particular, or literature in general, need become alienated from the intellectual life of the time". The Moderns can justifiably be accused by Snow of arrogance towards would-be readers outside their circle, and of having caused a sharp decline in serious novel reading and widening the split between "serious" and "popular" writing. However, Margaret Kennedy[1] points out that this was not necessarily a retrogressive step for they:

> . . . broke up the enormous novel-reading public, the public accumulated by the Victorians, into smaller and more manageable groups. The tastes of readers have become specialized. There is now a large public for such writers as Elizabeth Bowen and Eudora Welty, who would not, fifty years ago, have had a platform from which to speak.

The danger in following Snow too closely is that the novelist can underestimate the intelligence of his readers - and the resulting books satisfy neither dons nor dustmen. Novelists are sometimes praised for their "serious intentions" rather than being appraised for their actual achievements.

C.P. Snow attacks the Moderns for their use of the technique of stream of consciousness. As P. West[2] points out: "The attempt to articulate the stream of consciousness was nothing new . . . . What was new was the attempt, made by Virginia Woolf, Proust and Joyce, to base entire novels on it". C.P. Snow criticises the method on the grounds that it is unrealistic and, unlike Angus Wilson[3] does not seem to recognise that its aims are the same as his own. The realistic or naturalistic novel admired by Snow shows the outer man: the stream of consciousness shows the inner man, and both are manifestations of the search for wider

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1 M. Kennedy, <u>The Outlaws on Parnassus</u>, 1958.
2 P. West, <u>The Modern Novel</u>, 1965.
3 'The Dilemma of the Contemporary Novelist', <u>Approaches to the Novel</u>, ed. J. Colmer, 1966.

realism, a search which, according to Ian Watt[1], has been characteristic of the novel from its beginnings. Taken to extremes, both methods are self-defeating: there is little to choose between a catalogue of the furnishings of a room and a catalogue of the furnishings of the mind. P. West[2] quotes from Albert Camus's Resistance, Rebellion and Death to illustrate the logical conclusion of the prose realist's theories:

> What is there more real, for instance, in our universe than a man's life, and how can we hope to preserve it better than in a realistic film? But under what conditions is such a film possible? Under purely imaginary conditions. We should have to presuppose, in fact, an ideal camera focused on the man day and night and constantly registering his every move. The very projection of such a film would last a life-time and could be seen only by an audience of people willing to waste their lives in watching someone else's life in great detail.

P. West comments on this: "If art could be made indistinguishable from life, then art would not be worth creating anyway". In Snow's eyes the Moderns, in their use of the stream of consciousness, are again illustrating their failure to do their duty to their public. Snow[3] sees the "novel of sensibility", as he calls it, as an "aesthetic cul de sac", for "the novel only breathes freely when it has its roots in society". Snow's attacks on the excesses of the followers of the Moderns was necessary, but the alternative he proposes is no less a cul de sac.

C.P. Snow has been supported in his attacks on the excesses of the Moderns by his wife, Pamela Hansford Johnson. In 1949 Miss Johnson was complaining[4] that ordinary readers were baffled by Modern novels to such an extent that they

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1 I. Watt, The Rise of the Novel, 1963.
2 P. West, The Modern Novel, 1965.
3 NYTBR, 30.1.1955.
4 List., 11.8.1949.

had stopped reading novels altogether. She urged a return to the novel which told a story, which was intelligible: "Writing is not a private game to be played at a private party". In a later essay[1] she admitted the value of the work done by Woolf and Joyce ("After them, it was impossible for anyone to write the dead physical descriptions of Jane Austen, the dead dialogues of Scott . . .") but she complained that "What shrivelled away in their work was any contact between man and society". In a letter[2] she wrote that the "majority of young 'serious' novelists caught from Woolf and Joyce the tones of their respective visual and aural sensibilities, and nothing else: and because they tended to throw away all interest in society as a whole, in character, narrative, tension, their work became largely sterile and left no important succession".

William Cooper,[3] in an essay on the experimental novel, suggests that the novelists of the French avant-garde are returning to the experimentation of the 'thirties. He sees the experimental novel as a retreat from writing about Man-in-Society to Man-Alone and deplores the consequent loss of character in the novel. Of A. Robbe-Grillet's _The Voyeur_ (1959) he writes that the author "concentrates on visual impressions, on impressions of the eye alone, in fact on impressions of an eye so alone that you feel that there's no head at the back of it". The _nouveau roman_ writers have been attacked rather than applauded by the English, in spite of the missionary work done by Calder and Boyars. Their work is seen as retrogressive

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1 Included in _The Baldwin Age_, ed. J. Raymond, 1950.
2 _List._, 1.11.62.
3 Included in _International Literary Annual_, ed. J. Wain, 1959.

rather than progressive and the violence of the Englishman's dislike of the French experiments is a reminder that the Moderns were strongly suspected of introducing foreign importations, not indigenous growths. Raymond Williams[1] says that "the 1950's could fairly be characterized . . . as a period of return to older forms, and to specifically English forms" (my italics). The cosmopolitanism of the Moderns was suspect, and was distrusted by the proletarian writers of the 'fifties who saw them as members of the decadent haute bourgeoisie. Although Laurence Sterne can be fairly regarded as the first of the Moderns, the more commonly held view is that the Moderns learnt their tricks from foreigners.

John Wain[2] is more moderate than Cooper but he sees Joyce's Ulysses as the culmination of the Modern movement and "after this, the only direction left was to go down". The experimental novels since Ulysses have been distinguished only by "faddishness and an irritable search for new gimmicks", although he excepts Flann O'Brien's At-Swim-Two-Birds from this general condemnation. His quarrel is with the imitators rather than the originators of the Modern movement.

Angus Wilson allows that experiment has its place in the novel and criticises Leavis and Snow for their insistence on morals and health of novels, but he states his own position clearly [3] when he writes: "my own novels are essentially traditional in form and my preoccupation is strongly . . . a social and moral one." Wilson, then, is guided by personal taste rather than by artificial dicta.

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1 Audience 8:76, 1961
2 'The Conflict of Forms', Essays on Literature and Ideas, 1963
3 NYTBR, 2.7.1961

The excesses of the Modern novel were such that some restoration of the balance was needed, but Snow and some of his followers have over-redressed the balance. They have produced inadequate and insufficient reasons for their total rejection of the experiments of the Moderns. The Moderns' investigation of the stream of consciousness led them to question the need for and the place of some of the elements of the novel which had always been regarded as essential - such as plot, story, theme and character. Their investigations of the boundaries between the novel and poetry and of the nature of time, are perhaps amongst their most valuable gifts to later novelists and it is a serious error to state that there can be no place for them in the contemporary novel.

The attempt by some of the Moderns - such as Gertrude Stein - to eliminate plot and story from the novel was made for two reasons. It was seen as an artificial device, invented and therefore untrue. A. Robbe-Grillet[1] holds the same view: "the enlightened reader" discovers this and "fears he has been led into a trap". 'Theme' is equally inimical to the novel as Art. The rejection of story and plot in the novel was a necessary corrective to the contrived and complicated plots offered by such older writers as Dickens who showed little respect for causal probability. The second objection to the novel telling a story is insulting in its implications: the assumption that it was only sheer curiosity about what happened next that kept the reader going right through to the last page. People were therefore reading a novel for the wrong reasons. Contemporary

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1 Quoted by W. Cooper, International Literary Annual, ed. J. Wain, 1959.

writers such as Graham Greene have recognised that a good story can certainly be used to sweeten the pill, but there can be few readers in search of story alone who would not prefer an Agatha Christie to a Graham Greene. E.M. Forster[1] reluctantly concludes that a novel must tell a story, and in this he is supported by most post-war novelists.

As a result of this debate the melodramatic and improbable plot has been largely abandoned to the popular dustbin, but one unexpected result is that some of the post-war writers who have asserted most firmly that the novel must tell a story, have shown a curious ineptitude in the handling of plot in their own novels. Pamela Hansford Johnson shows little respect for the demands of plot, being seemingly content merely to provide one, and it is more often a feeble thread of story than a carefully constructed and articulated plot. She manipulates the story to provide situations which give an opportunity for moral lessons; there is no attempt to develop a plot in which such situations naturally arise. C.P. Snow's plots derive from the popular detective story, and William Cooper offers the slimmest of plots. In contrast to their scarcely concealed disdain for good plotting are the novels of popular writers where plot is everything. The resurrection of the picaresque novel has, of course, been a boon to novelists who wish to avoid the difficulties of good plot construction.

One of the effects of the stream of consciousness technique was to alter radically the concept of character in the novel. P. West[2] suggests that "the debate about the stream had to consider such anomalies as . . . the character who is no

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1 E.M. Forster, Aspects of the Novel, 1927.
2 P. West, The Modern Novel, 1965.

more than a succession of instants, . . . the outside world as a reflection of the perceiving mind, and the self-regarding identities which lose themselves in introspection . . ." Martin Price[1] wrote of the symbolist novel that the "characters tend to dissolve into the elaborate verbal structure of the work, becoming nodes, as it were, of images or motifs; or they dissolve into aspects of one central character, dialectical forces within one situation or mind." The novel of manners, which gave us social man, was a characteristically English form but the stream of consciousness began, in P. West's words,[2] "to satisfy a second curiosity and, indeed, to create a new type of hero: self-absorbed and rather ineffectual." The stream of consciousness became the "stock in trade of the anti-hero". Angus Wilson[3] suggests that Catholic novelists such as Graham Greene were instrumental in restoring character to the novel for they "found the dissolution of personality that is involved in the stream of consciousness method something that did not respond to what they wanted to say about the relation between man's soul and God."

The Contemporaries have, in theory, restored character to a central position in the novel, but they have often lacked the necessary equipment for building memorable characters. Mary McCarthy[4] points out that there have been few such characters in fiction since Joyce's Bloom, and that only two recent ones have "stuck": Joyce Cary's Gulley Jimson and Kingsley Amis's Jim Dixon.

Memorable characters are either eccentrics (an English speciality) or characters who are so fully developed that

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1 'The Other Self', Imagined Worlds, ed. M. Mack and I. Gregor, 1968.
2 P. West, The Modern Novel, 1965.
3 'The Dilemma of the Contemporary Novelist', Approaches to the Novel, ed. J. Colmer, 1966.
4 'Characters in Fiction', On the Contrary, 1961.

they come vividly to life in the mind of the reader. Dickens produced some of the greatest eccentrics in English literature and his methods have been emulated by later writers and by popular novelists who saw the value of eccentricity in fixing a character in the mind of the reader. Olivia Manning's Prince Yakimov[1] and Joseph Kell's Mr Enderby[2], as well as some of Angus Wilson's minor characters, continue the tradition.

The second type of memorable character cannot be presented only from the outside (as the eccentric can), for this is only half-knowledge. Nor is he usually successful if he is presented only from the inside, as Virginia Woolf unwittingly demonstrated with Mrs Dalloway. C.P. Snow's Strangers and Brothers sequence is built around the character of Lewis Eliot, but he is constructed from the outside and only comes briefly to life in the earlier more autobiographical novels. Only where there is a balance between the inner and outer man do memorable characters emerge.

The Moderns' investigation of the boundaries between the novel and poetry led them to be called "imagists" by Stephen Spender[3], for their writing belonged to the world of poetry more clearly than it belonged to the novel. Angus Wilson[4] ruefully says of this "and we do like in England to be sure that our categories are divided". Lionel Stevenson[5] writes: "In the past century a few competent writers have produced what they described as 'novels in verse' . . . . But, in the long run,

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1 Olivia Manning, The Balkan Trilogy, completed in 1965.
2 Joseph Kell, Inside Mr Enderby, 1963.
3 S. Spender, 'The Obsessive Situation', List., 18.10.1962.
5 L. Stevenson, The English Novel, 1960.
4 'The Dilemma of the Contemporary Novelist', Approaches to the Novel, ed. J. Colmer, 1966.

the assumption that a novel is an imitation of experience is incompatible with the formalities of phrase and patterning that are inherent in verse." Philip Toynbee in his Pantaloon trilogy[1] has unsuccessfully attempted the verse-novel and Eric Linklater in Roll of Honour (1961) uses free verse for his novel of reminiscence. However unsuccessful such experiments may be, it is important that they should be made. No experimentation can be equally disastrous and writers like C.P. Snow and Pamela Hansford Johnson who aim only for "intelligible prose" achieve what can only be termed a "non-style". C.P. Snow in particular is guilty of writing what F.R. Karl[2] calls "businessman's prose". Karl points out that although such writers gain in directness, they "lose in paradox, irony, density and significance of theme." It is doubtful whether Snow even gains in directness, for this is not a quality usually found in businessman's prose. Snow eschews linguistic experiments, but by doing so he is not only dismissing the verbal fireworks of a Joyce, he is also ignoring the examples of writers who have achieved a simple direct style. George Orwell, Christopher Isherwood, V.S. Pritchett and Richard Hughes write with a deceptive simplicity which avoids cliches and monotony alike. Fortunately Snow has few followers in this, for most contemporary novelists are aware that a non-style is likely to produce a non-novel.

Perhaps one of the most valuable bequests by the Moderns to their successors has been their exploration into the meaning of time in the novel. They made time the servant of the novelist, not his master. As in the drama, the novel broke

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1 Begun in 1961 with Pantaloon.
2 F.R. Karl, A Reader's Guide to the Contemporary English Novel, 1963.

away from the artificial Unity of Time which had been imposed on it. Laurence Sterne was perhaps the first novelist to consciously ignore the convention of strict chronology, and the Moderns stretched or shrank time at will. E.M. Forster[1] warned that: "The time-sequence cannot be destroyed without carrying in its ruin all that should have taken its place; the novel that would express values only becomes unintelligible and therefore valueless." Gertrude Stein and later B.S. Johnson have tried to destroy the time sequence, but most novelists accept Forster's restriction. They have, however, benefited from the experiments, and it is relatively rare to find a novelist today who exactly follows a chronological time sequence. The technique of flahback in particular, which has been enthusiastically adopted by the cinema, has been found invaluable by even popular writers as a method of introducing suspense and mystery, as well as varying and increasing the pace of the tale.

The vociferous and well-publicised attacks on the Moderns and their followers by writers of the 'fifties have misled many critics to echo Karl's[2] words: "The contemporary novel is no longer Modern". Those who find this thought depressing have added that it is also moribund. Of these critics Margaret Kennedy[3] has unkindly - and justly - remarked: "As soon as a number of inexcusably bad novels of sensibility had been written, the opposition opened fire. The dogma collapsed so suddenly that those who had put their shirts on it had no recourse save to declare that the whole art of the novel must be, in such a case, defunct."

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1 E.M. Forster, Aspects of the Novel, 1927.
2 F.R. Karl, A Reader's Guide to the Contemporary English Novel, 1963.
3 M. Kennedy, The Outlaws on Parnassus, 1958.

Some admirers of Joyce declared that he had achieved everything possible in the novel, leaving nothing more to say - a patently silly viewpoint, for in the novel as in music there are always fresh tunes and combinations of notes to play.

Karl's statement has been accepted almost without question by critics whose view of the novel takes no account of its organic nature. Nothing in fiction is lost or destroyed: it can at most be obscured. During the 'fiftes the experiments of the Moderns were obscured by the Contemporaries, but I would suggest that this phase has now passed. English novelists have always proved intransigent to critics who wish to divide them neatly into Schools - indeed this intransigence has been the source of much of the novel's vitality (French novelists have been less fortunate). C.P. Snow's strictures have been ignored by many novelists and it is hoped to show in the next chapter that there are many post-war novelists who have assimilated and adopted some of the discoveries made by the Moderns. P. West[1] wrote: "The sensible course is surely to throw away nothing useful while incorporating the fruits, if any, of all experiments. If we do that, then the experimental novel itself will not be criticised for inept reasons." S. Spender[2] wrote: " . . . and yet I still think that the Modern movement laid down a challenge to comprehend imaginatively the modern experience as a whole. I think that sooner or later this will have to be taken up again." In the next chapter it is suggested that the post-war novelists, particularly those of the 1960's, are again taking cognisance of the work of the Moderns.

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1 P. West, The Modern Novel, 1965.
2. 'Experience as a Whole', List., 25.10.1962.

Chapter 3 Part A:

The Experimental Novelists

The "purest" group, the only one which could be called neo-Modern, is the Experimental. Like the original Moderns they question the whole concept of the traditional novel and their experiments are not confined to any one aspect of the novel. Where possible, similar writers have been grouped together. In the first group are the most consciously experimental writers: Christine Brooke-Rose, Rayner Heppenstall, B.S. Johnson, Maggie Ross, John Berger, Philip Toynbee, Dennis Guerrier and Joan Richards, Eric Thacker and Anthony Earnshaw, John Fowles, Colin Wilson and Maureen Duffy. Two writers who are influenced by Ivy Compton-Burnett; Muriel Spark and William Trevor, are included at the end.

CHRISTINE BROOKE-ROSE. The Middleman (1961), a satire on Public Relations Officers, psychiatrists, journalists, television producers and their like, marks the end of a stage in her development as a novelist. M. Ratcliffe [1] suggests that since 1961 she is "in practice striving to adapt the manner of the French anti-novel to the manners of the English." Ratcliffe quotes an illuminating remark of hers: "Novel readers, unlike readers of poetry, drift through a novel. They read passively. I like to make my readers read actively." Like the nouveau roman writers themselves, she is a more persuasive theorist than practitioner, for a criticism that Virginia Woolf [2] levelled at the realists could, ironically, be as easily levelled at Miss Brooke-Rose: "They write of unimportant things . . .

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1 The Novel Today, 1968.
2 Common Reader, 1919.

they spend immense skill and immense industry making the trivial and the transitory appear the true and enduring."

Between (1968) is an example of Christine Brooke-Rose's mature style. It is a factual treatment of the data of the consciousness of a middle-aged lady interpreter. Within the first few pages the unreality of the polyglot's world is established by her use of "free-running association, superb multi-lingual forgings, pompous reported talk, word-play".[1] This is an example of her writing:

[2] The cloud has cleared. Way down below the window-seat through the rectangular window with the rounded corners the sea looks solid earth or clay you could cut through with a blunt knife pick up in handfuls mould perhaps into a moon marine mother of death birth menstruation or fear of something else not ordered. Horoskop: Sie haben Appetit auf Neues. Passen Sie zur Zeit so gut es geht dem Partner an.
In fact the bathroom door in pinewood flanks the pine cupboard to the right and stands ajar, letting in too much light from a high glazed window in the wall pink-tiled all the way up and the curved edge of the black bidet. According to legislation into effect you may not bring the antiquity out of the country.

She continues in this vein, constantly varying, reshaping and shuffling material to which few new additions are made. There seems to be no advantage in having written this in novel rather than short story form, for beyond a certain point there is nothing more to be gained and the word-play becomes self-indulgent. A reviewer[3] wrote of her technique: "All's flux, a blend of memory, desire, and what you happen to be reading on the cornflakes packet." Another reviewer lavished praise on it - the conflict between the Moderns and Contemporaries is still lively. The "active participation" of the reader for which Miss Brooke-Rose aims is not achieved; rather the reverse happens. The lines have a soporific, repetitive,soothing effect - very different from what she intended.

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1 TLS 31.10.1968
2 Ob. R., 27.10.1968.
3 TLS 31.10.1968.

RAYNER HEPPENSTALL's first novel, The Blaze of Noon, was published in 1939 and is, according to M. Ratcliffe [1], regarded by some European critics as the first book of the nouveau roman. His next two novels, The Connecting Door and The Woodshed (which both appeared in 1962) place him firmly in the French school. In 1969 he published a critical guide to the writings of Raymond Roussel and a translation of his Impressions of Africa. He has also written a critical study of the nouveau roman writers in The Fourfold Tradition. In this he explains why he has found his spiritual home in France:

> I should have liked to write, from day to day, simply about the moment and its concerns and any past matters which pressed on the memory, the prose being merely careful, transparent, exact, easy on eye and ear, varied only by the variety of the mind's approach to what it scrupulously dealt with, utterly shameless, wholly personal. That it was quite impossible is due to the rigid formality of British literary customs.

Heppenstall is, however, more tolerant and less doctrinaire than writers like Alain Robbe-Grillet and Nathalie Sarraute. "I would be the last person to prescribe any rules, regulations or limitations for what the novel ought to be . . . I speak only of what I feel." [2]

He has thought much and written well about the nature of memory, and Sylvere Monod [3] writes: "Much of his originality as a novelist depends on his ability to manipulate the events of his narrator's life out of their chronological arrangement while gradually and efficiently suggesting to the reader the order in which they actually happened." The Connecting Door is told in the present tense when Harold returns to a place he has visited twice before at

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1 The Novel Today, 1968.
2 Quoted by M. Ratcliffe in The Novel Today, 1968.
3 'Rayner Heppenstall and the Nouveau Roman', Imagined Worlds, ed. M. Mack and I. Gregor, 1968.

critical periods of his life - and he comes up against his two former selves. Sylvere Monod [1] suggests that: "The theme of the book seems to be the impermanence of human personality". All the cells of the body are replaced several times during a man's life and the body of an old man contains none of the cells of his young body. Heppenstall seems to suggest that such changes occur also in the personality, for his three "persons" show little continuity. His treatment of the theme is not entirely successful. Like the nouveau roman writers whom he admires, his obsession with the close notation of life, and with texture, grind the novel to a halt.

B.S. JOHNSON, unlike Christine Brooke-Rose and Rayner Heppenstall, does not belong to the nouveau roman school. He is vigorous, original and very funny and has more in common with Joyce and Sterne than with the exhausted arridity of Robbe-Grillet. In each successive novel he has taken experimentation further, but not towards either obscurity or gimmickry.

In 1963 he published his first novel, Travelling People. It is a sign of his success among "ordinary" readers that both this and his next novel have been published in paperback. Travelling People was described by one reviewer very succinctly as an : "Inventive, sharply-observed and very funny account of the adventures of a hitch-hiking graduate in a ghoulish Stromboli country club in Wales." [2] Amongst other experimental devices, he employed black pages as a way of ending, in death, the interior monologue of one character.

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1 op.cit.
2 Ob.R., 1.10.1967.

Albert Angelo (1964) tells the story of a young man who is by vocation an architect, but by economic accident a teacher. His story is told in three sections as a kind of dramatic monologue, the author takes over in the fourth, and in the fifth the author finishes off the story. In the first three sections Johnson uses a number of experimental devices. One such is the division of the page down the centre to set out two different levels of consciousness, and another is to change the authorial viewpoint from 'I' to 'he' to give fresh perspectives. At one point Albert has the idea of letting the children write their opinions of him ("This I hope will work out their hatred of me without it actually needing to come to violence. How about that for an idea then?"). But underneath these lines the page has been cut - and the reader is given a preview of a later page which describes the death of Christopher Marlowe with the words [1]

> struggled to take back his knife, and inflicted on him a mortal wound above his right eye (the blade penetrating to a depth of two inches) from which he died instantly.

Through this device the reader is given a premonition of Albert's death, the link between violence in modern London and violence in Elizabethan London is made, and there is a suggestion that their lives had other parallels.

In the fourth section the author breaks in, explaining to the reader:

> what im really trying to write about is writing not all this stuff about architecture trying to say something about writing my writing im my hero though what a useless appellation my first character then im trying to say something about me through him albert an architect then whats the point in covering up covering up covering over pretending pretending i can say anything through him that is anything I would be interested in saying . . . .

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1 The Australian Customs authorities held the novel, refusing to release it until they had been shown the obscenities, which, they were convinced, had been cut out.

> Faced with the enormous detail, vitality, size of this complexity, of life, there is a great temptation for a writer to impose his own pattern, an arbitrary pattern which must falsify, cannot do anything other than falsify; or he invents, which is pure lying. Looking back and imposing a pattern to come to terms with the past must be avoided.

Albert Angelo, then, is both an attempt at autobiography and an exploration of the nature of the novel. Johnson points out some of the deliberate falsifications in the story as Albert told it, for example: "The one I feel sorry for is little Linda Taylor, made an epileptic, to suit my ends, the poor little figment." Of Albert's story he says: "Life is not like that, is just not like that" - and this is his problem; how to tell the truth. Later he writes: "Faced with the enormity of life, all I can do is to present a paradigm of truth or reality as I see it: and there's the difficulty." And later :

> . . . the novel must be a vehicle for conveying truth, and to this end every device and technique of the printer's art should be at the command of the writer . . . . A page is an area on which I may place any signs I consider to communicate most nearly what I have to convey: therefore I employ, within the pocket of my publisher and the patience of my printer, typographical techniques beyond the arbitrary and constricting limits of the conventional novel. To dismiss such techniques or to refuse to take them seriously, is crassly to miss the point.

By the end of this section he has destroyed the novel's illusion, but admits that even he can't leave his story of Albert where it is - so he adds a very brief fifth section. Albert is summarily and swiftly killed by five of the boys he taught, and the book ends with a child's essay on a funeral she attended. The last lines are:

> Just a shooking display of funeralization on behaf of the furm that was called in.

Albert Angelo has been discussed in some detail because the fourth section so clearly states Johnson's aims and interests in the novel. He says little that is entirely new, but it

is unusual to find it put across with such charm, sincerity and wit. Although Johnson laughs at the novel reader for believing everything and accepting fictions as truths, and for demanding a tidy pattern in the novel, he does not alienate the reader as do so many other experimental novelists. He takes the reader into his confidence: it is as if reader and writer are exploring the limits of truth-telling together.[1]

B.S. Johnson's later novels show his dissatisfaction with the physical limits of the bound book. The Unfortunates (1969) is in twenty-seven unbound sections which the reader is invited to read in any order, with only two sections marked "first" and "last" to provide a guide. The book is a collection of memories, coming as randomly as memories are supposed to, although reconstruction is not difficult for the mind creates its own order. A reviewer said of this: "This movement between random and order, past and present, is both the method and the theme of the novel." [2] The writer's memories are centred on a dead friend who had helped the young writer to organise and refine his first sprawling novels - like his other novels, this one is strongly autobiographical. The same reviewer said:

> One is made aware of the relativity of experience: that which comes before depends so much on what comes after. . . . With the paperchase device, and his fast-running, scrupulously honest prose, he succeeds marvellously in bringing the very process of experience and recall to the reader's attention. But this technical self-absorbtion - for both author and reader - is finally at the expense of the reality of other lives . . . I'm not sure yet if it is a failure of art, or life.

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1 This seems to be one of the reasons for the failure of most experimental novels with the general public. They are resentful and suspicious that the writer is trying to confuse them in a display of intellectual arrogance. Unless there seems a good reason for doing so the reader will not co-operate. Experiment may be exciting to the writer but it can be boring for the reader if it seems to offer nothing more than an ingenious brain-teaser.

2 Times Sat. R., 15.3.1969.

B.S. Johnson may not always succeed in his experiments, but he is a very good traditional writer and his novels are enjoyable on this level alone. Above all, his sense of enjoyment, his love of pure play, distinguishes him from his contemporaries and links him with writers like Joyce and Sterne. He is not of their calibre, but he has something of their spirit.

MAGGIE ROSS The narrator of Maggie Ross's first novel, The Gasteropod (1968) is an obsessive collector of molluscs, but it emerges that his real life's work is catching with his camera each ephemeral facet of his wife's existence, her every embrace with her lover, her every wrinkle over the years, in an immense archive of monumental truth and perversity. The narrator is waiting for her in a portrait gallery:

> Without distortion I can see the long dark run of the floorboards stretching away from under my heels, the length of the room to the arch at the end. The arch is the entrance to this gallery; that is where I must concentrate if I can. The reflected floorboards are darkly red but if I turn towards the arch they change to yellow with stains on them like the Dun Sentinel.

His descriptions of paintings and of the gallery are linked and interspersed with flashbacks (in no chronological order) which lead back to the present. A reviewer[1] called the form of the novel "brilliant. . . . The icily detached and superficially normal way in which the gasteropod tells his own story underlines how devious and eerie his obsession is." In her descriptions of objects, beautifully and meticulously done, Maggie Ross reminds one of Alain Robbe-Grillet (particularly in his The Voyeur, 1959), and she is clearly one of the small group of English writers who have been influenced by the nouveau romanciers. In this novel the

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1 TLS, 8.8.1968.

influence has been beneficial, for the _nouveau roman_ methods are particularly well suited to her subject.

JOHN BERGER. Angus Wilson described John Berger as ". . . that very rare thing, a Marxist, a member of the Communist Party, I believe, a declared dialectical materialist, who yet writes novels which are wholly experimental in form."[1] He is also an art critic, which is the source of his novel _A Painter of our Time_ (1958). The diary of a Hungarian refugee painter is published and annotated after his disappearance, by a friend. The diary is an attempt to record one art in terms of another. It is a powerful attempt, but when it is compared to Joyce Cary's _The Horse's Mouth_ its chief defect is obvious. Berger's hero does not know when to stop talking. Gulley was an artist with words as well as paint, but he never allowed his enthusiasm for a picture carry him on for pages at a stretch. Janos is an abstract artist, which makes it more difficult - Gulley's picturss could be imagined. The "story line" offers little relief, as it is mainly the thoughts of the artist on political problems.

In _Corker's Freedom_ (1964), Berger's third novel, the stream of consciousness is handled with subtlety and to some purpose. Its theme is self-communication. Berger assumes that our articulate thought speak only for part of our true selves - and that only the most formalised part. Only by giving voice to other parts can the whole personality be released. The author therefore puts words into the mouth and mind of a character who in reality would not know how to say them, but which express an undiscovered

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1 'The Dilemma of the Contemporary Novelist', _Approaches to the Novel_, ed. J. Colmer, 1966.

part of the personality. Corker, who runs a small employment agency, is a conventional little man. But the things he says and thinks, and the things he knows without thinking, together with a kind of floating fantasy-self, make up a man who is unaware of his essential self. While he is giving a travel talk to a small society, his office is burgled and his old life destroyed. But the talk turns into a lecture on freedom - the parts of Corker become the whole at this point. He has achieved a real freedom, and becomes a Hyde Park orator whose message is: "Unity in essentials. Liberty in inessentials. Charity in all."
The experimental methods Berger uses (streams of consciousness, dialogue written in play form, switches from the minds of one character to another, the all-seeing omnipotent author) are contrasted with and balanced by the firm actuality of the physical objects and by the liveliness and accuracy of his social observation.

PHILIP TOYNBEE In Tea With Mrs Goodman (1947) Philip Toynbee experiments with superimposed narratives, using eight characters. The Garden to the Sea (1953) explores the "fracturing of personality", with the fragmented parts of a single personality dramatised through separate narrators. J. McCormick said of this book that it communicates only "its own confusion to the intelligence"[1], and F.R. Karl deplored its allegorical patterning.[2]

In 1961 Philip Toynbee published the first four parts (seven are projected) of a sequence to be called Pantaloon or The Valediction (the first book bears the name of the sequence).

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1 Catastrophe and Imagination, 1957.
2 A Reader's Guide to the Contemporary English Novel, 1963.

Two Brothers, the fifth part, was published in 1964 and A Learned City, the sixth, in 1967.

They are the memories of an old man, Richard Abberville, told to a young Norwegian student. Each section represents one day of his outpourings. The style of the three ranges from loose verse narration, interspersed with passages of "corrective prose" in Pantaloon, to the continuous narrative in stanza form in Two Brothers; and in A Learned City the narrative is shared between Abberville as a young man and his grandfather, the style is full of literary echoes and pastiches. P. West [1] suggests that Panteloon is part-epic, part-masque, and that it attempts more than it can attain. The books themselves offer no adequate justification for preferring verse to prose - especially as the writer is a poor novelist and a worse poet. In an article [2] Toynbee deplored the contemporary avant-garde in the arts, particularly in the theatre and visual arts, seeing their return to the primitive as retrogressive. He wrote: ". . . But the true development of all the arts is in the direction of greater complexity, not of simplification or neo-primitivism. . . . In the local history of an ideal art it would be shown that every new generation of artists used all the means evolved by their predecessors, plus those new implements which they themselves had invented." As a result of such thinking he embraces so many of the means evolved by his predecessors that his novels become exercises in experimental techniques. One of the means he does not embrace is the art of making the complex appear simple.

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1 The Modern Novel, 1965.
2 Ob.R., 8.1.1967.

DENNIS GUERRIER and JOAN RICHARDS In _State of Emergency_ (1969) the authors apply the technique of programmed learning to the novel. The Prime Minister of a new African state is confronted with a series of crises which offer several alternative actions that he can adopt. It is here that "reader participation" (the goal, rarely achieved, of the _nouveau romanciers_) is required. The narrative stops, the alternatives are listed and whichever one the reader chooses directs him to a different page in the book. But only one is correct and if the reader chooses incorrectly, he is told why and sent back to try again until he hits on the right answer and the book proceeds. It undoubtedly has possibilities as a new parlour game to replace Monopoly ("Be your own C.P. Snow") - and it is a very enjoyable novel too.

ERIC THACKER and ANTHONY EARNSHAW, a Methodist minister and an art teacher, published an illustrated surrealist fantasy _Musrum_, in 1968. Musrum is a male gipsy mouse whose home is an anti-world of non-matter. Musrum's Giant Mushroom is stolen from him by the Weedking whom he pursues as far as the little known Kingdom of Russia and carries it back to his own territory, Intersol. The "story" has a Tolkien touch but if there is a moral at all it is that things are seldom what they seem and that events almost never happen in a predictable manner. A reviewer suggested this "non-description" of Musrum: "an extended allegory incorporating pseudo-homily and an impressive array of non-axioms, intricately blended in a surrealist amalgam".[1] No description can quite convey the extraordinary effect, but these quotations may indicate something of its unusual qualities:

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1 _TLS_ 24.10.1968.

Bella had spent her childhood playing with clockwork models of herself. Now she allowed Musrum to wind her up . . .

Musrum, having spent half his life looking for a needle, found one by chance in a large haystack. In less than three minutes he had sewn the missing button on his wheel.

Seeing a crack in one of the huge metal casings, Musrum inserted an imaginative fingertip into the flaw, only to have it sharply bitten by a savage lurking something. His wounds took weeks to heal.

Christopher Columbus often related a singular childhood memory, in which he was stopped, in a Genoan street, by a man who asked the way to Chicago.

Needing time, Musrum accepted the offer of the year 1489 from an itinerant pedlar. This gave him the opportunity to construct the North American continent.

Resting awhile in a tavern on the road to Cologne, Musrum declared vehemently that the ale was "pure bog-water" and, suiting action to averment, dashed the contents of his tankard against the wall . . . Cotton grass, saxifrage, angelica and cinquefoil now grow there in profusion.

The lordly castellan, Musrum, so admired a mountain view attainable from one of his inner rooms that he had the window moved into several different rooms according to his mood .... This window had ultimately to be sold to provide sorely needed cash. There are now no mountains in Intersol.

It is the literature of the Absurd but it is more than a compendium of metaphysical witticisms. It is a genuinely surrealist fantasy of words and pictures. Mervyn Peake's Gormenghast trilogy is possibly its closest literary confrère but its unlikeness to other contemporary books is more apparent than its likenesses.

JOHN FOWLES His first three novels, The Collector (1963), The Magus (1966) and The French Lieutenant's Woman (1969), show John Fowles to be one of the most exciting and accomplished authors to have been published in this decade. The Collector is a terrifying story of a deranged butterfly collector who adds a girl to his collection; The Magus[1] of a man caught up in a web of illusion; The French Lieutenant's

1 Discussed in chapter 7 as an example of the Gothic novel.

Woman is a pastiche of a Victorian love story. Fowles is concerned with the evolution of freedom, with the "actions of men in pursuit of their end" and the belief that "life is only what we within our hazard-given abilities, have made it ourselves" (these and other quotations from Marx form epigraphs to each chapter). Linked with this is an attempt to pinpoint an historical change in consciousness. James Price [1] describes the hero's odyssey as "the process, in miniature, in which nineteenth-century man becomes twentieth-century man, or fails to".

It is an extraordinarily intricate book written in the style of "an uncensored and emancipated Thackeray - a Thackery who has considered the works of Freud, Marx and recent historians, and feels free to discuss their conclusions before a mass readership of equals." [2] Like Muriel Spark, John Fowles is interested in the novelist-as -God and the novel-as -a-lie, discussing his problem with readers in this manner:

> To be free myself, I must give Charles, and Tina, and Sarah, even the abominable Mrs. Poulteney, their freedoms as well. There is only one good definition of God: the freedom that allows other freedoms to exist.

and

> The novelist is still a god, since he creates (and not even the most aleatory avant-garde novel has managed to extirpate its author completely) . . . .

The author provides two alternative endings to support his point about the absurdity of writing novels and particularly of ending them; he draws liberally on quotations from contemporary writers; there is a great deal of factual matter and arcane information [3] ; and the author adopts and removes the mask of his Victorian narrator to alter his perspectives.

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1 The New Statesman, 13.6.1969.
2 TLS , 12.6.1969.
3 Such as that in Victorian London one house in sixty was a brothel.

~~quality of mystery that intrigued in his earlier novels.~~

Anthony Quinton referred in an article [1] to John Fowles's recently published volume of aphorisms, The Aristos. He called them "certainly philosophical in the large sense of the word. His ideas are humane, thoughtful and fresh." The novelist of ideas is rare in England - Aldous Huxley was one such - and it is even more rare for this to be combined with considerable knowledge and sheer writing skill.

COLIN WILSON The Outsider, Colin Wilson's first book, sold 20,000 copies in the six months after its publication in 1956. It was inordinately praised and the subsequent reaction had all the qualities of a hangover. The novels which followed illustrate his fascination with the irrational and the demonic, with the deeply destructive influences at work in society. Like Alain Robbe-Grillet he turned to the thriller form. Ritual in the Dark and The Glass Cage [2] are two of his thrillers. The Philosopher's Stone (1969) is a Gothic fantasy. Man Without a Shadow (1963) is built around the same characters as Ritual in the Dark, but it is more experimental than most of his novels. The preface to this book is a long discussion of the novel and Wilson's dissatisfaction with it in its traditional form. He deplores particularly the practice of story-telling in the novel.

> What I would like to do - what I feel it will be one day possible to do - is to write . . . a book that is so dense that it can be read fifty times. Not a book of ideas . . . but a book that deals with life with the same directness that we are compelled to live it. . . . a good book should somehow be a living organism, with many levels of significance. . . . There ought to be a type of book that makes a frontal assault on 'reality' as the novelist knows it, that is not realism or fantasy or the novel of ideas, that uses ideas because battering

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1 'Philosophy and Literature', TLS, 27.7.1967.
2 Discussed in the chapter on the Popular Novel, Chap.7.

> at 'reality' demands that the problems should be to some extent verbalized and yet which is less a book than an armour-plated bullet trying to rip its way through the surface of futility to an underlying meaning. . . , is it not time that we created a new type of novel, the kind of novel that I could dimly envisage as I wrote this one?

The earnestness and sincerity of Colin Wilson's reflections on the novel are striking, but he lacks the technical equipment of a conventional novelist and it is unlikely that he will achieve the break-through he seeks. Man Without a Shadow is written as a diary, or rather as two diaries: one the writer calls "Sex Diaries", the other "Black Magic Journals". Presumably the first was included to encourage the lip-licking reader to battle through the second, but only the most naïve would find the "Sex Diaries" exciting. The women in Wilson's novels are either virgins or depraved animals and the diary writer's frequent copulations with both kinds are as exciting to read as a sex manual. The "Black Magic Journals" are long pretentious essays pepped up with descriptions of sorcery of the kind which Denis Wheatley does so much better. Colin Wilson has not the primary skill of the writer - the ability to use words for communication - and his sincerity and desire to experiment with the novel form are insufficient compensation for this deficiency.

MAUREEN DUFFY is an experimental writer who aims at profundity in her themes but whose novels are most effective where they are least philosophical or experimental. The Paradox Players (1967) suggested this theme to one reviewer:

> [1] . . . the paradox which underlines the games we play, the paradox which the novel is about: to discover a reality in oneself beyond the delusion of "getting and spending",

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1 TLS 28.9.1967.

> it is necessary to reduce life to simple survival: yet, in opting out of materialistic society, one risks believing in the permanence of ideals and ideal situations. The ivory tower, even when it is not solitary, cannot resist the changing world outside.

The hero, Sym, has left his wife, family and job to find a place where he can write. He joins a river-boat community which seems, at first, to be entirely free of the conventions of the larger world. Walden, an anarchic blusterer, and Sassie, a hemp-growing woman who appears to have attained a perfect freedom from convention, become his friends. But in the end Walden and his long-suffering wife are forced to recognise the demands of the "treadmill", and Sassie destroys Sym's illusion that their particular idyll can last. The river-boat community breaks up and Sym leaves, with a satisfactorily large pile of pages for his novel.

The most successful parts of the novel are the descriptions of river-boat life on the Thames. The rigours and hardships, and the peculiarly enclosed quality of river life are convincingly conveyed. The hard winter which freezes the river, and the thaw in spring, are described with a vivid, poetic exactness. But the three central characters are unconvincing and lifeless and this is not concealed by the use of streams of consciousness, flashbacks, cross-cuts, and pages from Sym's diary. A reviewer of her next novel, Wounds (1967), said:

> [1] Maureen Duffy handles detail so beautifully and can suggest what her characters see, imagine and remember with such precision and life that it is disappointing to find the larger implications of her novel so crude and uncertain by comparison. . . . Her gifts lie in the area of split seconds of individual reality, and she has spoiled the effect of these with a smothering and intractable life view.

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1 TLS, 3.7.1969.

MURIEL SPARK In a perceptive study of Muriel Spark,[1] F. Kermode drew attention to her explorations of the nature of fiction. In this sense, as well as in her artistic style, she can be described as an experimental novelist.

> She is evidently not of the opinion that the possibilties of the form are exhausted, since she is continually finding new ones. Her novels quite deliberately raise difficult questions about the status of fiction, but she has not been driven to violence in her attempts to answer them; she does not cut her books up or fold them in or try to make them random. If there is to be randomness, she wants to be in charge of it.

Kermode analyses four of her novels to discover what questions she has asked, and what answers she has found, to the problems of the novel form. In all of them she is seeking a way of reconciling "truth" with "fiction".

<u>The Comforters</u>: (1957) . . . is a novel which looks into the question of what kind of truth can be told in a novel. It creates a quite powerful sense . . . that to make fictions is in a way a presumptuous thing to do, because the novelist is, unlike God, free at the expense of his characters.

<u>The Ballad of Peckham Rye</u>: (1960) . . . The devil as father of lies is the patron saint of novelists; . . . Like a novelist [Dougal] seduces people into wanton or even self-destructive acts.

<u>The Bachelors</u>: (1960) Just as, in <u>The Comforters</u>, we are asked to consider the analogy between the writing of a novel and a temporary loss of sanity, we are here made to see an affinity between novel-writing and mediumship.

<u>The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie</u>: (1961) . . . Miss Brodie . . . assumes a novelist's, or God's power over character.

In an interview with F. Kermode [2], Muriel Spark enlarged on her views:

> I don't claim that my novels are truth. I claim that they are fiction, out of which a kind of truth emerges. And I keep in mind that what I am writing is fiction because I am interested in truth - absolute truth - and I don't pretend that what I'm writing is more than an imaginative extension of that truth. . . . There is metaphorical truth an moral truth, and what they call anagogical . . .

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1 <u>Continuities</u>, 1968.
2 'Myth, Reality and Fiction,' The <u>List</u>., 30.8.1962.

> and there is absolute truth, in which I believe things which are difficult to believe, but I believe them because they are absolute. Fiction is one aspect of the truth, perhaps, but in fact if we are going to live in a world as reasonable beings we must call it lies. But simply because one puts it out as a work of fiction, then one is not a liar.

Muriel Spark's interest in the novel form is not confined to posing questions about its relation to truth. In her choice of material, too, she shows herself to be seeking new possibilites for the form and to be extending the traditional concerns of the novel. With the exception of Robinson (1958), The Mandelbaum Gate (1964) and The Public Image (1968) - which are her least successful novels. - all her novels are about groups of characters who are linked by a single common factor. In Memento Mori, (1969), for example, all the characters are old people; in The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie (1961) the characters are teachers or school-children. The deliberate bringing-together of people of specific ages or circumstances, enables her to explore the material with a thoroughness which is surprising in novels as short as these. They are not subjects which are often written about by English novelists, except incidentally.

Muriel Spark's style also marks her as an experimental novelist. She most nearly resembles Ivy Compton-Burnett, both in her stylised dialogue and in the asperity and wit of her tone. These lines could well have come from one of Ivy Compton-Burnett's novels:

> 'Mr Lowther is not at school this week.'
> 'So I hear,' Miss Alison said.
> 'It seems he will be away for another week at least.'
> 'Is he ill?'
> 'I understand so, unfortunately,' said Miss Gaunt.
> 'Miss Brodie is ailing, too,' said Miss Ellen.
> ... It may be that Brodie has the same complaint as Mr Lowther.'

Muriel Spark is one of the most witty and entertaining writers in contemporary fiction, but it is difficult to see in what direction she will go. Her sole attempt at the longer novel showed her to be a miniaturist ill-suited to expansiveness.

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1 The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie, 1961, page 58 Penguin ed.

WILLIAM TREVOR   The Old Boys (1964), for which William Trevor was awarded the Hawthornden Prize, was a striking first novel. It describes the power-games played by the School Old Boys Association Committee - octogenarians all. The subject matter of Trevor's novel is unusual, but his treatment of it is more remarkable. In the sparseness and formality of his dialogue he resembles Ivy Compton-Burnett, but in his interest in the patterns of behaviour and the eccentricities of his characters, he is more like Muriel Spark. This is part of a dialogue between Jarraby and his wife. He wakes her at two in the morning to find out whether the peaches they had at dinner were Australian:

> "They were Australian peaches. They came from the Antipodes."
> "They could hardly be Australian and come from elsewhere."
> "I will not have Australian produce in the house."
> "So you say -."
> "The why go against my wishes? Why since you know them do you continue in your ways?"
> "It is quite impossible to keep an eye on everything I buy. I have asked in the past about the butter and the bacon and the cheese. The people selling think me odd."
> "They think you odd for other reasons."
> "Maybe, maybe. I do not go into it with them."

The grumpy, nagging accents of old age are beautifully caught. The formal manner of speech, the pedantic accuracy and the slightly old-fashioned phrasing effectively convey the characters of these old people.

In The Boarding-House (1965) his characters are, for the most part, younger, and live in a more close-knit community. The lonely and eccentric are again his subjects, but the range is wider. There are some vivid comic scenes told in a skilfully dead-pan manner.

The Love Department (1966) may have been influenced by James Purdy's Cabot Wright Begins (1964). There is the same mixture of fantasy and surrealism, and Trevor's hero

(who resembles Purdy's Malcolm [1]) is given the job of tracking down an English Cabot Wright. The Love Department is more diffuse and less controlled than Purdy's novels. Trevor's style remains unchanged, but where it was a success in his earlier novels, the subject matter here seems to call for different treatment. The trick of portentous, office-memorandum -like descriptions and telephonic dialogue begins to be wearying and his eye for oddities has become less sharp. The volume of short stories which followed The Love Department, The Day We Got Drunk on Cake (1967) confirmed the suspicion that Trevor's style has become a gimmick.

All of the novelists discussed so far have experimented with the novel because they found the traditional form limiting. They are all capable of writing a good conventional novel should they choose to do so. There is, however, a group of young writers who have been seduced by the "play" element of experimentation into believing that experiment is its own justification. Their novels are gimmicky, their experiments to no purpose. Alan Burns, David Coxhead, Paul Ableman, Roger Simon, Julian Gloag and Nicholas Mosley are discussed in this group.

ALAN BURNS is the recipient of an Arts Council award, which suggests that experimental writing is returning to favour with the literary establishment. But the reasons for the award are not apparent to a reader of his Babel (1969). It is a pretentious collection of statements like this:

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1 The hero of Malcolm (1960).

> the royal family is a new name for God. The arithmetic country has no leader. There had been an emergency on the recommendation of the Prime Minister. No return to rule is planned . . . .

These are more meaningful than most of his sentences, and the jokey pseudo-profundity is not cured by Burns's use of the William Burroughs's "cut-up" technique of sticking together unrelated sentences from newspapers. According to the publisher's advertisement, the technique "reveals the Babel myth as the tragedy of all attempts to construct a secular Utopia." It is also a tragedy of wasted effort, the sort of book which makes C.P. Snow's attacks on the followers of the Moderns seem more than justified.

DAVID COXHEAD's Run Come See Jerusalem (1969) caused a reviewer [1] to ask: "How often is experimentalism an excuse for evading the rigorous demands of craftsmanship ?" The author is so involved in this, his first, novel with experimental "gimmicks" (such as alternative versions of incidents, pondering what qualities to give to his characters, and so on), that it offers only a ragged and confusing surface with no serious purpose apparent behind it.

PAUL ABLEMAN's first novel, I Hear Voices (1958), showed a promising experimental talent. It is a study of schizophrenia in which "the first person narrator constructed sick imaginings which blended one into another in a continuous flow at once subtle, humorous and clinically authentic". [2] The Twilight of the Vilp (1969) also has a narrator figure who spins fantasy, "but this time it is a poor, diluted mixture of Sterne-ish jokes and perfunctory science-fiction." [3] Paul Ableman has allowed the fascination of experimental

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1 TLS 23.1.1969
2 TLS 20.2.1969
3 ibid.

games to seduce him away from the proper concerns of fiction.

ROGER SIMON <u>Heir</u> (1969) is the diary of a man who accidentally kills his girl-friend. It gradually reveals his psychological problems, breaking in the last section into tricksy typography - broken words wander up and down the pages, form blocks, zig, zag, and finally become a Star of David. The ending is needlessly gimmicky.

NICHOLAS MOSLEY Two of Nicholas Mosley's novels, <u>Accident</u> (1965) and <u>Impossible Object</u> (1968), are based on essentially banal situations, a fact which is partly concealed by his experiments in making the narrative hard to follow. His style is extremely trying, as this extract from <u>Accident</u> illustrates:

> A small brown room with two modern armchairs in it, a table, a high window, A sort of bathyscape at dawn. Four paces from the wall to the table. Four paces back again. A picture of a mountain-side with a fir tree. Putting your head out into the waste. A hospital. Pipes everywhere. The patients out of sight. Eyes looking out of a ground hole. Nothing living. No imagination, I thought - Now I understand why people want it. A mechanism like a clock. Bomb.

Coupled with this is his arbitrary practice of destroying a chronological time sequence. In <u>Impossible Object</u>, eight short stories about two lovers are shuffled and interspersed with surrealistic essays on such subjects as Nietzsche, bombs, population problems, and the influence of sexuality and childhood on war and cruelty. The reader is supposed to relate the lectures to the stories, which he may not be willing to do as they read like this:

> So now God sat among the millionaires in sharkskin uniforms and the old ladies like commercialised Christmas and he took the girls on his knee and gave them diamonds. . . . One day the boys from over the river came to get him. They wrapped him in nylon and put electrodes in his head and heart. . . . But all this had happened to God before.

Mosley has a penchant for pointless epigrams: "Once men found it easy to be hurt; now they have to advertise in shop windows." Julian Jebb [1] began his review of this novel with the remark: "All honour to the novelist who tries to displace time. . . ." But the displacement of time must be done for a purpose. The substitution of "where does this piece go?" is no advance on the old "what happens next?".

JULIAN GLOAG <u>Maundy</u> (1969) is the story of an athletic young banker who becomes a sadist and a pervert. The narrative of Gloag's novel is conventional-seeming, becoming increasingly more odd as the novel progresses. The climax is a Beckett-like speech at his mother's wedding. A reviewer, [2] intrigued with his steady repetitions of key words like "air, fire, blood, water; glove, sock, raincoat" and so on, suggested that if this novel were "an old and admired work of art, scholars would work hard to arrange the images and set them in another order. But <u>Maundy</u>, in spite of its sinister fascination . . . is more of a crossword puzzle than a poem." [3]

The last writers in this section on the experimental novel in contemporary fiction can best be defined in opposition to the first group. Writers like Rayner Heppenstall and

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1 <u>Times Sat.R.</u>, 28.9.1968.
2 <u>TLS.</u>, 26.6.1969.
3 Much the same technique was used by Edgar Mittleholzer in <u>Latticed Echoes</u> (1960), which he described as "A Novel in the Leitmotive Manner".

Christine Brooke-Rose are consciously seeking new ways of breaking from the traditional novel. They are experimenters first, novelists second, and are concerned more with how they write than with what they write about. In contrast to them are the novelists who are not consciously experimental, but who use experimental techniques where they feel they will be the most effective. Most of the writers in this group have written conventional novels, but these works will not be discussed here. The novels that will be discussed here are those which incorporate experimental techniques because the material seems to require such treatment. [1]

Julian Mitchell, Anthony Glyn, Jennifer Dawson, Sheila Macleod, Piers Paul Read, Shena Mackay, and Jane Gillespie represent this group.

JULIAN MITCHELL <u>Imaginary Toys</u> (1961), Mitchell's first novel, is composed of extracts from the diaries and thoughts of five Oxford students. He uses a stream of consciousness technique to expose them at a crucial moment in their lives, focussing on their sexual relationships. Since 1961 he has written five novels which have established him as a very talented writer and one who shows real development as a novelist. In his later novels he combines experimental methods with such traditional concerns as firm characterisation, narrative drive and social comment.

<u>The White Father</u> (1964) was a traditional novel, but in <u>The Undiscovered Country</u> (1968) Julian Mitchell returned to the experimental novel. It is written in two parts. The first

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1 A number of novels which do this, but are more interesting as examples of poetic novels or of allegories, are discussed in those sections.

is a "memoir" of Charles, a friend of Julian's. It is a fairly straight-forward account of their early relationship and of their infrequent meetings as their lives go in different directions. It is not written as a novel, for it is crowded with verifiable facts and reads like an autobiography. The second half of <u>The Undiscovered Country</u> contains a previously unpublished fragment of <u>The New Satyricon</u> which Charles wrote before he died (possibly at his own hand). In Julian's notes on the novel he gives this description of Petronius's <u>Satyricon</u>:

> . . .'a potpourri or farrago of mixed subjects in a a variety of styles', it satirizes, in the modern sense, various aspects of life in Nero's Rome, and it is a 'satyr-book' - that is 'concerned with satyrs, which is to say, lecherous, randy.'

<u>The New Satyricon</u> is aptly named. It takes the narrator-hero through a series of surrealist adventures in a vast hotel as he pursues the most beautiful creature (he/she, it does not matter) whom he glimpsed on arrival at the Undiscovered Country. It is a quest which takes him through some entertaining territory and Mitchell's power of mimicry is considerable in the parodies of such diverse subjects as, amongst others, the Theatre of Cruelty and a marriage service. Julian provides a linking commentary to the sections which guides the reader through what could be very confusing mazes, and which also throws a new light on the Charles/Julian relationship. Charles was always critical of Julian's writing talent, which he felt to be limited. He is Julian's artistic conscience. He is also his moral conscience, for Julian failed Charles when he needed him. It seems then that Charles is in fact Julian's alter-ego whose deeper failures are

symbolised by Charles's worldly failure. On this level it is an intensely personal book, a critical examination of himself as a writer and as a man. It is also an hallucinatory commentary on some of the foibles of contemporary society. The "Modern" in Julian Mitchell is never allowed to overwhelm the "Contemporary". The balance he achieves is characteristic of a group of writers who appeared in the 1960's and who reject the extreme position of both movements while discarding nothing they find useful.

ANTHONY GLYN The Terminal (1965) explores the Ionesco theme of non-communication in a witty and lively manner. "Everything is funny and serious both at once" is the key to Anthony Glyn's approach. A young man on his way overseas meets and becomes engaged to an air-hostess in Paris. He returns some time later and stays with her family. With the help of their eccentric aunt, gradually he realises that everybody has "stopped". They all lead apparently normal lives, going to the office and behaving no differently from other people: but in their minds they constantly re-live the moments in their lives when they were happiest. Thus, his fiancée, whose engagement gave her an enviable status in the eyes of her colleagues, insists on returning every evening to the restaurant where they became engaged, eating what they ate the first time, and repeating their conversation word for word. The mother talks only of her days as a member of the WRAC during the war. The father speaks of his match-box collection and of the report for which

he was once commended at the office. Only the aunt seems normal, but at the end she paints a tree that isn't there; it is a memory from her childhood. The young man succumbs too, after a struggle, "stopping" at the day he left Paris with a new fiancée and a new job holding promise of a happy future.

It is a very amusing novel and short enough - about one hundred and eighty pages - for the idea not to become over-worked. M. Ratcliffe [1] called it: "a novel of the imagination entirely rooted in everyday observation and continuously relevant to life as it is consciously experienced. It could turn out to be a key book of the sixties." He also talks of the "iron narrative tradition of Kafka" being an influence on the book, but it seems to belong more clearly to a surrealist world like Lewis Carroll's. Although Anthony Glyn has written a number of novels, including The Dragon Variations (1969), which is almost a chess text-book, none of them repeats this modest formal experiment.

JENNIFER DAWSON. The James Tait Black Memorial prize was awarded to Jennifer Dawson for her first novel, The Ha-Ha (1961). It describes the schizophrenia of a young girl who is in a mental institution after a break-down following the death of her mother. Her mother was the only person with whom she could make contact, but when she meets another patient, Alasdair, a relationship begins to develop. They first meet in the ha-ha, the sunken ditch which forms the boundary of the institution,

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1 The Novel Today, 1968.

and Josephine's story is of her attempt to cross the ha-ha to the other side. She begins to venture painfully into the "normal" world and taste a joy and sense of identity she had not known before. Alasdair is discharged and leaves without warning, and Josephine has a break-down. She runs away and the days that follow blur into impressions, of drinking in pubs, of trees, of railways, of sex. She is found and returned to the hospital where she makes a slow recovery, but runs away again: "Not that I wanted to go very far. There was no one calling, neither God nor man, not there", and later, "I knew for certain that I had not after all been extinguished, and that my existence had been saved."

The search for identity, for contact, is a theme which runs through much of contemporary fiction, but it has rarely been explored so movingly. Josephine's schizophrenia is a classic clinical case, told by the patient herself. This calls for - and gets - some remarkable writing, making full use of impressionist techniques, flashbacks, poetic imagery and telescoped time.

> I sat there and gazed - perhaps it was weeks, perhaps months - at the brightness of everything; the bed-ends that reared up in jets from deep shafts of glittering coal underneath; the walls like newly-opened chestnut leaves; even the lino only needed a little water, I saw, to send it springing up, too, like fields of dark, shining spinach. . . . I leaned back and let the words flow over me - like flickers on a cinema screeen - and examined the boundlessly beautiful shafts of brown and cream and purple that composed the wooden arm of the chair.

Jennifer Dawson has her material in complete control. She resists the temptation to sentimentalise or to indulge in flights of fancy - an almost irresistible temptation with such material. It is a profoundly moving book.

Jennifer Dawson's third novel, The Cold Country (1965), is also an exploration of the theme of loneliness and the search for identity. There is a wider range of characters and the scene shifts with almost cinematic speed. In this novel she shows herself to be a fine satirist, with an uncomfortably acute eye for the false and hypocritical. The old, the sick, the outcasts, the misfits - her sympathy lies with them. This is a description of an Old Folks' Home :

> The Matron had a particularly soft spot for the old ones; she had a 'way' with them. When one of them had been out for the day, she would bustle down to the front door, pop her head round, and cry very merrily each side of her long nose: 'No hawkers or circulars! All baggage round the back!' The old women had been numbered and counted, numbered and counted again, and let loose in the male-block, for it was Christmas, and enough was known about geriatrics for the authorities to take care that the old were not just fed and clothed, but kept bright with crêpe paper and coloured pinafores and a sense of dignity preserved. . . .
> 'Now we want nice lively singing! Full of spark and go! Clear, sharp words,' her thumbs rose with her voice. Her cheeks flushed. 'And all the actions, mind!'

Straight-forward descriptive passages are contrasted with ones like these:

> 'How are you Dickie? Still facing up to it all, in London?'
> 'Still striving among all those grey people leading grey lives in their little subutopias?'
> 'Like beetles fighting for space in their little cars!'
> 'The great grey masses. The admass,' they chimed with sighs. . . .'
> 'We are normally selfish people.' Their breasts rose like flags being run up,
> 'But we want to get something going.'
> 'We do feel we ought to hand on something of what we've had.' . . .'
> 'We want to do something really dee, to get some colour back into their drab lives. How can we get them into motion?'

Jennifer Dawson is certainly one of the most accomplished post-war novelists with a full range of writing skills at her command.

SHEILA MACLEOD's first novel, The Moving Accident (1968), offers an interesting contrast with Jennifer Dawson's The Ha-Ha. The wife of a pop-star is driven by loneliness and isolation to attempt suicide. The book is a mish-mash of fantasy, dream and reality. She is subjected to Kafkaesque inquisitors, telephone calls trigger off a series of wish-fulfilment dreams, jump-cut flash-backs, recorded voices and other experimental techniques are used, but the overall impression is patchy and uncontrolled.

PIERS PAUL READ. Game in Heaven with Tussy Marx, Piers Paul Read's first novel, was short, comic and technically enterprising. In 1969 he was awarded the Geoffrey Faber Memorial Prize for his second novel, The Junkers (1968). The narrator, who is with the British Embassy in Berlin in the 1960s, is instructed to investigate the von Rummelsberg family, the Junkers of the title. This book is a record of his relationships with the family and his imaginative and factual reconstructions of their pasts. Fictitious and real characters mingle: The scene switches without warning, but with design, from the 1920s through to the 1960s. The chapters are made up of brief sections with headings like these: "Edward von Rummelsberg: 1942"; "Klaus von Rummelsberg/Günter Strepper; 1943-1944". There are no linking explanatory passages and the effect is of a series of snapshots which gradually build up a complete picture. It is a technically fascinating book.

The Junkers is a family chronicle, but it is more than that, for it is also about divided Germany, the generation who fought in the war, and the younger generation whose attitude to the war and its aftermath is quite unlike the

older generation's. Read is curiously detached from his material, and "his refusal to suspend the reader's disbelief, his straightforward insistence that he is merely making up a tale, containing ideas, all recall that cool mood of the 1920s - made still cooler by his rejection of explicit moral judgements." [1]

SHENA MACKAY was nineteen when her first book, two short novels, Dust Falls on Eugene Schlumberger and Toddler on the Run, was published in 1964. They are strikingly original and surprisingly mature novels, inspiring K. Allsop to this exuberant statement: "There is at times the mind-reeling sense that Dylan Thomas, Ivy Compton-Burnett, Shelley Berman and Truman Capote have joined up as a fiendish writing team." [1]

The first story is of the abduction of a convent school-girl by a beatnik advertising man, the second is about the flight of another girl to a beach-hut with a criminal dwarf ("It's only his mind that's warped, he's got a lovely little body"). Her characters are pathetic misfits, prisoners of their ugly bodies and of their conventional upbringing. Their loneliness finds an outlet in fantasy, but when they try to make their fantasies real, they are crushed. Both books end in tragedy.

> Eugene was in far off hell and she was here. Around her forever stretched the black eternity. The howling and beating of fists had achieved nothing, neither would this. 'Yes,' she said. 'I will learn shorthand and typing' because she knew she was already dead.

A reviewer of one of her later books, Old Crow (1967) [2] remarked that "the verbal inventiveness that Miss Mackay

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1 Daily Mail review - quoted in the publisher's advertisement.
2 TLS, 15.6.1967.

displays so coolly in all her writing has deservedly received much praise . . . ." Her verbal inventiveness is matched by her handling of plot and characters, and although she does not appear to have any literary models, she makes use of the techniques which the Moderns made familiar.

JANE GILLESPIE is an unusually prolific writer, having published more than sixteen novels since her first, The Weir, appeared in 1953. In spite of this she shows surprisingly few signs of having over-extended herself. She is a versatile craftsman capable of employing unusual methods for exploring her themes and subjects. Regard for Truth (1967) is more obviously experimental than her earlier novels. In it she investigates the nature of memory. An old man is forced by his sister to try to recall something that happened when they were young (exactly what is undisclosed until the end). It is a classic Freudian drama, but its treatment is far from straightforward. Memory is a shaky thing, and people have different memories of the same events, as well as lapses of memory. The memories of the two old people and of a "ghost" narrator who tells what they have forgotten or never knew are linked not by chapter, but by headings such as these:

"He could remember, if he found it at all significant . . .
""Augustine Maxwell is writing in his notebook.
"Dudley Headley talks to Marianne Maude:
"She has forgotten, because even at the time it did not occur to her . . .
"He does not remember, has never remembered . . .

The shifts in time, the changes of viewpoint and the recording of memories are handled with skill - so much so that it is not obvious that she is using techniques that some years ago would have caused her to be called an "experimental novelist".

There are many contemporary novelists who certainly could not be called "experimental" but whose novels incorporate experimental techniques. The use of the stream of consciousness and flash-backs, for example, has become almost standard practice amongst even the most conventional writers. It is less likely that this assimilation has come about through the direct influence of the Moderns, than that it is as a result of the influence of the cinema on the novel. Fifteen years ago it was assumed that "the public" would not accept anything other than straight-forward filming techniques, but today the most ordinary film displays techniques which the director would not have used fifteen years ago. Surprisingly, some of the most experimental films have become the equivalent of "best-sellers". Viewers accustomed to meeting experimental techniques in the cinema have no difficulty in understanding them when they meet them in novels. The public has shown itself to be both more intelligent and less conventional than it was believed to be.

Chapter 3 Part B:

The Poetic Novel

The writers in this group are distinguished by their concern with language. Stephen Spender [1] suggested that the Contemporaries could be given the alternative name of "Prose-realists", and that the Moderns could be called "Imagists". Strictly speaking, there are few post-war writers who could be described as Imagists, although most of them use imagery in their novels. There is a small group of novelists whose writing is poetic rather than prosodic. Most of them are published poets, and this is reflected in the language of their novels.[1] Very often their novels are a succession of arresting images, linked by a rather tenuous thread of narrative. Their language is the chief source of pleasure for the reader, and it is the style rather than the content of their novels which lingers in the reader's mind.

Lawrence Durrell, Anthony Burgess, Rosemary Tonks. Angela Carter, Josephine Poole and Randolph Stow represent this group.

LAWRENCE DURRELL is the nearest fictional successor to Malcolm Lowry. They are both primarily poets, rather than novelists, and their styles have the same "baroque" flavour - rich, lush and heavily ornamented. They both

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1 Several writers who are published poets do not show this transference from one form to another. Roy Fuller, Philip Larkin, D.J. Enright, John Wain and Kingsley Amis are, in their novels, Prose-realists.

use exotic settings for their novels - in Malcolm Lowry's Under the Volcano (1947) it is Mexico, in Durrell's Alexandria Quartet it is Alexandria.[1] Neither writer has an English temperament: they seem to belong to an American and a European tradition rather than to an English one.

Lawrence Durrell had been writing for about twenty years before his Alexandria Quartet brought him fame. Since then, Durrell's novels have attracted a great deal of critical attention, but they will be discussed here only in so far as they are examples of Poetic novels in contemporary fiction. Durrell is one of the most consciously experimental writers of the period, but it is his language which makes most impact on the reader. These extracts are fairly representative of his style:

> [2] The moon had grown old and feeble by the time we reached Polis and a thin severe dawn threatened us from the east, draining the sea of light and freezing the sky to a bloodless white. . . . It was a good idea to surprise the dawn at this forgotten point in history - the hollow curved beach with its great finger of rock raised in patient admonition - and to listen for a while to the oldest sound in European history, the sighing of the waves as they thickened into roundels of foam and hissed upon that carpet of discoloured sand.
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> In the fragile membranes of light which separate like yolks upon the cold meniscus of the sea when the first rays of the sun come through, the bay looked haunted by the desolate and meaningless centuries which had passed over it since first the foam-born miracle occurred. With the same obsessive rhythms it beat and beat again on that soft eroded point with its charred-looking sand: it had gone on from the beginning, never losing momentum, never hurrying, reaching out and subsiding with a sigh.

> [3] The atmosphere of the village was quite enthralling; its architecture was in the purest peasant tradition . . . . It had the purity and authenticity of a Cretan hamlet. And everywhere grew roses, and the pale clouds of almond and peach blossom; on the balconies grew herbs in

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1 The Alexandria Quartet is composed of: Justine, 1956; Balthazar, 1958; Mountolive, 1958; Clea, 1960.
2 From Bitter Lemons, 1957. Page 170, Faber edition.
3 ibid. Page 56.

> window-boxes made from old petrol tins; and crowning every courtyard like a messenger from my Indian childhood spread the luxuriant green fan of banana-leaves, rattling like parchment in the wind. From behind the closed door of the tavern came the mournful whining of a mandolin.

Durrell's style is intensely poetic and baroque, tending to be excessively elaborate. The images pile up so rapidly that he achieves an impressionist picture, with the details blurring into each other. In his novels he frequently indulges his taste for poetry at the expense of other concerns of the novel. J. Gindin [1] suggests that his style ". . . is concerned only with its own balances and modifying discords, unconcerned with its supposed subject matter." P. West [2] criticises his tendency to over-elaborate, but he admires the". . . wonderfully precise, enamelled and life-enhancing qualities" of his language. Durrell uses imagination for its own sake, which can be exciting, but which can also be an irritant. S. Spender [3] suggests this with his comment on Durrell's ". . . complete self-indulgence in the writer's capacity to exaggerate any drop of real experience into an enormously inflated and glamorized piece of literature." V.S. Pritchett[4] considers that "even when the pedal is down", his writing is splendid:

> . . . because the poetic image is the image of precision; and arresting, because contemporary English prose has either - in one of Durrell's phrases - got a hot potato in its mouth or has been nibbled close by the bleak teeth of modern criticism. . . . The writer whose subject is illusion - Mr Durrell's - is entitled to colour, image and fantasy.

When his subject is not illusion but metaphysics, speculations about the eternal verities, his style becomes a handicap.

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1 Postwar British Fiction, 1963.
2 The Modern Novel, 1965.
3 'Anglo-Saxon Attitudes', The Partisan Review Anthology, ed W. Phillips and P. Rahv, 1962.
4 The Working Novelist, 1965.

Durrell is perhaps most surely successful in his evocation of atmosphere. Alexandria comes alive, not as a geographical entity, but as a mood, an atmosphere, of decadent splendour and decay. F.R. Karl [1] quotes from an article by Durrell where he says: "I have evolved a private notion about the importance of landscape, and I willingly admit to seeing characters almost as functions of a landscape. . . . My books are always about living in places, not just rushing through them". V.S. Pritchett [2] calls his evocation of Alexandria, "one of the finer mirages in our writing".

Durrell's characters cannot be separated from their background. "In . . . any less opalescent place than Alexandria, Mr Durrell's heroine would seem a demanding bore." [3] Alexandria defines their actions and makes them what they are - which is not "people". "They are vehicles of events; they are poet's notes; they are fables, subjects of one another's conversation and, in the case of the women, are seen only in the light of desire. It is Mr Durrell's point as an artist that they are fervid aspects of the city, created by its moments." [4]

The theme of the Alexandria Quartet is presumably the examination of modern love in all its various aspects, but a closer examination reveals that it is not love, but sex, desire, narcissism, that motivate and compel his characters from bed to bed. Sexual love does not, for Durrell, create conflicts or tension; it is a form of freedom rather than imprisonment. His striking

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1 A Reader's Guide to the Contemporary English Novel, 1963.
2 The Working Novelist, 1965.
3 S. Spender, 'Anglo-Saxon Attitudes', The Partisan Review Anthology, ed. W. Phillips and P. Rahv, 1962.
4 V.S. Pritchett, op.cit.

sexual fantasies offer no insight into "real" love, but, like Iris Murdoch's, they explore the erotic territory of the post-Freudians. Curiously, their sexuality is almost asexual.

The reception of the Alexandria Quartet was enthusiastic in England, ecstatic in France; but his next novel, Tunc (1968), the first of a projected pair, had a mixed reception. It offers no advance on the earlier novels and the writing is less exuberantly dazzling. In Tunc, Durrell pays closer attention to the theme and narrative line than he did in his previous novels. Charlock, a brilliant inventor, is lured by the founder's daughter into marrying her and joining her father's "firm". The "firm" is an apparently benevolent body, but, as Charlock discovers, is it also autocratic. His marriage breaks up and the book ends with Charlock attempting to escape from the "firm". The "firm" clearly represents the culture to which we are all subject and by which we are modified. The novel is an inquiry into the nature of a culture and into the possibilities of freedom within or outside it. Caradoc, a celebrated architect employed by the firm, tries to escape from it and "go primitive". The next book will presumably disclose whether or not they do escape successfully.

In spite of Tunc's mythological structure, its references to theology, its symbolism, and so on, this book could fairly be described as "a gentleman's romance". It has all the ingredients - bawdy; an enigmatic and desirable woman; an unenigmatic and desirable woman; mystery; suspense; adventure; intellectual chit-chat; exotica; erotica; arcane snippets of information; purple passages and farce. Even the title is a bar-room joke.

ANTHONY BURGESS A reviewer [1] of one of Anthony Burgess's novels suggested that he ". . . has probably the finest ear of his time." He may well be right, which makes Burgess's failure to receive much attention from the critics particularly puzzling.[2] He seems to have all the equipment to become a great novelist: a fine ear and eye, a lively intelligence, a range of interests and styles, immense readability even when at his most experimental, fine narrative drive, the power to make his characters come alive, wit and humour. And yet only one critic [3] amongst those whose works were consulted for this study did anything more than mention him amongst a group of "promising" writers.

There are several possible reasons for this neglect, but the most cogent one is that he has not fulfilled his promise. Because he is better endowed than most of his contemporaries, more is expected of him. Like Christopher Isherwood, he has not produced the major work of which he is capable.

Inside Mr Enderby (1963) , perhaps his best novel, invites comparison with Joyce Cary's The Horse's Mouth, but it suffers from the comparison. It is a cameo rather than a full-sized portrait of the artist - excellent as far as it goes, but it does not go deeply enough into the subject. All Anthony Burgess's books are short and, as Muriel Spark has discovered, the novelist who writes briefly tends to be labelled as minor.

His particular strength is his style, which is Joycean [4]

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1 OB.R. 26.5.1968.
2 There may be other reasons - he is a provincial; he does not live in London; part of his life was spent outside England; his fecundity - 17 novels in 14 years - is held against him; he is a popular writer.
3 M. Ratcliffe, The Novel Today, 1968.
4 He has published A Shorter Finnegans Wake and a commentary on Joyce.

in its love of puns, literary and verbal allusions, parody, and, above all, the sound of words. His knowledge of linguistics and his musical training have trained his ear. A few examples from some of his novels may suggest something of his robust, enthusiastic and lively use of language.

[1] He calls a Beatle-style pop-group: "Yod, Crewsey and the Crewsy Fixers", "very religious boys".

[2] A description of, presumably, William Burroughs:
He had shears with which he seemed to be busy cutting strips out of newspaper sheets, and he looked frowning at Enderby while he pasted some of these, apparently at random, on a pawed and sticky piece of foolscap. . . . "There," said the man, and he mumbled what he had stuck and written down, something like: "Balance of slow masturbate payments enquiries in opal spunk shapes notice of that question green ass penetration phantoms adjourn."

[3] On either side were mean houses, in one of which a blue television screen did a rapid stichomythia of shot and dialogue, the window wide open for the heat . . . A street-lamp showed one clump of flowers up clearly, a glow of red and lilac petaloid bracts.

[4] He was in a manner tricked, coney-caught, a court-dor to a cozening cotquean. So are all men, first gulls, later horned gulls, and so will ever be all men, amen. It was easier to believe so, yet the real truth is that all men choose what they will have.

[5] Anthony Burgess's experiments with form have been mainly in taking some of the despised popular novel forms and using them for serious purposes. A Clockwork Orange (1962) and The Wanting Seed (1962) are science-fiction; Nothing Like the Sun (1964) is historical; Tremor of Intent (1966) and Honey for the Bears (1963) are spy stories, the first influenced by John le Carré realism, the second a tragi-comedy; A Vision of Battlements (his first novel, which was not published until 1965) has an epic structure based on that of the Iliad; and The Eve of Saint Venus (1964) is almost a fairy-tale. His experiments with form, combined

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1 From Enderby Outside, 1968.
2 ibid.
3 Tremor of Intent, 1966.
4 Nothing Like the Sun, 1964.
5 On page 5A.28 there is a quotation from A Clockwork Orange.

with a consistent "readability" make him one of the few novelists (Graham Greene is another) to have bridged the gap successfully between the serious and popular novel without making damaging concessions. He has also been able to combine and balance his interest in style and his interest in content. In his concern with language he is a Modern; in his concern with social problems and the contemporary scene, he is a Contemporary. "Life is interesting as raw material. But I find significance not in the world but in the imagination. The world continually fails to live up to my ideal for it, so all I'm left with is what goes on in my imagination." [1]

ROSEMARY TONKS has published several volumes of poetry, including The Iliad of Broken Sentences (1967). Her first two novels, Opium Fogs (1963) and The Bloater (1968), show her to be the kind of novelist whose conception of the novel is: ". . . a series of images, 'poetically' conceived and placed in meaningful relationship one to another." [2]

[3] It was the season of perpetual late afternoon when the rain lands on the pavement as though dripping through from a floor above. The streets darken like drawing-rooms full of black furniture. Clouds, dirty beauties aloft, have long ago shed the last of the peacock dews. You move along drawing in your thoughts. On all sides are the magnificent new citizens who return from cosmic hours abroad and live with flair and elegance, inexorably, for two or three days. In places the Metropolis has the depth of a glass of water. There are sheets of strong north light, on the slope. But the emotional fatigue of being a Londoner begins with the first downpour and the first intellectual who brings out of his boot-locker an idea as toxic as a bag of dust.

For the purposes of comparison, these are the opening

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1 Quoted by M. Ratcliffe, The Novel Today, 1968.
2 Virginia Woolf, quoted by J. McCormick in Catastrophe and Imagination, 1959.
3 From The Bloater, 1968.

lines of Virginia Woolf's The Waves:

> Behind it, too, the sky cleared as if the white sediment there had sunk, or as if the arm of a woman couched beneath the horizon had raised a lamp and flat bars of white, green and yellow spread across the sky like the blades of a fan.

Both writers tend to pile up the images rather too quickly for a novel, and the effect after a while is dazzling rather than refreshing or striking. The images begin to blur into each other and lose their clarity. In Opium Fogs, the thin thread of the plot is there only to link the writing into a novel instead of leaving it as a collection of poems. The characters are flattened out and their dialogue is curiously stylised:

> "I must know what this has been for you - an escapade?"
> She was ravaged.
> "Forgive me! But don't you see, for you, it could be a temporary expedient for loneliness. Whenever I'm talking to you I feel I'm fighting some mad battle all alone. You are always closing your eyes and hiding.

Opium Fogs is a very entertaining novel as well as being an interesting example of the post-war Poetic Novel. Her second novel, The Bloater, was, as she admits in an interview,[1] written primarily to entertain. "I wrote it like a child writing a diary - it's the only way to be really humorous." She is much conerned with what she neatly calls, "writing of light temper". "Handling things lightly is very hard". The Bloater was written in four weeks and although it succeeds as entertainment, it suffers from over-hasty construction. The Bloater is less poetic than Opium Fogs, but there are passages like this:

> The water is just as it should be, full of moods. Down at the edge here it's a transparent brown sugar aquarium with fudge-coated leaves at the bottom. Over there, it's impenetrable, white, glossy, and the fishing lines go into it at an angle and disappear. . . .

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1 Ob.R., 1.9.1968.

ANGELA CARTER Like Rosemary Tonks, Angela Carter wrote her first novel when she was already an established poet. Shadow Dance (1966) is packed tightly with poetic images, but her writing is at its best in passages where she is more relaxed and not striving for effect:

> First the castles, one at each corner, like the legs of a cow. Then the knights - I love the knights; such proud horseheads, such flaring nostrils and, besides, they move obliquely. Now the reverend gentlemen, next to the caballeros. And the Queen, the travelling lady; she's my favourite piece, she can go anywhere on the board - zip, zip. And a femme fatale she is, whose kiss is death. Uneasy lies the head that wears the crown, here is the king. Vulnerable, your King - in the last resort he has to hop off one by one, stage by stage, like Louis XIV escaping from Versailles. Morris shall be black and I white. There are our infantry, our pawns, all ready to go over the top. Let's begin.

The novel is an unusual mixture of melodrama, symbolism, surrealism and realism. The melodrama is at its most Murdochian when Honeybuzzard kills Ghislaine in a deserted house lit with candles as in a church. Her death is a kind of wish-fulfilment. As in Iris Murdoch's novels, the symbolism is often arbitrary and sometimes so obscure as not to yield easily to interpretation. The surrealist vision of the author is in strong contrast to the realistic technique she employs when describing the visits to cafés and pubs. Her realism extends to graphic descriptions of an inordinate quantity of spilt blood, guts, gore and vomit.

Shadow Dance is more of an exercise in experimental writing than a novel, but in her third book, Several Perceptions (1968) she has greater control over her material. Joseph, like his biblical namesake, is obsessed by calamity and sees the world as "a whirling carousel of strange forms - a furious virgin trapped in love, furred creatures of

night, an immaculate prostitute, mutilated ghosts of the disasters of war." [1] Joseph expresses his revulsion against the current nightmare not with protest, but with disgust:

> Joseph had the chance of a fine education but threw it away; he had free choice on the self-service counter and voluntarily selected shit, old men dying, pus, and, worst of all, most dreaded of encounters, the sweet, blue gangrene. . . . Every minute of the lonely nights was filled with dreams of fires quenched with blood and bloody beaks of birds of prey and bombs blossoming like roses with bloody petals over the Mekong Delta.

A reviewer wrote: "Having chosen to explore the mind of a young man, and to chart his exploration of the minds of an assorted group of elders and coevals of both sexes, Miss Carter has deliberately opted for imagination in place of observation, poetic symbolism instead of sociology. The mind, in Hume's image, is a 'kind of theatre' in which the players, strutting, declaiming and vanishing, figure the 'several perceptions' of the title." [2] This reviewer also drew attention to the references to and parallels with Lewis Carroll's writings, which he suggests should be regarded "less as pointers than as the authentic trade-mark of surrealism."

Several Perceptions is a more coherent novel than Shadow Dance but, like the earlier novel, its action is what a reviewer [3] called "not particularly pointful". There are a series of events - Joseph and a friend releasing the zoo badger, for example - which are in themselves meaningful, but which do not add up to a meaningful whole.

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1 Publisher's advertisement.
2 The List., 1.8.1968
3 TLS, 1.8.1968.

JOSEPHINE POOLE's third novel, The Lilywhite Boys, was published in 1968. The story is slight and the action predictable (which is unfortunate, as the element of mystery for which she works is not achieved). It is, however, interesting for its style:

> The room cringed from the weight of a painted ceiling, which once perhaps had glowed. But now it was dried to the colour of old blood, and rough in patches so that the shapes were difficult to follow; it looked at first as though a complete harvest festival had been blown on to the ceiling. She stared. Then under her accustomed eyes the separated fruits joined to make bodies in amorous attitudes, masked by clumsy gauze, and surrounded by a skipping spawn of cupids. Where space remained, in the necessary angles of the human form, lurked a cornucopia, or lute; and it was all tied up with ribbons like a monstrous parcel.

The two lilywhite boys of the title are ambiguous devils/angels whose literary ancestors are Miles, in Henry James's The Turn of the Screw, and Simon, in William Golding's Lord of the Flies.

> He had pond blue eyes, and his hair lay flat on his head like gummed silk. Robin picked his nose, but privately: Jeremy, detached in crystal, bit his cuticles anywhere until they bled; and his elbows and knees, poking out of fairyland, were also vulnerable.

The two boys evolve a religion around their mother, and her secretary, Anna, becomes their sacrificial victim.[1] The stylised dialogue and the isolation of the country-house setting are reminiscent of Ivy Compton-Burnett's novels. Paradoxically, this helps to make the improbable story more credible. But the final impression of the novel is that it is over-rich, over-written. Josephine Poole's talent is considerable, but like Rosemary Tonks and Angela Carter, she is perhaps a better poet than she is a novelist.

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1 Murderous little boys, but not, as yet, little girls, are becoming a popular subject with novelists. Jane White's Quarry (1967) and Jillian Becker's The Keep (1967) are two recent examples.

The last writer to be discussed in this group, Randolph Stow, is an extreme example of the poet-novelist whose novels are extended poems, descriptive passages linked with a thin thread of narrative. To The Islands (1968), his third novel, is a travelogue of the Australian Out-Back. When he is not being sentimental, his descriptive passages are often very beautiful.

There does not seem to be any very good reason for having written this in novel form, rather than publishing it as a volume of poems. Virginia Woolf's conception of the novel ". . . a series of images, 'poetically' conceived and placed in meaningful relationship one to another.",[1] does not provide an adequate reason for preferring the novel form to the anthology. There is a place for poetry in the novel, but the novel and poetry are not one and the same. Without wishing to call on the history of the novel to support this statement, for this would suggest that the novel should be bound by tradition, it is perhaps enough to point out that the novel and the poem require a different type of attention from the reader. The poet who publishes his poems in a novel does not get the close, concentrated attention his writing requires. The reader's eye is drawn on by the smooth flow of the lines, and there is a tendency for the images to flow into each other and become blurred - it is in the end a question of typography. The poetic novelist who limits the poetry in his novels is more successful as a novelist that the poetic novelist who dispenses with prose.

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1 Quoted by J. McCormick, Catastrophe and Imagination, 1959.

Chapter 3 Part C:

The Allegorical Novel

Frank Kermode [1] traces the development of myth to its present status:

> The original function of myths, some say, was the maintenance of social stability by the recall of absolutely true stories which explained how things came to be as they were. This is not, in our place and time, a use for myths; and whenever somebody tries to employ them for social or political purposes we expect mischief . . . But what gave myth its modern prestige? One landmark is Nietzsche's attack on Socrates. . . . In a Nietzschean world of fiction, myths regain status; but they have still no real use, as they had for the archaic believer. The story of the rehabilitation of myths for their use in explaining not only archaic societies but the dark side of the modern mind is familiar: it is a different, an essentially post-Nietzschean story. .... Freudians . .... and Jungians . . . . are committed to explanation in terms of hypothetical archaic origins.

There are "archetypal" myths, such as those of Prometheus, Job, Sisyphus, Samson, Oedipus, Narcissus; and there are myths where the story, rather than the situation, provides the model, such as those of Philoctetes and Orpheus. The first group, the archetypal ones, "are ever-repeated typical experiences rooted in the human condition." The great significant works in the history of fiction are variations of such archetypal situations and conflicts which first occur in mythology, and are re-stated in the specific language of the period." [2]

It is the re-appearance of the second group in contemporary fiction which has been the cause of some controversy. J. McCormick [3] suggests that, traditionally, English and American novelists have been suspicious of the conscious use of symbols and their organisation into allegory. ". . . Recently, however, a group of novelists has adopted

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1 'This Time, That Time', Continuities, 1968.
2 A. Koestler, The Trail of the Dinosaur, 1955.
3 Catastrophe and Imagination, 1957.

symbols and allegory as a conscious device." The key word here is "device". The writers McCormick referred to have deliberately taken myths and re-worked them in contemporary terms. Whether their novels gain in significance from such techniques, or whether it is a spurious significance, is the crux of the debate today.

Philip Rahv [1] summarises the argument:

> The exponents of myth keep insisting on its seminal uses, appealing indiscriminately to Yeats and Joyce and Mann and other exemplars of the modern creative line, while the opponents point to the regressive implications of the new-fangled concern with myth, charging that at bottom what it comes to is a kind of nebulous religiosity. . . . To be sure, not all exponents of myth are of one type. Some make no excessive claims; others . . . blow up myth into a universal panacea, proclaiming that the "reintegration of the myth" will not only save the art but will lead to no less than the cure of modern ills and ultimate salvation. . . the cultism of myth is patently a revival of romantic longing.

The "reintegration of myth" presents peculiar problems for a writer whose public, in contrast to the mediaeval audience, "does not believe that correspondences exist between the material and spiritual world, and they do not automatically expect every incident or object to have symbolic importance. No conventions of allegory exist. . . ." [2] The revival of classical myths to provide a ready-made plot depends for its effectiveness on the reader having some knowledge of the original story and, as a reviewer [3] remarked, no such assumption can be made, for "classical myths have been silently dropped as topics of literary conversation." The re-writing of a classical myth may be an exercise in ingenuity, but this in itself does not make the material significant, or the novel profound. Such works must succeed on the realistic level, as novels, before they achieve symbolic significance.

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1 'The Myth and the Powerhouse', The Partisan Review Anthology 1962, ed. W. Phillips and P. Rahv, 1962.
2 C.B. Cox, The Free Spirit, 1963.
3 TLS 2, 1963.

P. West [1] wrote: "Myth alone does not make good literature: but good literature of any kind can profit from the presence of myth - and best of all on a take-it-or-leave-it basis. The meaning is that part of the novel which keeps us busy while the myth works on us more intimately."

Some of the novels to be discussed in this section achieve this ideal state, others do not. The most surely successful allegorist, William Golding, is discussed first. He is followed by a group of novelists who share a common approach to myth: Iris Murdoch, Janice Elliott, A.S. Byatt, Janet Warnke and John Symonds. The last writers to be discussed here do not form a group, although some of them are linked to each other: Janet Frame, Robert Shaw, Nigel Dennis, P.H. Newby, Thomas Hinde, Andrew Sinclair and John Bowen.

WILLIAM GOLDING V.S. Pritchett [2] called William Golding, "the most original of our contemporaries". He is one of our best poetic novelists, one of our liveliest and most successful experimental novelists; he is a good traditional novelist, excelling in characterisation and narrative drive. His originality does not lie in any one of these talents, but in the total vision which directs their combination. The form of his novels is an expression of this vision.

A reviewer [3], writing of The Spire (1964), suggested that there was no adequate critical term for the form of Golding's novels, although he himself calls them myths or fables. Most commentators prefer to describe him as an allegorist, but whichever term is used, it is inadequate. The massive metaphorical structure of his novels is not

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1 The Modern Novel, 1965.
2 The Working Novelist, 1965.
3 TLS 3, 1964.

used to provide a ready-made structure (as in Janice Elliott's The Singing Head, for example), or to provide an excuse for fanciful excursions into the territory of symbolism (as Iris Murdoch uses it). Golding's allegories are carefully constructed analogical expressions of moral ideas, moral ideas which derive from such thinking as this:

> [1] I believe that man suffers from an appalling ignorance of his own nature. I produce my own view, in the belief that it may be something like the truth. I am fully engaged in the human dilemma . . . .
> In all my books I have suggested a shape in the universe that may, as it were, account for things.

> [2] Before the Second World War I believed in the perfectibility of social man . . . . It is possible that today I believe something of the same again: but after the war I did not because I was unable to. . . . I believed then that man was sick - not exceptional man, but average man. I believed that the condition of man was to be a morally diseased creation and that the best job I could do at the time, was to trace the connection between his diseased nature and the international mess he gets himself into. . . . Man is a fallen being, gripped by original sin. His nature is sinful and his state perilous.

Golding, then, is concerned with the nature of man. He is "striving to move behind the conventional matter of the contemporary novel to a view of what man, or pre-man, is really like when the facade of civilized behaviour falls away."[3] To this end he isolates his characters, placing them in settings which are remote in time or place (only The Pyramid, 1967, does not have this quality of isolation). He thus avoids the merely contemporary, the social or the subjective.

Although the essence of allegory is that it resists simplification and explication, some idea of the basic mythic patterns of Golding's books can be given.

In Lord of the Flies (1954), perhaps his most explicit allegory, he suggests that evil does not come from outside

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1 An interview reported in TLS 3, 1964.
2 'Fable', Hot Gates, 1965.
3 F.R. Karl, A Reader's Guide to the Contemporary English Novel, 1963.

(the "Beast"),or from other people (Jack), but as Simon perceives, it is present in all men. The island is a Paradise, the children are Innocents, but the myth of the Fall is handled ironically.

In The Inheritors (1955), the dying ape-men are innocents; innocent of both evil and knowledge. The New Men, who have achieved a high state of evolution, and of knowledge, replace them. They, the first homo sapiens, are not innocent: awareness and rational intelligence seem to be inextricably connected with human sin. The First Man was a Fallen Man.

In Free Fall (1959), Sammy Mountjoy, a modern man, tries to trace the moment in his life when he lost his innocence and with it his power to choose.. J. Gindin [1] suggests that the metaphor is Faustian, for Sammy finally localises his loss of freedom in his decision, made out of pride and egoism, to pursue Beatrice.

> "If I want something enough I can always get it provided I am willing to make the appropriate sacrifice."
> What will you sacrifice?
> "Everything".

By sacrificing Beatrice, he is sacrificing his soul, and from that point his natural propensity to sin was hardened.

> I had lost my power to choose. I had given away my freedom. I cannot be blamed for the mechanical and helpless reaction of my nature. What I was I had become.

The title refers to the momentous choice in Eden and seems, too, to imply that we all have to make the same choice; that we are all free to fall.

Pincher Martin (1956) has links with Free Fall in its use of the Faustian metaphor, for Pincher has sold his soul to Satan in his monstrous pride and selfishness. On the rock he fights against the dissolution of the self, and for

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1 Postwar British Fiction, 1963.

seven days his will creates "an unreal heaven, a temporary hell, his escape from death".[1]

> I was always two things, mind and body. Nothing has altered. Only I did not realize it before so clearly.

Martin refuses to accept death, heaven, Divine Love - the allegory can be variously interpreted - for that would bring loss of self. Both Sammy and Pincher show the folly of trying to control the world rationally, for both are unaware that rationality can be a kind of devil, especially when it is attached to a voracious ego.

In The Spire (1964), Golding returns to a remote setting - mediaeval Salisbury - where he achieves an isolation of his characters much in the same way as he did in Lord of the Flies and The Inheritors. The central symbol here is the spire which Jocelin builds with the power of his will. But: "There is no innocent work. God knows where God may be." The spire is many things. It is a monument to man's aspirations to God, but it is also a phallic symbol, for the cathedral is both a diagram of prayer and a diagram of a man's body. It is built on poor foundations, with rubble-filled pillars. Although it tilts, it still stands. It is imperfect because man is imperfect, and the confusion of Jocelin's motives is reflected in the final structure.

Although Golding's metaphors can be read as orthodox Christian statements about the nature of man, he is not concerned with church dogmas. The primacy of evil and its concomitant, man's lost innocence, are his chief themes, but he is a moralist and not a writer of moralities. His "faith" is based upon his interpretation of the moral life of the individual, and "he cares about the condition of

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1 William Golding, Mark Kinkead-Weekes and Ian Gregor, 1967.

human life even though he deals with the depravity of man."[1]

[2] And there is pity for the pain they feel. In The Inheritors it is the obscure pain of a baffled and dying group of ape men . . . . In Pincher Martin . . . the pain is in the fight against physical hurt and loss of consciousness, in the struggle to put his educated will against his terrors. In Lord of the Flies . . . the pain is in the struggle between the boys who revert through fear to the primitive and turn into savage hunters, and those who are trying vainly to preserve foresight and order. . . . Pain is simply the whole condition of man.

Golding's allegories are not patterns manipulated by a master-mind, for he uses all his powers as a traditional novelist to make his situations real, and to make the reader feel the pain and care. It is perhaps this combination of allegorist and realist which makes Golding unique in contemporary fiction, In none of his novels, even the most "difficult", does he forget ". . . the concrete in his search for symbolic action."[3] In Pincher Martin, for example, the rock is real, and Pincher's physical suffering is real: on one level this is a story of a torpedoed sailor fighting for survival. The shock of the ending shows the extent to which the reader has been convinced of the reality or truth of this struggle.
In smaller details, too, he convinces. The conch in Lord of the Flies, for example, is a beautiful object, and the symbolic significance it acquires never destroys the actuality of the shell.

There is in Golding's novels an overwhelming sense of detail of the physical world, and although this in itself is not unusual in a writer, it is unusual in an allegorist.

A reviewer wrote:

[4] the texture of myths and fables tends to be bare and general - Golding's novels are full of sharp particulars and this is his unique achievement - he has invented a fictional form which can impose schematic moral

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1 C.B. Cox, The Free Spirit, 1963.
2 V.S. Pritchett, The Working Novelist, 1965.
3 C.B. Cox, ibid.
4 TLS 3, 1964.

> coherence upon the actual texture of experience, without losing either.

F. Kermode [1], writing of Lord of the Flies drew attention to ". . . the new shapes produced by the pressure of a theme. . . it is a sharply imagined account, a new clear outline, of what one vaguely knew . . ." J. Gindin [2] has commented on the way his metaphors ". . . permeate all the details and events of the novels." V.S. Pritchett [3] sum up Golding's unique qualities with these perceptive remarks:

> By their nature, his subjects . . . could easily become the pasteboard jigsaw of allegory, pleasing our taste for satire and ingenuity, but the pressure of feeling drives allegory out of the foreground of his stories. He is a writer of intense visual gifts, with an overpowering since of nature and an extraordinary perception of man as a physical being in a physical world, torn between a primitive inheritance and the glamour of an evolving mind.

William Golding has overcome the difficulties of constructing modern allegories and has opened up new possibilities for the form. He is certainly one of the greatest novelists of his time, and perhaps the only one whose place on Parnassus is assured.

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1 'The Later Golding', Continuities, 1968.
2 Postwar British Fiction, 1963.
3 The Working Novelist, 1965.

IRIS MURDOCH is one of the most admired - and written about - writers to have been published since the war. Her first novel, Under the Net, was published when she was 35, in 1954, and the maturity of her approach to a subject which was enjoying a popular vogue at the time, attracted the favourable attention of the critics.[1] Of the ten novels she has published since Under the Net, one is a love story (The Sandcastle, 1957), one is an historical romance (The Red and the Green, 1965), and the rest all display, some to a lesser extent that others, Iris Murdoch's fascination with the gothic romance.[2] She uses the gothic romance to construct allegories. Three novels have been chosen to show her development as an allegorist - The Flight from the Enchanter (1955), The Bell (1958) and A Severed Head (1961)

The Flight from the Enchanter has the gaiety and the sense of fun, of pure play, which distinguished her first novel, but it also seemed to indicate that she was developing in an altogether different direction. All her characters are under spells or enchantments, held in a kind of emotional captivity by another person or force, but they are finally driven, by their own natures, to flee enchantment. F.R. Karl[3] sees this book as falling between two camps, the frivolous and the serious. G.B. Fraser[4] finds fault with her characters, who are all strange, all surprising. It is "perhaps precisely the lack of some representative of solid, conventional standards, some symbol for everyday acceptance or discontent", which makes them

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1 Under the Net is discussed in Chapter 5A, page 41
2 Discussed in Chapter 7, page 66
3 A Reader's Guide to the Contemporary English Novel, 1963.
4 'The Solidity of the Normal', International Literary Annual 1959, ed. J. Wain.

all seem puppet-like. Mischa, the central figure, constantly recurs in her later novels as a sinister, powerful and enigmatic force.

The Bell is possibly Iris Murdoch's best novel. In it she achieves a successful synthesis of the traditional and the experimental. The novels which followed have shown little real development from this point, and the most recent ones are retrogressive. It would be needlessly repetitive to discuss all the novels which followed The Bell, so only brief mention of some of them will be made.

The Bell is about a group of people in a lay religious community. The setting is partly a novel means of assembling diverse characters under one roof, which it does simply and naturally, but it is also essential to the theme, for the characters define and discover themselves in relation to it. In one way or another the lives of all the characters are changed by the events of that summer. The chief event is their attempt to place a new bell on the tower of the nearby abbey, an attempt which fails when it falls into the lake because a bridge has been tampered with. Dora and Toby, who are intruders rather than members of the group, find the old bell which had been lost for many years and recover it (there is a superb technical description of the rescue).

The symbol of the bell can be variously interpreted. It can be seen as a postulant, a means of entering religious life for each of the people involved. But the effort of human beings to construct and particularise their salvation is undermined by human emotion, action and behaviour. The members of the religious community are fundamentally

amateurs, compromising between the spiritual and physical world. The old bell is sent to the British Museum as an historical curiosity, which suggests perhaps that the tradition of the past is meaningful only for antiquaries and is removed from the central issues of experience.

Iris Murdoch has been criticised for her use of the bell as a symbol, chiefly because it is an arbitrary one. As C.B. Cox [1] points out, ". . . there is no inherent reason why the bell should represent absolute values, and so her fanciful development of plot to illustrate this meaning often appears rather forced. This type of allegory can fully succeed only if the literal sense is dramatically coherent in its own right." G.B. Fraser [2] wrote: ". . . one has a strong feeling of latent meaning there, rather than knowledge of the meaning." A. Burgess [3] comments: ". . . she took the dangerous way of making her own myths". P. West [4] remarked: ". . . the tensions within the bizarre religious community prompt her into unhappy symbolism." J. Wain [5], writing of her novels generally, points out that she sometimes seems to construct her books from the outside, ". . .so that the story pivots on rather contrived pieces of symbolism." The symbolism in The Bell is very much less contrived than the symbols of some of her later novels, for it becomes a genuine part of the structure.

Iris Murdoch is more surely successful with the traditional material of the novel. The two chief characters, Michael, the leader of the community, and Dora, who is

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1 The Free Spirit, 1963.
2 'The Solidity of the Normal', International Literary Annual 1959, ed. J. Wain.
3 Urgent Copy, 1968.
4 The Modern Novel, 1965.
5 Essays on Literature and Ideas, 1963.

only there because her husband requested her to come, are the ones most affected by events. Michael is forced to realise that what he had thought to be his religious vocation, the divinely ordered pattern of his life, was largely a projection of a naïve self-importance and a sublimation of his homosexual impulses. He learns the truth of the maxim: "To leave the world is not to leave the temptations of the world." Dora, spirited, sensual and unintellectual, is a cheerful pagan who achieves a measure of self-knowledge. Her first appearance in the novel is characteristic - she steps off a train with a butterfly but without her luggage. Her relationship with her husband (and with her lover) is based on sexual need. She is unsure of herself and of other people and only on the subject of painting is she confident of her judgements. Her "worldliness" is in marked contrast to the "spirituality" of the community, but when the community breaks up, it is Dora who has gained most from her experiences. She leaves both husband and lover to return to her interrupted art studies and to teach. The community has shown up the fundamental nastiness of her lover, and it has also made her realise that she herself is less shallow than she had thought and that she can change her life.

The minor members of the community are also forced into a self-awareness and self-honesty they had not had before. Cathy, who was to enter the convent as a postulant, tries to drown herself when she realises th t her love is for Michael, not for God. There is also Nick, who had been the cause of Michael's dismissal from his teaching job years before, and now lives in a cottage in the garden of the abbey, a mysterious, drunken creature. He kills

himself when he believes that Michael is attracted to Toby. Toby, the youngest person there, strives to prove his manhood and become accepted as an adult. The other characters are sketched swiftly and neatly - their presence is felt but they do not intrude into the foreground. Most of them are species of cranks, attracted by the refuge from the world that the community offers.

In her descriptions of the buildings, the bell, and its rescue, and in her characterisation, Iris Murdoch shows herself to be a fine traditional novelist. There is a strong sense of physical reality, and this is important for it ties the novel down and prevents it from flying off into fantasy. Although the symbolism in the novel is not always successful, she has it under complete control.

Iris Murdoch has been influenced by Freud, Sartre and Proust. In her book on Sartre [1], she writes:

> Sartre, like Freud, finds in the abnormal the exaggerated forms of normality. His more lurid characters are to show us, either by direct analysis . . . or half-symbolically . . . something of the malaise of the human spirit in face of its freedom. Like Freud too, Sartre uses a mythology or picture of the mind in terms of which the individual case can be described.

Iris Murdoch's approach to her characters in her later novels is very much like this. In many of them the symbols become all-important, and there is a marked retreat away from realism towards fantasy. Her characters become increasingly abnormal. As J. Gindin [2] points out, the central theme in her novels is man's divided nature:

> Man . . . is part creature, part rational and conscious being. He has a strong need for the definition, the precision, his conscious nature can provide. But he also needs to limit the definition, to recognise that elaborate definitions, generalizations, make splendid targets for the shafts of the creature, the separate and particular and often unconscious situations that make up human experience.

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1 Sartre, Romantic Rationalist, 1953. Chapter 2.
2 Postwar British Fiction, 1963.

The novels which followed The Bell focus on the irrational side of man, to the almost total exclusion of the rational with the result that she is no longer writing about people but about impulses. Her novels become increasingly more stereotyped and stylised in construction, with her puppets performing an intricate and carefully-patterned dance which exerts its own fascination but is rarely meaningful

A Severed Head was described by F.R. Karl [1] as a:

> . . . Restoration bedroom farce transformed into modern cultural drama. Through delineation of various patterns of love. both normal and perverted, she is trying to explore the contemporary boundaries of freedom and restriction. One critic said that she was attempting to transcend reality, in The Bell through religious symbols, here through a metaphysical examination of love.

M. Bradbury [2] suggests that the book satirises the liberal spirit, the Bloomsbury notion that personal relationships are all, that nothing should be withheld, and yet that the disorder and repression behind our patterns of feeling can be decently concealed.

The book revolves around Honor Klein, an anthropology don, who represents the primitive, nonrational id. The head, the centre of rational thought, is symbolically severed by her samurai sword; rational explanations of human behaviour, such as Martin attempts, are shown to be inadequate.

Iris Murdoch is perhaps an acquired taste, but even those who have acquired it must be disturbed by the extraordinarily slap-dash writing in her most recent novels. The Nice and the Good (1968) is discussed in Chapter 7 as an example of a detective story, but in Bruno's Dream (1969) she has

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1 A Reader's Guide to the Contemporary English Novel, 1963.
2 'The Taste for Anarchy', The List., 22.2.1962.

written a novel which has even less to commend it than her previous Christmas book. The novel begins well with a portrait of an old man, Bruno, and in the first few chapters it seems that the author is intending to explore new territory. But the familiar mish-mash of thick symbolism, mystery, sudden violence, puppet characters, fiends and abnormal sex takes over. What promised to be an exciting study of old age becomes a woman's magazine-ish love story, or stories. At her best Iris Murdoch writes with beautiful, taut clarity. At her worst she writes like this:

> [1]'Oh God,' said Lisa.
> 'I love you, Lisa.'
> 'I know. I love you too.'
> 'Oh my darling -.'
> 'I'm sorry, Miles.'
> 'Don't be sorry. It's wonderful.'
> 'I never thought you - why suddenly now, Miles, what happened?'
> 'I don't know. I feel I've loved you for years only I was blind to it. You were so necessary.'
> 'Yes, perhaps. But it wasn't like this.'
> 'I know. This is sudden. And oh my God it's violent, Lisa. I feel I shall die of it.'

He doesn't die, of course: Only Bruno dies, and the others live happily ever after, having survived some of the most tortuously contrived action Iris Murdoch has ever put into a novel. As a writer she has become the victim of her own success. She has found a formula and is working it to death. Her allegories of the irrational in man have become self-indulgent sexual fantasies.

JANICE ELLIOTT is a disciple of Iris Murdoch. She has the same prediliction for Gothicisms, symbolism, involved and unlikely plots, and so on, but she handles dialogue and description far less capably than does Iris Murdoch at her best.

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1 <u>Bruno's Dream</u>, page 160.

The Godmother (1966) shows an almost point-by-point similarity with Iris Murdoch's Bruno's Dream (1969), but the similarities presumably arise because the two novelists share similar interests. In The Godmother, an elderly spinster, Helen, lives alone in a crumbling mansion. She is the focal point of the book (as Bruno is in Iris Murdoch's novel) and is visited by various characters, including a sinister devil-figure, Jacko, who has appeared in various guises in most of Iris Murdoch's novels.

> There was a pattern. Till now so obscure, so shifting, as to be unrecognisable. But now defined as a star, or flower shape. At the centre, fixed, Helen, the old woman, who now could no longer move from her bed. And at the points of the crystal the others: James, Dorothy, Anne. Even Mrs Harold. They imagined, all of them, except perhaps Anne who dimly knew otherwise, that they lived in a world of their own. Subaqueous or subterranean, each experienced, in his own way, below the recognition, a pull to the centre.

This is also the basic pattern of Murdoch's novels, and the action is not dissimilar. Violence erupts, James's wife kills herself, the village children attack the house, and Jacko, who has disappeared, is reported to have killed an old woman. The novel ends on a sentimentally happy note with the right people living happily ever after.

In 1967 Janice Elliott published The Buttercup Chain, which, in spite of its thick symbolism towards the end, is no more than a girlish fantasy where all the characters swop partners in an imitation of the Murdochian dance in A Severed Head. Its subject is the kind of life made possible only if two things which were until recently thought indispensable, are dispensed with: privacy and guilt. It lacks the profundity to make this disturbing.

A reviewer wrote [1]: "Miss Elliott writes very readably, in breathless little sentences you can almost read a lisp into. . . . The talk is monosyllabic, which tires no one . . . it is all as bland and meaningless as the adman's posed landscapes with figures."

In The Singing Head (1968), Janice Elliott re-writes the myth of Orpheus in the setting of a college campus on the Sussex Downs. The narrative is constantly broken with short quotations from Ovid and Robert Graves, clues to the forgetful or unacademic of how her "spiritual detective thriller" will be unravelled in subsequent chapters. She is courageous in tackling such a subject, particularly so in tackling it after Iris Murdoch's failure in A Severed Head seven years earlier. Unfortunately, most of her attention is given to the working out of the myth, with the result that her characters, including her central one, Marcus, have little reality. Marcus is given to endless introspection; his colleagues to endless calculating and plotting. Janice Elliott is less generous with the helpings of sexual oddities than is Miss Murdoch, but she is equally generous with passages of baroque fantasy.

For those who have not acquired a taste for the Murdochian gothic novel, there is little of interest in Miss Elliott's novels, for there are none of the brilliantly written scenes which illuminate even Iris Murdoch's poorest works. That there should be so many points of resemblance between the two novelists is disturbing, for it suggests either that Janice Elliott is following a fashion, or that the much admired originality of Iris Murdoch is an easily-imitated gimmick.

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1 TLS, 25.5.1967.

A.S. BYATT has written an expository study of Iris Murdoch, and the influence of this writer is apparent in her own novels, particularly in her use of symbolism and fantasy, and in her exploration of "the dark unknown".

Shadow of the Sun (1964) is an ambitious novel which does not succeed at all levels. A sensitive, misunderstood adolescent girl, Anna, lives a fantasy life in a household dominated by her father, who is one of the greatest novelists of his day. Anna is seduced by her father's Boswell, Oliver. There are violent upheavals, and the book ends on a faintly pessimistic note with Anna recognising that her future lies with Oliver, and that she will never be truly "free". Anna is flat and negative, and her creative father is beyond A.S. Byatt's powers to make convincing. The novel is interesting chiefly because it offers a contrasting treatment of material which Antonia Byatt's sister, Margaret Drabble, has used in her novels. Where Antonia is over-sensitive and inclined to be dull, Margaret is down-to earth and inclined to be superficial. A.S. Byatt shows many of the defects and merits of the Moderns in her writing, Margaret Drabble does the same for the Contemporaries.

In The Game (1967), A.S. Byatt handles her material more surely. Two young sisters come to terms with their irreconcilable antagonism towards each other by evolving an elaborate Arthurian fantasy along the lines of the junior Brontë chronicles. They also develop a competititve attachment to the same young zoologist, who goes abroad. Cassandra becomes an English literature don specialising in mediaeval romance, and Julia marries,

has children, and writes novels about domestic imprisonment. The zoologist's return - they see him first on a television programme about snakes - affects each of them differently. For Cassandra, he and his jungle become part of her fantasy life, which is shaken when she eventually meets him face to face. His return reminds Julia of her past, and she publishes a novel which "tells all". For her it is an act of exorcism, but for Cassandra it is a betrayal, and she kills herself.

JANET WARNKE A Pursuit of Fairies (1967) is another Murdochian novel. The central figure is an old woman who, after four husbands and a travelling life, retires to a villa in Switzerland and collects a number of "oddities" around her, (a very well-worn method of assembling diverse characters under one roof). "Systematically and thematically there are odd affinities with Iris Murdoch: that interesting household, references to a 'demon lover', Mrs Dartley's unforgivable musing, 'I am the widow of the century'. . . ." [1]

JOHN SYMONDS Kathleen Nott, reviewing John Symonds's fifth novel, The Hurt Runner (1968) wrote: [2]

> . . . it accomplishes a remarkable double-cross in technique. For if there is such a thing as an anti-novel, this is the novel that absorbs and transcends it; saying, in effect, 'Your world is mad indeed, a mere congeries of discrete effects and visual moments, but I will show you the moments and events as the swarm of real lives!'.

The "real lives" are those of "Baby", the dwarf illegitimate child of a promiscuous mother who reads existential philosophy, a manic-depressive grandmother, a hippie who puts

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1 Ob R. 21.5.1967.
2 Ob R. 15.12.1968.

Baby on LSD, and so on: a collection of grotesques. The bizarre plot has a similiarly fantastic quality. Symonds seems to be experimenting with material and action rather than with style, for his treatment is firmly naturalistic. It is this which saves the novel from being a fairy story and which makes his people and their situations so persuasively real. The Murdochian material is handled in a witty and matter-of-fact manner - a disturbing combination. Baby's chief problem is that people do not treat him as if he were a normal young man, which he is in his desires, needs and emotions. He and the other "grotesques" are not allegorical figures dreamed up by the author; they are real people.

JANET FRAME is a New Zealander and her novels have local settings, but they aim at - and achieve - universality. Her novels are essentially moral fables or allegories.

A State of Siege (1967), her seventh novel, showed a retired art teacher living in a remote and beautiful island where she had gone to paint. But the bitter conclusion is that, after failing to create art in society, she cannot do any better alone.

The Rainbirds (1968) is a neat inversion of the tale of Odysseus, or of Lazarus - a man returns from the dead to find that his family and friends have adjusted to his absence, and that there is now no room for him.

Godfrey Rainbird, an English-born New Zealander, is an ordinary suburban citizen who does his anxious best to become an unremarkable member of the narrow, smug, New

New Zealand society, a society which the author neatly satirises:

> Godfrey soon discovered that everyone in New Zealand was born (or at least conceived) among sandbells and lupins, and from the time children were held naked against Dad's legs while the water flapped over the blue with cold titty-spots to the early morning sneaking on gnarled manuka-stick legs down to the sea for 'an old man's dip', the people of New Zealand regarded the sea as they regarded the land: it was a personal possession.

Godfrey is knocked down by a truck, declared dead, and wakes from his coma in the mortuary. His return is an embarrassment to his wife, relatives, employer - and the community. The latter is savagely satirised for its thoughtless conformism, which conceals a malicious, and even vicious, cruelty. Beatrice, Godfrey's wife, is a natural conformist:

> Beatrice Muldew of Matuatangi, South Island, was twenty two. Twenty one and the golden key on the kewpie-ridden six-tiered cake had not brought the promised rewards.

She cannot cope with the new situation and kills herself, taking with her her pathetic secret - every week-end she had visited her husband's empty grave and laid flowers on it. Godfrey himself has been affected by his experience and by the reactions of the press and public to it:

> "I don't feel like an inhabitant of earth any more - I feel as if I've been blasted back to where they kept telling me to go when I first came here - remember? Go back to your own country."

He loses contact with the normal world, and even printed words become gibberish, yet have a crazy kind of relevance to his plight. The Lord's Prayer contains phrases like this:

> hollowed be they mane;thy dingkum come . . . give us this day our daily dread and frogvie us pour press-stares . . .

Godfrey's withdrawal into himself is recorded in a stream of consciousness which is, at time, over-ornate, but which contrasts interestingly with the asperity of the author's

voice. The book ends with a copy of the Dunedin Tourist Office brochure which draws attention to the beautiful cemetery where the Rainbirds are buried. The Rainbirds has been discussed in some detail because it is one of the few contemporary novels to have incorporated a mythic structure into a social novel, with complete naturalness. Janet Frame has not had to torture her material into mythic shapes, as Janice Elliott had to in The Singing Head, and neither has she had to develop her own myths, as Iris Murdoch does. The allegory is not imposed on intractable material: it arises naturally from the story.

ROBERT SHAW P. West [1] called Robert Shaw "an apprentice Greene" and commended his "brilliantly imaginative and partly allegorical first novel, The Hiding Place (1959), and his "almost Dostoeveskian second performance, The Sun Doctor," (1961), which he described as "almost a burnt-out case". West compares Shaw to Beckett in the profoundness of his understanding of dissolution, which Shaw achieves by hemming in his characters with colour and social fabric, Beckett by paring all that away. In The Man in the Glass Booth (1967), Robert Shaw tackles - understandably a little tentatively - a highly emotional subject. His hero is a Jewish property tycoon who dresses up in SS uniform in secret, keeps waxwork effigies of the Nazi leaders, and drops quotations from Hitler into his normally Jewish utterances. He behaves like a hunted man - and is kidnapped and taken to Israel to stand trial as the war criminal Dorff. In the dock (the glass booth of the title), he boasts of his deeds, gives a list of his

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1 The Modern Novel, 1965.

compliant Jewish assistants, and accepts full responsibility for his actions. He is the first war criminal to tell the truth, not only about his own feelings, but also about the complicity of the Jews in the Final Solution. The self-deception of the judges, and the hypocrisy of the Germans, are both attacked. But a spectator recognises "Dorff": he was a Jewish prisoner, and the real Dorff is dead. The charade is over.

As a fable or allegory it is not quite as pointed as this summary suggests, and the character of the hero is rather more ambiguous. It is more successful on the level of a suspense story, and here the hero's vigorous, fast-talking Jewish New York slang keeps the story lively.

In 1969, Shaw published A Card from Morocco, a less ambitious novel as regards subject and theme, and a less successful one. The key to both this book and to Shaw's earlier ones is given in these lines of speech:

> "Do you think if whatwent on in your mind actually worked out it would be disastrous? . . . I mean i what if a night fantasy became real. What if one made it real?"

The fantasies of the two heroes become real, or appear to, but "real" is also a fantasy. The result is a little confusing. The idea on which the novel is based is too flimsy, and it does not provide an acceptable excuse for venturing into fantasy.

NIGEL DENNIS 's partly allegorical Cards of Identity (1955) explores one of the characteristic themes of contemporary fiction: the search for identity. F.R. Karl [1] suggests that Dennis is returning to the themes of Kafka, Joyce, Conrad, Lawrence and Mann, "in whom the search for one's

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1 A Reader's Guide to the Contemporary English Novel, 1963.

identity is the cosmic quest for what one is." Dennis is preoccupied with the diminishing of the personality of man, diminishing not because he has lost his identity but because he voluntarily relinquishes it. In the past, every man knew who or what he was; in the contemporary world he requires constant exterior confirmation.

Nigel Dennis treats this theme satirically and his methods are experimental, as befits the theme, but G.S. Fraser [1] suggests that the satire is ambivalent:

> . . . it is partly satire on modern means of mass persuasion, and on the uneasiness which many people feel today unless they can adapt themselves to a stereoetyped role. But the cruel and frivolous members of the Identity Club seem to be regarded by Mr Dennis with a certain Nietzschean complicity, and the ruthlessness of the whole scheme is in the end distasteful.

The plot of Cards of Identity is an exposition of the theme. The members of the Identity Club hold their annual conference in a large country house. The neighbours who call are fitted out with new identities - butler, cook, gardener, and so on. The conference is held, case-histories and papers discussed, a play by "William Shakespeare" (The Prince of Antioch, or An Old Way to New Identity) is performed, and the novel ends in some confusion with the arrival of a suspicious policeman. The club members discreetly leave and the "staff" regain their old identities.

The purpose of the Identity Club is to manufacture identities, and they themselves are adept at sliding into any skin which is more appropriate or convenient at the time.

> [2] Identity is the answer to everything. There is nothing that cannot be seen in terms of identity. . . . Today, when it is rare to find any man who can be said to know his self, it is clubs such as ours which tell these

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1 The Modern Writer and His World, 1964 ed.
2 Cards of Identity, Part Two, page 100,(Penguin edition).

> sufferers who they are. . . . We . . . give our patients the identities they can use best. We can make all sorts of identities, from Freudian and Teddy Boy to Marxist and Christian. . . . Other clubs . . . insist that they merely reveal an identity which has been pushed out of sight. . . . We are proud to know that we are in the very van of modern development, that we can transform any unknown quantity into a fixed self, and that we need never fall back on the hypocrisy of pretending that we are mere uncoverers.

Dennis repeats, expands and enlarges on this theme: he provides case-histories which encompass the entire spectrum of contemporary man's most significant activities; he varies his approach to, and distance from, his material; he writes in a variety of styles, often achieving excellent pastiche. But the case-histories become repetitious, the jokes predictable, and the characters caricatures. The novel is based on a single idea and everything else is subordinated to exploring this idea. F.R. Karl [1] is perhaps right in suggesting that the novel becomes "an intellectual sport, a literary eccentricity", for Dennis lacks the humanizing touch which would give concrete significance to his material. It is a marvellously inventive and imaginative piece of work, but it is less a novel than a collection of essays and illustrations derived from a single idea.

P.H. NEWBY A Journey to the Interior (1946), P.H. Newby's first novel, is described by J. McCormick [2] as being "rich in present accomplishment and future possibility". Its subject and themes have been used again in several of his later novels. It concerns the discovery of a man's self through a journey or quest which has no logical motive. The motives are not merely mixed, but explosively contradictory. During the quest something happens to rejuvenate

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1 A Reader's Guide to the Contemporary English Novel, 1963.
2 Catastrophe and Imagination, 1957.

the character and make him fit for himself and for society. His characters seek a sort of exaltation. F.R. Karl [1] describes Newby's typical hero as : "a man who has lost his will and the novelist shows how he can be brought back from the interior self where the death wish has prevailed over the desire for life."

In The Barbary Light (1962), Newby "presents the complicated evil in man . . . as the product of a pattern of distrust." [2] As a boy, the hero had boarded a ship which the crew said was going to the Barbary coast, but they were joking, and they put him ashore a few miles away from home. The childhood betrayal dominates his life, the unsailed voyage becoming more real to him than if it had actually happened. The novel begins years later when he is is a Chartered Accountant and due to appear before the Disciplinary Committee. Instead, he goes to Tunis, leaving his wife and mistress. He is beaten up by robbers, returns home and discovers he feels nothing for his mistress but now has some understanding of his wife. He has seen the Barbary Light for what it was: an unattainable illusion, a worthless dream.

In this book, as in his next two novels, Newby explores the territory between dream and reality. Actuality and memory, fact and fantasy, the things that happen and the things that might have happened, all coexist on virtually equal terms. The quest, his boyhood adventure and the haunting of his wife by her dead husband have a hallucinatory, dream-like quality.

Newby writes a clear, straightforward prose, but makes use of a number of experimental techniques and shows

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1 A Reader's Guide to the Contemporary English Novel, 1963.
2 A. Burgess, The Novel Now, 1967.

". . . an admirable cultivation of the meanings and implications of these techniques." [1] A reviewer wrote that this book ". . . furthers his claim as a technical innovator". [2] He also remarked on: ". . . the sense of pressure of unknown or half-apprehended forces, a feeling that all is not what it seems, that gives his writing its characteristic tension."

One of the Founders (1965) is a more traditional novel, perhaps because it is a comedy., and in places a very good one. There is a brilliantly farcical scene of a duel between the hero and the man his former wife is now married to, and the dialogue is often lively and amusing. Like the hero in The Barbary Light, Hedges discovers that he has been pursuing the wrong ambitions and that his life is going in the wrong direction. With his marriage to a girl he has made pregnant, he frees himself from the sexual spell woven by his wife, and he also loses interest in a University building project which had, up till then, engaged most of his attention. It is as if his creative urge, his urge to build something, is satisfied in his new life.

P.H. Newby was awarded the Booker prize for Something to Answer For (1968). A reviewer [3] called it: ". . . an absorbing feat of narrative ingenuity, a study of psychological disorientation,which traces its plot-line with immense skill and resource through the mist of mental confusion which besets its main character." The hero, Townrow, goes to Egypt in 1956 at the request of the widow of a friend to investigate his friend's death. Soon after his arrival, he is hit over the head, and for the rest of

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1 J. MacCormick, Catastrophe and Imagination, 1957.
2 TLS 2, 1963.
3 TLS, 21.11.1968.

the novel he is never clear as to what is "real" and what is not. The fevered brain of Townrow is the reader's "guide" through the action. Newby discussed the novel in Books and Bookmen.[1]

> The whole problem in this book was one of making the situation of the central character, Townrow, and particularly his change of outlook, plausible and utterly convincing. So that I wanted to involve the reader in the situation with Townrow as much as I could. I could do that, I think, by subjecting the reader to a certain amount of surprise and uncertainty himself - so that he could rub his eyes and go back and say did he mean that, or so and so. . . . I don't believe in mystification or complication for the sake of the thing. But in this case I hoped by adopting a certain literary technique to involve the reader in the surprise and bewilderment which the central character is going through.

As a result of his horrifying experiences, Townrow undergoes a change of moral outlook, and his search for identity ends on a note of exaltation as he drifts on a small boat on the Mediterranean:

> He now knew he could not afford to surrender the smallest splinter of judgement to any government, organisation, cause or campaign. He was to trust only the immediate perceptions, what the eye saw, the nose smelled, and his hand touched.

In Books and Bookmen, P.H. Newby summed up his view of life:

> We're terribly vulnerable, weak animals in a cold and hostile universe. . . . Life is precarious. Life is hell and this is much more fundamental about a man than any thought about the particular social status he might happen to occupy. . . .
> There's a quality in the Arabic language where unless you're very careful you're talking about something that doesn't quite exist. . . . the Egyptian is . . . aware of a kind of contrast between appearance and reality, which I found enormously interesting.

P.H. Newby has become something of a coterie enthusiasm, but his novels are less profound than his admirers claim them to be. The "search for identity" makes for a lively adventure story; the idea that a man may reform when he has been through some traumatic experiences shows no deep insight into character; the contrast between appearance and reality is already overworked in novels.

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1 July, 1969.

THOMAS HINDE 's novels can be divided into three groups: "contemporary", "exotic" and "symbolic".[1] They have in common a concern with social change. He is not interested in the changes themselves ,but in the impact of social change on the individual. In the third group of novels the emphasis is shifted away from social changes to what could be termed "social pressures".

Of the two novels which comprise Games of Chance (1965), the second, The Investigator, can be taken as an example of his method. It is the story of the breakdown of an ordinary little man who is employed by a large anonymous firm to invent games. He develops a persecution complex, and also suspects that the firm is not what it seems; that it is a front for some more mysterious activities. He starts to collect "evidence", but reaches a point of desperate disintegration, and is taken to an asylum, which is where he writes this book. The reader sees everything through his eyes and because he cannot distinguish between what is real and what is imagined, neither can the reader. The careful documentation and the unsensational, very reasonable, tone of the book almost convince the reader of the man's sanity, especially as the things which happen are recognisable uncertainties which beset real people. Colleagues come and go unexpectedly; people attend mysterious "conferences"; the telephone rings but no one replies when you answer it; the loudspeaker system could hide a camera; the firm is huge and confusing: this is the sort of evidence which the narrator accumulates. He is eventually driven mad by his inability to come to terms with a fundamentally dishonest

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1 "contemporary": Mr Nicholas (1952), Happy as Larry (1957), For the Good of the Company (1961). "exotic": A Place Like Home (1962), The Cage (1962). "symbolic": Ninety Double Martinis (1963), The Day the Call Came (1964), Games of Chance (1965), The Village (1966), High (1968).

and progressively faster-moving society. The world of big business is to him incomprehensible, and therefore threatening and mysterious.

The Day the Call Came is also an exploration of the Kafka nightmare, and again the reader shares the hero's experiences. An apparently sane man, he believes he is employed by an unknown Master who tells him on his wireless receiver to "stand by", for what he only dimly knows. He begins to find the behaviour of his neighbours suspicious, eventually killing one in a state half of conviction, half of desperation.

The Investigator and The Day the Call Came are expressions of generalised anxiety, reflections of the helplessness of the individual in an elaborate bureaucracy. High is a further development of this theme. An Englishman lecturing in America, Maurice Peterson, writes a novel in which his own experiences and personality are transmuted into those of Peter Morrison, who is writing a novel about the campus which bears a striking similarity to a novel Maurice Peterson is reading about the campus . . . . Fantasy and reality are inextricable, and the adventures are experienced by Peterson as the sensitive, ineffectual, badly behaved but victimised lover, and Morrison as the rumbustious, Falstaffian man who lusts and kills in jealous rage. The hero seeks refuge in his fantasy self, his alter-ego, as an excape from, and a way of adjusting to, the unfamiliar society in which he finds himself.

> Suddenly he was desperately frightened. Would he ever again know anything for certain without at the same moment knowing and believing its exact opposite?

Thomas Hinde is a good conventional writer, and although his material is mystifying, there are no stylistic "tricks" ∴

to mystify it further. Although Thomas Hinde's novels invite comparison with P.H. Newby's in their materials and themes, the two writers treat their subjects very differently. Hinde's are less deliberately - and irritatingly - confusing than Newby's are wont to be. His characters are not driven far afield to exotic lands on some vaguely defined "quest"; they are very ordinary people who cannot cope with the complexities of the modern world. Their ordinariness, and the naturalistic style of his writing, make both them and their problems more credible and relevant than Newby's. Their experiences are common and their reactions seem logical, with the result that Hinde's novels are more disturbing than the wilder fantasies of P.H. Newby. Hinde does not have to knock his characters over the head in order to confuse them as to what is real and what is illusory: to Hinde's characters the modern world _is_ a nightmare.

ANDREW SINCLAIR _The Breaking of Bumbo_ (1959) and _My Friend Judas_ (1959), Andrew Sinclair's first novels, were comic campus novels not unlike Kingsley Amis's _Lucky Jim_. _The Hallelujah Bum_ (1963) is a beatnik novel indebted to Kerouac and Nabokov. His next two novels, _The Raker_ (1964) and _Gog_ (1967) are allegorical novels. The Raker is the name given to the man who collected the dead during the plague, and the hero of this novel, Adam Quince, an obituary writer for a newspaper, meets a man who has this nickname. Death is his business, and when the original Raker drinks hemlock, Adam Quince takes his place.

Gog has a rather more confused plot line, and the allegorical profundities are no clearer. Gog is a huge man dredged from

the sea in 1945. Amnesiac, he has no means of identification and only vague, dream-like memories of pre-war days. He walks southward from Scotland (like _The Hallelujah Bun_, this is an entertaining travelogue), has various adventures en route, and in London finds Magog, the eternal oppressor. The spiritual war between Gog and Magog is a confrontation between people (good) and Government (bad). Gog's journey through the mythology and ancient history of Britain is also a journey through post-war England, but the novel is highly derivative (Joyce, Tolkien, J.C. Powys, William Burroughs and the cinema are amongst his sources) and, in the end, pointless. It concludes with Gog's realisation that:

> A man is a man is a man. . . . He does not want Liberty, but to be free. He does not want Fraternity, but to have some brothers. A man's ribs are his own castle. There he dwells until he dies. As he can love his own person, so may he love each person and all persons.

It was a long journey to discover that. Andrew Sinclair is obviously aiming at significance in his novels, but he has not shown himself skilled at handling a mythological or allegorical structure. Both these novels are, in the final analysis, fantasies. They are interesting more for his vigorous, lively, and often poetic, style than for their more pretentious "messages".

JOHN BOWEN is another novelist who is at his best with conventional material. His two allegorical novels, _After the Rain_ (1958), which uses the Biblical metaphor of the Flood, and _A World Elsewhere_ (1965), a reworking of the Philoctetes myth, are contrived and stilted. In between these two novels, Bowen wrote two which are virtually documentaries: _Storyboard!_ (1960) and _The Birdcage_ (1962).

They are well-written and entertaining books, but too concerned with giving inside information on the worlds of advertising and television and, in The Birdcage, on how to cure scabies. The theme of loneliness runs through the novels but is not central as it is in his finest book, The Centre of the Green (1959). This traces a critical period in the lives of four members of the Baker family. Bowen has achieved allegorical or mythical significance without striving for it. His characters are wholly credible, and although they illustrate classic psychological themes, they are people first, types second. The possessive mother, the psychologically-disturbed son, the suicidal son, and the weak, rejected father: they have a life which is not derived from mythological significance. In this novel Bowen has derived the general from the particular: the particular has not been developed to illustrate the general.

Chapter 4 Part A:

The Chronicle Novel

The chronicle novel, also called by critics the Bildungsroman, the roman fleuve and the epic novel, may be a portrait of a family through several generations (as in Galsworthy's The Forsyte Saga) or it may be the life story of a single character(as in C.P. Snow's Strangers and Brothers). It aims at historical realism and its basic assumption is that objective social reality can best be presented in this manner. The reader is expected to relate not to myth but to the facts of life fictionally and voluminously compiled.

Trollope, rather than Proust or Zola, has been the model for the chronicle novelists in the second half of this century (although Proust has influenced such writers as Anthony Powell, and Angus Wilson has been influenced by Zola). Trollope's "parliamentary" and Barchester novels gave a compendious view of the nineteenth century

> [1] encompassing nobility, gentry, and the extension of the nobility and gentry in the society of the Continent; lawyers, doctors, clergymen, army and navy officers, painters, architects; civil servants as well as government officials of high rank; the publishing and political world; the world of the prosperous middle classes, in trade, in speculation, or in property; the shabby genteel; commercial travellers. . . . Indeed, Trollope appears to have omitted only the considerable world of industrial capitalism and labour, which he touches on indirectly.

No contemporary writer has attempted so large a canvas (few have had Trollope's wide experience) and they have concentrated instead on smaller sections or facets of society. Trollope and later Galsworthy wanted to show the flow of life (hence roman fleuve) rather than to compel

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1 Seymour Betsky, 'Society in Thackeray and Trollope", The Pelican Guide to English Literature 6, ed. B. Ford, 1966 ed.

life into narrative and plot. The modern adopter of the chronicle novel has changed the technique by giving the flow a direction, "his apprehension of social fragmentation and his political and ideological ideas acting as the lidade for determining direction." [1] The chronicle novel is a revival of the epic idea but with economic rather than heroic man in view.

The structural problems of the form are enormous, and contemporary writers have not always shown themselves equal to solving them. It is an exceptional novelist who can maintain a high standard of excellence throughout his work. The ambitious novelist who projects a long series of novels - five or more - is likely to find that the original impetus is lost in the early stages. The boredom of working on a single set of characters and the stamina and patience required often affect his work adversely. As A. Comfort [2] has pointed out:

> Only an eye to reward, or a superhuman sense of construction prevents this sort of undertaking . . . from becoming a damnable chore to the writer himself. . . . The vast novel-sequence is bound to sink, as it is sinking, out of the first line of technical excellence. and be inherited by the good second-rater, who has the patience to do it, and whose personality is not likely to act in short bursts as that of the primarily creative, intuitive type.

The problem of loss of impetus is a very important one and a division of the contemporary chronicle novelists based solely on the number of novels they intend to write or have written to complete their series, illustrates the effect of loss of impetus on the more ambitious novelists. Of the five novelists who have written five or more volumes in their series, only one, Henry Williamson, has shown few

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1 J. McCormick, Catastrophe and Imagination, 1957.
2 The Novel and our Time, 1948.

signs of flagging (and that perhaps because of the auto-biographical nature of his work). C.P. Snow, Anthony Powell, Doris Lessing and Simon Raven have all written series in which the first books are more vivid, fresh and alive than the later ones. This is partly because their most receptive stage has passed and the initial compulsion or inspiration is no longer so strong. At a time when the English novel is generally criticised for the narrowness of its focus, for the unambitiousness of even its best writers who are often content to write what they know they can do easily and well, it seems unfair to criticise those who attempt to enlarge the range of the novel. Their failure is not in intention, but in execution.

C.P. SNOW's Strangers and Brothers series began in 1940 with the publication of the title novel covering the years 1925 to 1933. The penultimate and tenth novel, The Sleep of Reason, set in 1963, was published in 1968. Snow's opus then is almost complete and it is possible to attempt an assessment of his achievement.

C.P. Snow's attacks on the Moderns were outlined in Chapter 2. His novels are in part a reaction to the Moderns, an illustration of his belief that the novel should have its roots in society, that it should have a moral, even didactic purpose. His rejection of the materials and aims of the Moderns was also a rejection of their methods and it is here that Snow's principal defect as a novelist becomes most apparent. Where the stream of consciousness novel tended to explore the inner and exclude the outer man, Snow reverses the process. His characters are developed,

insofar as he does develop them, as social figures and types, not individuals. Since Snow is dealing with motives which are often irrational, with men of ambitions, with matters of conscience, the irrational side of man needs to be explored, and not merely described or stated. Snow offers rational explanations of the irrational behaviour of men. The process of decision making is not as susceptible to this treatment as Snow implies. For example, in The Sleep of Reason, he rationalises the behaviour of the two young killers, but he cannot project himself imaginatively.

The most common criticism of the series is that Lewis Eliot, the narrator, is an unsatisfactory character. He is shadowy, growing more dim as he grows older, although his shadowiness gives him a useful chameleon-like ability to act whatever part he is called on by the author to play (lovesick young man, enterprising barrister, cool and intelliegent government official, compassionate family man with his second wife, wise older man, and so on). As Snow has chosen (primarily for structural reasons) to use a narrator rather than to be an omniscient author, a great deal depends on Eliot's character. He should be a man who interests the reader and he should also be a man whose comments, observations and insights into people and events are acute. For this he requires imagination - and Eliot has none. He is a very dull man. Snow's "businessman's prose" eliminates irony and poetry and the tone of somewhat pompous solemnity and earnestness is unrelieved.

The one-dimensional view of Eliot that we have would matter less if he had the power to make other characters vivid

and real, but this he rarely manages (Roy Calvert and George Passant are possible exceptions). He has an infuriating habit of introducing each new character with a sketch which does nothing to fix the character in the reader's mind - which is important where the cast is large.

> [1]He had a plump face, lemur-like eyes, a quiet, subtle, modulated voice.
>
> [2]He was a large young man, cushioned with fat, but with heavy bones and muscles underneath. He was already going bald, although he was only in his late twenties. The skin of his face was fine-textured and pink, and his smile was affable, open, malicious, eager to please and smooth with soft soap.
>
> [3]Lord Boscastle was both massive and fat; there was muscular reserve underneath his ample, portly walk, and he was still light on his feet.
>
> [4]He was a man of sixty, but his figure was well preserved, the skin of his cheeks fresh, rosy and unlined.
>
> [5]He was getting on for sixty, but he had kept his fair wavy hair, and he was well-preserved.
>
> [6]The colour in his irises had faded, and they were ringed with white. Otherwise he did not show the signs of extreme age: his cheeks were ruddy pink, his hair and beard silky but strong.

A more Dickensian approach would make his descriptions sound less like a passport application: height, weight, skin (fresh, pink, brown, lined or unlined), eyes (lemur-like or blue, shifty or steady), state of hair (if male), colour of dress (if female), state of preservation, estimated age, other distinguishing features.

Criticism of Snow's characterisation may seem carping, for it is not primarily people that interest him, but institutions

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Page numbers refer to the Penguin editions.
1 Monty Cave, <u>Corridors of Power</u>, p.14.chap.1.
2 Tom Orbell, <u>The Affair</u>, p.1., chap.1.
3 <u>The Light and the Dark</u>, p.19., chap.2.
4 The Master, <u>The Light and the Dark</u>, p.17., chap.2.
5 Nightingale, <u>The Affair</u>, p.27., chap.3.
6 Gay, <u>The Affair</u>, p.19, chap.2.

and "the power-relations of men in organized society"[1]. However they cannot in a novel be separated from the men who build and run the institutions; such an approach is a documentary one. As a documentary novelist Snow has considerable appeal to readers with a taste for arcane information: he gives guided tours to the privileged around Cambridge colleges, London society, scientific research stations, Parliament, the Civil Service, the legal profession and so on. The mechanics of college elections, of the process of government and the process of the law satisfy a curiosity which novelists rarely acknowledge. Snow also appeals to the curiosity of the reader about what goes on behind scenes, what lies behind the non-committal statements in newspapers.

It was suggested at the beginning of this section that long novel sequences such as this tax a writer's stamina. There is a tendency to become long-winded and repetitious, to become dull and lifeless and, in Snow's case, also to become censorious. The series perhaps reached its high-water mark with The Masters (1951) which is set in 1937. The novels which followed (with the possible exception of The Conscience of the Rich (1958) which also covers his earlier years, 1927 to 1936) have been disappointing. The college election of The Light and the Dark is expanded in The Masters and re-written as the expulsion of a Fellow in The Affair (1960). The pattern of the novels has become stereotyped - they all have the form of a detective story with a conflict or test providing the starting point of the narrative. Not only the same

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1 P. West in The Modern Novel, 1965, quoted from an article by C.P. Snow in the Kenyon Review, Autumn, 1961.

issues and conversations reappear, but even the same scenes. Snow writes good, if over-long, trial scenes - but they appear in one form or another in almost every novel. The novels leading up to The Masters are more personal and autobiographical, more deeply felt, than the later ones which tend to be demonstrations of decision making in various milieux. The young Eliot is involved; the middle-aged Eliot is less emotional, less perceptive, more self-satisfied and smug - and more critical of the New England.

Most alarming of all is Snow's romanticising of the power-seekers and his wholly unironic attitude to them. It does not apparently occur to him that to the outsider these men might seem petty and even feeble. The issues they face with such earnestness are not world-shaking. In The Light and the Dark (1947), for example, he writes: "Through most of the Easter term, Arthur Brown was busy with talks, deliberate arguments, discussions on tactics, and bargains. There were talks in all our rooms, late into the summer nights." The subject of these talks between the Fellows of one of the centres of higher education in Britain? Whether or not to elect Roy Calvert to a Fellowship. If the College is to be taken as a microcosm of the higher centres of power, the only possible response is to be appalled - and not, as Snow intends - to be awed.

Roy Fuller's review of The Sleep of Reason [1] ends with a fair summary of Snow's achievement:

> . . . Snow is perhaps the only living English novelist who from the experience of his life could have made something lastingly significant out of the direct issues of the age rather than, as most have to do with, the oblique effect of those issues on personal sensibility. But his work remains in the category of the merely if honourably entertaining and perhaps he has only himself to blame if captious critics occupy themselves in searching in it largely in vain for something higher.

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1 The List., 31.10.1968.

SIMON RAVEN began his novel sequence <u>Alms for Oblivion</u> with <u>The Rich Pay Late</u> (1964) and has added a novel to it each year since then (ten are projected). His subject is the English upper middle classes after the war.

> [1] The series is not planned as one long saga; each volume will present an independent story. But the ten major characters are all loosely connected with one another by birth or upbringing. If there is one theme which will dominate the series it is that human effort and goodwill are persistently vulnerable to the malice of time, chance, and the rest of the human race.

There is no chronological order, but the third, fourth and fifth novels to be published centre on Fielding Gray who, like Raven himself, was expelled from his school, an action which adversely affected his subsequent career. Gray develops as a plausible personality, but the others in the novels are seldom more than cartoons. Simon Raven is an accomplished thriller writer (<u>Brother Cain</u>, 1965 is one of his best known) and he applies thriller techniques to what is essentially C.P. Snow material. <u>Friends in Low Places</u>(1965)for example, revolves around the possession of a letter which would throw a new light on Suez and embarrass the present government. The people involved range from a gigolo to a prostitute, from a Cabinet Minister who agrees to make a deal to a slippery editor with special sexual requirements, and lurking in the background is a megalomaniac gambler. The action is fast-moving - too fast, for Raven only touches on subjects, such as the choice of a parliamentary candidate, which call out for a fuller exposition. Simon Raven's attitude to his characters and their power-games is refreshingly different from Snow's. All his characters are, in one way or another, rogues.

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1 Author's note to <u>Friends in Low Places</u>.

Expedience rather than conscience is the basis of their decisions - which is perhaps a more realistic view than Snow's. It is a pity that so often Simon Raven is lured away from his chief subject in pursuit of a good story, for his cynical view of the power-seeker is a necessary corrective to Snow's solemn respect. Whether Raven will be able to keep up the invention in the remaining five novels remains to be seen - he has already used more material and touched on more subjects than Snow's and Powell's novels put together.

ANTHONY POWELL Although Anthony Powell published his first novel, Afternoon Men, in 1931, it was not until 1951 that he embarked on his major work, his roman fleuve, The Music of Time, of which twelve novels are planned and nine published. On the first page of his first novel in the series, A Question of Upbringing, Powell's description of a Poussin painting called "A Dance to the Music of Time" gives the key to the whole design of the work. "It proposes that we contemplate the interaction of these brief lives as constituting a loosely woven pattern within which parallels, contrasts, repetitions will occasionally occur, sometimes planned by the characters, sometimes unexpected by them. Its emphasis is on the relations of the dancers to the dance." Anthony Powell's human beings are participants in a dance, a dance over which they have no control because its movements and their steps in it are governed by the music of time.

Powell chronicles the lives of Society and Bohemia in

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1 A. Mizener, The Sense of Life in the Modern Novel, 1965. Powell's description is rather too long to give here.

in England after the First World War. He is "interpreting with an oblique brilliance the pre-war caballa of snobbery, caste marks, behaviourism, internal scales of measurement, and the permissive eccentricities of the public school."[1] It is a "record of a casual yet intimate interlocking of very diverse social groups - the worlds of money, of fashion, of old-fashioned exclusiveness, of bohemian sleaziness, of serious and futile activities in art and literature, of busy and yet often purposeless social and political manoeuvering." [2] Powell's intention seems to be to reveal the nature of an age, to show a society in a period of significant change.[3]

With each successive addition to the oeuvre his intention becomes less clear and high-minded, for: "What began as a panorama begins to sound like a gossip's column . . . . One has the impression that Jenkins, the narrator, has no other profession but to run about collecting the news." [4] Powell "descends from high, narrational analysis to low gossip . . . . and the sociological lapses into Powell's Report on his Fictional Familiars." [5] There are at least two dozen major characters and many more minor ones. The effort of keeping in contact with them and preventing them from disappearing altogether from the scene and from the reader's memory, entails Jenkins in endlessly retailing and collecting gossip about them. As a result most of the action happens off-stage and Jenkins's function becomes to chronicle "a pattern of distant adulteries, advancements

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1 K. Allsop, The Angry Decade, 1958.
2 G.S. Fraser, The Modern Writer and his World, 1964 ed.
3 This aspect of his novels has been discussed in Chapter 5A (the contemporary hero).
4 V.S. Pritchett, The Working Novelist, 1965.
6 P. West, The Modern Novel, 1965.

and declines; he records apparently unimportant attitudes, appearances and dis-appearances like a Front Line reporter who has never left GHQ."[1]

Evelyn Waugh strongly influenced Anthony Powell in his early novels, but his later ones have caused him to be called "a dehydrated Proust". G.S. Fraser[2] suggests that the phrase "pays proper tribute to his power of working out large general implications from small incidents; and it suggests a dryness of humour . . . ." But the "larger implications" have become lost amongst the collection of small incidents. V.S. Pritchett[3] believes that this is the danger of the roman fleuve when it lacks a strongly sustaining idea beyond the convenience of its own existence. "I am not sure that the idea of the decadence of a class anecdotally reviewed is strong enough."

Opinions on Powell's novels have been given from a number of critics because they indicate how very differently Powell's novels appear to his admirers and his detractors. The Music of Time has become a coterie enthusiasm. To outsiders who are not steeped in the mores of English upper class social life - or who are not convinced that they are worth detailing so minutely - Powell seems trivial. Gossip can be entertaining, as Aubrey showed, but it gains from being told about real people. Powell's characters are far from real; they are dancers, performers, whose behaviour seems wholly irrelevant to anyone but themselves.[4] Powell's attitude to them is ambiguous. In his early

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1 M. Ratcliffe, The Novel Today, 1968.
2 The Modern Writer and his World, 1964 ed.
3 The Working Novelist, 1965.
4 In 1948 Powell published a biography of John Aubrey.

novels he keeps a satirical distance from them, but in his later ones the impulse is nostalgic. He is a product of the society he describes.

It is not only Powell's subject matter which fails to attract the outsider. His style too, pretentious and over-wrought, is unvaryingly tedious. Jenkins "likes to describe every incident or episode with which he is engaged in the most meticulous detail, and to reflect on its moral implications, laboriously, and with an odd mixture of penetration and apparent naïvety." [1] In A Buyer's Market (1952) he takes four pages to describe the pouring of a sugar bowl over Widmerpool's head (school-boy pranks are much enjoyed by these bored and aimless people). The Military Philosophers (1968) opens with this typically mannered paragraph:

> Towards morning the teleprinter's bell sounded. A whole night could pass without a summons of that sort, for here, unlike the formations, was no responsibility to wake at four and take dictation - some brief unidentifiable passage of on the whole undistinguished prose - from the secret radio spider, calling and testing in the small hours. Sleep was perfectly attainable when no raid intervened, though recurrent vibrations from one or both machines affirmed next door the same restlessness of spirit that agitated the Duty Officer's room, buzzing all the time with desultory currents of feeling bequeathed by an ever changing tenancy. Endemic as ghouls in an Arabian cemetery, harrassed aggressive shades lingered for ever in such cells to impose on each successive inmate their preoccupations and anxieties, crowding from floor to bed, invading and distorting dreams.

The high regard in which Anthony Powell is held is puzzling to non-English readers (none of the American critics consulted shared the fervour of some of their English colleagues). They tend to see in it a reflection of the parochialism, the narrowness of focus, the obsessive concern with the social, the trivial and the fleeting which are

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1 G.S. Fraser, The Modern Writer and his World, 1964 ed.

characteristically English. It takes a considerable novelist to present the novel of manners as something enduring and worthwhile; Powell's novels of manners seem as enduring as back-copies of the Tatler.

DORIS LESSING In her introduction to the fifth and final volume of Children of Violence, Doris Lessing wrote: "This book is what the Germans call a Bildungsroman." A reviewer [1] commented: "But a Bildungsroman implies some personal moral resolution, some answers to the questions asked or exemplified by the central, finally gebildet figure." Only biographical answers are finally given. The sequence which started with the heroine the focus for the central themes of the novel, becomes in the end the biography of Martha Quest.

It would not be wholly unfair to describe Doris Lessing as Gindin [2] does, as a sociological journalist, for she is intensely committed to active persuasion to reform society. In her second, third and fourth novels (A Proper Marriage 1954, A Ripple from the Storm 1958, Landlocked 1965) her political and social concerns push the "novel" into the background, but in her first book, Martha Quest (1952), which is perhaps her most autobiographical, she achieves a balance between the novel and propaganda.

Martha Quest is the story of a young girl brought up on a southern African farm (identifiably Rhodesian). She rebels against her family, runs to the city (Salisbury) and makes mistakes - her marriage is one - in trying to discover

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1 TLS 3.7.1969
2 J. Gindin, Postwar British Fiction, 1963.

herself.

As a portrait of pre-war Rhodesia it is unforgettable : gathered at the Sports Club, ~~the teas~~ on the verandah, at sundowners, is a fairly representative cross-section of colonial white society. Doris Lessing directs her anger chiefly at their complacency and lack of political awareness, and she attacks the do-gooders and half-baked liberals with the same venom with which she attacks the stupid or malicious. But her view of her characters is wholly one-sided, her scorn so wide-spread that although the force of her attacks ensures that they are not ignored, the damage they do is reduced. Strangely, she almost ignores the effect of the Depression on the country, painting the period as one of general affluence and comfort.

Since the story is told by Martha, with irritating authorial interventions to drive home her points, it would seem essential for Martha herself to be more admirable, more likeable than the people she scorns. In the first half of the book her frustrations and restlessness make her a sympathetic character as she struggles to form her beliefs. But her frustrations turn her later into a whining, sharp-tempered and apathetic creature as silly as her feather-headed friends. But her feather-headed friends do not indulge in pages of introspection. There is no authorial distance from Martha. She is never treated ironically and she never laughs at herself. Where the reader feels only impatience, the author expects him to feel sympathy and compassion. Doris Lessing's Marxist view that characters are almost completely conditioned by time and place, by

their environment, has led to an over-simplification of both her major and minor characters.

In _A Proper Marriage_ there is a development of a theme which had not been central in the first book; the problem of the rights of women in a world made for men. Martha's feminism is expressed in a sullen withdrawal, a passive acceptance of her role, broken only with flashes of vicious temper. Her not very bright husband is understandably bewildered. Towards the end of the book - a large part of which has been devoted to the detailing of the problems of motherhood and housewifery - Martha finds her political home. In the next two novels she acquires and abandons another husband and becomes a small-town Marxist. _The Four-Gated City_, seven hundred pages long, is set in London at the beginning of the 1950s. The focus of attention is shifted away from Martha and her problems to the family she lives with. The wife has hallucinations and hears voices, and Martha comes to hear them too. Her extra-sensory perceptions are described in detail. "Martha, simply because of the swamping annotations of her psychic state, is never a 'character' at all. She is essays, diatribes, sharp observations, a novelist _manqué_: you can't walk round her."[1] The novel ends in the year 2000 after the Catastrophe which Martha predicted has taken place. One reviewer commented: "This is not a biography (nor a _Bildungsroman_) but a work of social pathology."[2]

Children of Violence is an uneven work and an ambitious one, and it is perhaps only in the first novel that Doris Lessing achieves a compromise between Lessing the Novelist and Lessing the Sociologist and political animal.

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1 John Coleman, _Ob.R._, 29.6.1969.
2 _TLS_ 3.7.1969.

HENRY WILLIAMSON. The publication of The Gale of the World in 1969 completed Henry Williamson's fifteen-novel cycle, A Chronicle of Ancient Sunlight. It is the story of Phillip Maddison, Williamson's alter ego, from his childhood near Croydon in the 1880's to his soldiering in the First World War (these first five novels are his most successful) and to his years living in the country writing and farming. The beginning of the Second World War (A Solitary War, 1966) found Maddison caught between loyalty to his country and admiration for Sir Oswald Mosley and Adolf Hitler. The Gale of the World, set in 1946, leaves Maddison at the point where he overcomes a six-year writer's "block" and is embarking on a novel sequence.

A Chronicle is an intensely personal record - it is only incidentally a social novel. His Pantheism, "perhaps the chief glory of Williamson's writing, as of his life"[1], is attractive to those who share his passionate, mystical involvement with nature and the English earth. Richard Jeffries's The Story of My Heart (1919) was his original inspiration.

Maddison's politics are less easy to accept, not because they are "right" or "wrong" but because of his naïvety. The later novels read in places like electioneering pamphlets, larded with quotations from Mosley (Hereward Birkin in the novels), and although they serve as a useful reminder that British opinion of Hitler was by no means unanimous, their value is offset by his childishly uncritical acceptance of even the most unlikely statements (one

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1 Times Sat. R. 7.6.1969.

character in _The Gale of the World_ tells him that Hitler ordered Rundstedt to halt the German tanks before Dunkirk, because of his friendly feeling for the British, "a cousin nation"). Hero worship is seldom attractive to the onlooker, and Maddison's is of a particularly unattractive variety. He writes to a young man who aspires to write an epic for his age:

> Will you show truly the luminous personality of Adolf Hitler in a room with those who believe in him? . . . And will you show this Lucifer, this light-bringer, in a scene of Tolstoyan scope and sweep, as one in those early years of the 'thirties possessed harmoniously by the highest spiritual forces, gentle and magnanimous?

If one sets aside Williamson's politics - and this is hard to do in the later novels - and tries to assess his achievement as a chronicle novelist one is faced with the problem of deciding whether the merits of _A Chronicle of Ancient Sunlight_ outweigh its defects. The sincerity and honesty of Maddison are impressive, there are many fine pages of writing - particularly in the descriptive sections - and the agricultural life has rarely been so comprehensively shown in novels. Against this is the grossly clumsy dialogue and feeble characterisation of the minor characters. The women in Maddison's life are idealised and unreal, and his own obtuseness in personal relations make Maddison himself singularly wooden. Williamson described Philip Maddison as having the talent but not the temperament of the great artist. It seems a fair comment on Williamson himself.

A. Comfort was quoted at the beginning of this chapter [1] as saying that the vast novel-sequence "is bound to sink, as it is sinking, out of the first line of technical excellence , and be inherited by the good second-rater." Of the five novelists who have attempted such novel sequences since the war, C.P. Snow and Henry Williamson could fairly be described as "good second-raters". Their novels are sound and workmanlike, constructed by craftsmen rather than artists. The vast novel-sequence suits their temperament for it does not depend for its success on the excellence of any one volume but on the panoramic view built up by them all. The total effect is impressive. They are not "inspirational" writers, not what A. Comfort calls the "purely creative, intuitive type", and the chronicle novel can best accomodate their expansive style.

Anthony Powell and Doris Lessing seem less able to cope with this demanding form, and the strain is marked in their later novels. Anthony Powell's degenerates into gossip; Doris Lessing's are padded out with irrelevancies. They lack a strong central theme to sustain them and the effect is of shapelessness. Doris Lessing in particular seems to benefit from the greater discipline imposed by shorter forms, as her volumes of short stories [2] show. Both Powell and Lessing have written very unevenly, and some of the parts of their chronicle novels are better than the whole. They are essentially "inspirational" writers who are ill-suited to an expansive form.

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1 Quoted on Page 4A.02 from The Novel and Our Time, 1948.
2 Voices at Play, 1961 is one of her best collections.

The six volumes of Simon Raven's sequence which have so far appeared suggest that he is not writing a chronicle novel but a number of novels which are tenuously linked to each other. A pattern may emerge as he adds to the series, but as it stands each novel can be read separately and without reference to any of the others. His range of material is wide but it is not explored or developed with the thoroughness which one expects from a chronicle novelist.

The remaining novelists to be discussed in this chapter are less ambitious as far as sheer number of words is concerned. None of them has attempted anything larger than a four-novel sequence, and a comparison between these novelists and those already discussed would suggest that this is probably the optimum size for such projects if the inspirational writer, the artist, is not to be over-taxed. The shorter chronicle novel at its best has a strong central theme which makes its overall construction firmer. A. Burgess [1] suggests that the writer of the trilogy or tetralogy ". . . is more aware of symmetry than the man who looks down a long stretch of winding river; each novel has a fixed and foreseen relationship with every other novel in the little sequence; the sense is of a solid pyramid or tower rather than of an unpredictable work of nature."

I have included in this group some novelists who have not written their books in series but who have written a single massive chronicle novel. Angus Wilson and William Plomer are the chief of these.

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1 The Novel Now, 1967.

Several writers who have published chronicle novels are discussed elsewhere in this study and will not be discussed here. Other aspects of their writing have seemed more important or interesting than their use of the trilogy or tetralogy. Mervyn Peake's Gormenghast trilogy is discussed as a Gothic novel in Chapter 7. Philip Toynbee's novel-sequence has been taken as an example of experimental writing (Chapter 3A). Lawrence Durrell's Alexandria Quartet has been discussed in the chapter on the poetic novel (Chapter 3B) but some mention of its structure will be made here because of the importance Lawrence Durrell gives to it.

A number of novelists have only published one or two novels of their projected sequences, and interim judgement may be of little value. They have therefore been dealt with more briefly than would be the case if more had been published and it were possible to gauge the success of their schemes and overall patterning. Richard Hughes, Edward Upward, Jillian Becker, Isobel Colegate and Colin Spencer will therefore not be discussed in detail.

Gabriel Fielding has begun a novel sequence with In the Time of Greenbloom (1956) which is very much less successful than his The Birthday King (1962) which is discussed in the section on the Exotic novel (Chapter 4D). Neither this work nor Frederic Raphael's The Limits of Love (1960), a Bildungsroman of a London Jewish family, will be discussed here as they do not represent these authors at their best. For this reason neither Joyce Cary's Chester Nimmo trilogy, which he completed in 1959, nor Evelyn Waugh's Sword of Honour trilogy, completed in 1961, will be included.

LAWRENCE DURRELL. In his preface to Balthazar, the second novel of the Alexandria Quartet he explains that the first three novels are intended to be "siblings", equal spatial situations, and that the fourth novel adds the dimension of time. Durrell aims at achieving a fugue-like simultaneity, with the first three novels developments of themes, the fourth a recapitulation.

> Of course, ideally all four novels should be read simultaneously. . . . but as we lack four-dimensional spectacles the reader will have to do it imaginatively, adding the part of time to the other three, and holding the whole lot in his skull.

Durrell calls the work "a four-decker novel whose form is based on the relativity proposition." One of his novelist characters, Pursewarden, expands on the theory which A. Burgess [1] has succinctly rephrased:

> . . . we view life, he tells us, from a necessarily limited point, but the limitation has nothing to do with our personal make-up, only with the ultimate facts of space and time. We observe from a given point-instant, but what we observe becomes different if we alter our position: 'Two paces west and the whole picture is changed.'
> What this amounts to is that, one novel of the Quartet being concerned with time, and the other three with the 'three sides of space', we can never see the whole of any given character or event in one novel alone.

The Continental critics have been most enthusiastic about this appeal to the relativity proposition, but the English critics have tended to see his experimental method of the "novel of sliding panels" in this light:

> [2] . . . it would be truer, and simpler, to say that it combines (often without warning) the stream of consciousness of several people, all of them doing their best to articulate recollections and their present impressions.

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1 The Novel Now, 1967.
2 P. West, The Modern Novel, 1965.

OLIVIA MANNING. In a discussion of the two books of Olivia Manning's which immediately preceded her "Balkan Trilogy" [1], A Different Face (1957) and The Doves of Venus (1956), F.R. Karl [2] commended particularly her sense of place, which he felt to be more effectively conveyed than was her central character. In the Balkan Trilogy her sense of place is allied to a sense of history and the result is a brilliant portrait of the disintegrating war-time Balkans.

Olivia Manning is unusual in combining what is called, for no very good reason, a masculine intelligence, with a feminine sensitivity. She can assemble and present facts clearly, with irony and without hysteria. She writes a cool, elegant prose which at times becomes poetry. No quotation could adequately illustrate the way this combination brings the Balkans to life at this particular point in its history, because the portrait is built up in small accumulating details. However this quotation from The Great Fortune suggests something of her method of creating atmosphere while at the same time conveying information:

> [3] The day before had been spent on familiar territory, even if the Orient Express had kept to no schedule. Harriet had watched the vineyards pass in the late summer sunlight. Balls of greasy sandwich paper had unscrewed themselves in the heat, empty Vichy bottles rolled about under seats. When the train stopped there was no sign of a station-master, no porters came to the windows. On the deserted platform, loud-speakers gave out the numbers of reservists being called to their regiments.

Another quotation from the same book shows the way she links natural phenomena with historical events.

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1 The collective title was suggested by a reviewer, not by the author. The three novels are: The Great Fortune (1960), The Spoilt City (1962) and Friends and Heroes (1965).
2 A Reader's Guide to the Contemporary English Novel, 1963.
3 (The Panther editions are referred to throughout.) Page 11

> [1] With late November came the crivat, a frost-hard wind that blew from Siberia straight into the open mouth of the Moldavian plain. Later it would bring the snow, but for the moment it was merely a threat and a discomfort that each day grew a little sharper. . . . At the end of November there came, too, a renewal of fear as Russia invaded Finland.

Against this vividly painted backdrop there is a finely drawn study of the marriage of a young British left-wing intellectual couple, Guy and Harriet Pringle. Their story is simple in outline. The Good Fortune opens with Guy and his new wife going to Bucharest where Guy lectures in in English. It ends with the fall of Paris. In The Spoilt City (1962) war comes to Rumania and Harriet flies to Athens. Guy joins her there in Friends and Heroes but when the Germans are six hours from Athens they leave on a boat for Egypt.

Guy is a complex man under his apparent simplicity. He is impulsive, generous, gregarious, idealistic - a St Bernard of a man - but he is also an abstracted, unconsciously neglectful husband whose charity begins anywhere but at home. Harriet, watchful, sensitive and guarded, is his antithesis. Most of the events are seen from Harriet's viewpoint and her reticence about her emotions is remarkable in a woman novelist, but it also makes Harriet appear a little chillingly inhuman. She is attracted to, but does not respond to, the warmth of her husband's personality. A brief mention of her childhood - spent with an aunt who did not love her - gives us a clue to the source of her withdrawn, dispassionate and lonely nature. Olivia Manning has been criticised for her portrait of Harriet, who is essentially unknowable, but it may be a failure

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1 Page 107, Panther edition.

on the part of the reader, not the writer, for Harriet is unlike any other heroine in fiction. She does not fit into any preconceived ideas of what heroines should be, although women readers find her wholly credible.

If there were any doubts about Olivia Manning's ability to create character, her portrait of Prince Yakimov would dispel them. Prince Yakimov is one of the most memorable characters in contemporary fiction. 'Yaki' is a White Russian emigré who arrives in Bucharest at the same time as the Pringles, and he is shot before they leave Athens. Yaki is, like the others, an alien but he is also a symbol of the past, a relic who does not survive the cataclysm. He is not unlike William Plomer's Toby d'Arfey [1] in his elegance and light self-mockery. He too has a fund of preposterous stories which depend for their success on the manner of telling rather than their content. Yaki lives off other people and he is a cunning scrounger, but he is also courageous, stylish, pathetic in his humility - and very funny. Yaki is the arch Survivor. In all Miss Manning's novels there are survivors - people who cadge and sponge outrageously to maintain standards of living they cannot begin to afford; wives who feel neglected but shore up their marriages out of sheer grit; woebegone provincial girls who refuse to be defeated by the cads and catastrophes of bedsitter life. Guy and Harriet are also survivors:

[2] They had crossed the Mediterranean and now, on the other side, they knew they were refugees. Still, they had life - a depleted fortune, but a fortune. They were together and would remain together, and that was the only certainty left to them.

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1 Museum Pieces, 1952.
2 Friends and Heroes, page 315.

This is their "great fortune". A reviewer writing of a similar book (Sarah Gainham's Night Falls On the City 1967) wrote:

> [1] Survival against apparently invincible forces of terror, degradation, and inhumanity is no more than an instinct: we admire it, and we cling hopefully to the thought that merely by surviving a human being can preserve something of a way of life destroyed.

That is, in essence, Olivia Manning's theme.

Olivia Manning's trilogy is one of the major works of post-war fiction. Its subject and the period it covers makes a comparison with Evelyn Waugh's Sword of Honour trilogy [2] inevitable, but it shows up the thinness, the bleakness and the lifelessness of the latter. It does more than chronicle a period and place - it brings them to life.

RICHARD HUGHES. After twenty-five years of silence, Richard Hughes published the first book, The Fox in the Attic (1961) of a projected sequence to be called The Human Predicament. In the preface Hughes wrote: "The Human Predicament is conceived as a long historical novel of my own times culminating in the Second World War." P. West [3] describes it as "Proustian", and his style of writing is not unlike E.M. Forster's or Christopher Isherwood's. The Fox in the Attic is in three parts - the first set in England, the second in Bavaria and the third in both. The period covered is the weeks of Hitler's unsuccessful putsch in 1923.

The book opens dramatically with Augustine, the chief character, carrying a dead child over his shoulder. A Burgess [4] suggests that the child is a symbol of the

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1 TLS 16.3.1967.
2 Men at Arms (1952), Officers and Gentlemen (1955), and Unconditional Surrender (1961).
3 The Modern Novel, 1965.
4 The Novel Now, 1967.

dead past, a watershed, as it were, between one era and the next. The death is also a device to set the narrative in motion, for the reaction of the village to the death encourages Augustine to visit some German cousins until the feeling in the village against him has changed. Augustine is an amiable young man, Oxford-educated and charming, but in Germany he finds that he is almost totally ignorant of people and politics. The glib undergraduate formulae do not fit his new experience. One - perhaps the central - theme of the book is the difference between the English and the Germans, particularly in their attitude to politics, for while the English are discussing the possible reconciliation of two warring politicians, the Germans are witnessing the rise of Hitler. In smaller details too the English and Germans are different. In England Augustine is an enthusiastic duck hunter; in Germany hunting of the boar is an altogether wilder, less precise sport. Animal imagery plays an important part in the novel. The second book is called 'The White Crow' as reference to Hitler, the third is called 'The Fox in the Attic' which refers to the fox which one of the Bavarian cousins keeps in the attic of the schloss, to the political refugee who lives there unknown to the rest of the family, and to Hitler who flees after the failure of the putsch like a fox to his bolt-hole.

In the preface, Richard Hughes wrote: "The historical characters and events are as accurately historical as I can make them, . . ." There is a great deal of historical detail, sometimes given in the form of lectures, sometimes dramatised (as in Hitler's and Ludendorff's march on

Munich), and sometimes it forms a natural part of the plot. The very short chapters enable him to be discursive, which becomes tiresome in the German section where the novel is often subordinated to the historical exposition. The author is omniscient, and sometimes intrusive. The very large cast of characters range through nationalities and classes and the links between them are not always strong - presumably this will become clearer in the later books. Augustine is at present too shadowy to be interesting, too young and immature.

In the preface to this book Richard Hughes wrote:

> The reader may wonder why a novel designed as a continuous whole rather than as a trilogy or quartet should appear volume by volume: the plain truth is I am such a slow writer that I have been urged not to wait.

An interim judgement of The Fox in the Attic can only therefore be more than usually tentative. It may well prove to be the finest work of this decade.

ANGUS WILSON Only in his most recent novel, No Laughing Matter (1967), has Angus Wilson written what is clearly a true chronicle novel, tracing as it does the lives of six people from childhood to late middle-age. But most of his earlier novels have a massiveness, a width of range, which links him with the contemporary chronicle novelists. He acknowledges the same influences (Trollope, Dickens, Zola and Proust) as do writers like Anthony Powell and C.P. Snow. He is primarily a social novelist, with an unusually comprehensive view of society. It seems justifiable, then, to discuss his work alongside that of the novelists he most resembles.

There is one important distinction between Angus Wilson and writers like C.P. Snow: Wilson is technically very versatile. He has adopted many of the stylistic discoveries of the Moderns (flashbacks, stream of consciousness, stylised dialogue, dramatised scenes and so on [1]). But it is not his style which immediately strikes the reader and although a case could be made for discussing his work as an example of experimental writing, he is more certainly a Contemporary. Angus Wilson is the kind of writer Stephen Spender hoped would one day emerge - a Contemporary who has assimilated the fictional techniques of the Moderns into his own material.

Angus Wilson is one of the most highly regarded novelists of the post-war period. He is also one of the most complex. It is not possible - as it is not with William Golding - to discuss these complexities in the detail they deserve. However a brief mention of the qualities which are most often commended by his critics may indicate something not only of his make-up as a novelist but also of the character of contemporary English fiction. Angus Wilson is admired chiefly for his originality - he is seen to possess the qualities which are so often lacking in his contemporaries. In praising these qualities the critics are drawing attention to what they believe are deficiencies in other writers and to what direction they hope the novel will take.

Angus Wilson the social novelist has been praised not only for the accuracy of his social observation, for this is not unusual, but for his range.[2] In his novels there

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1 No Laughing Matter is his most experimental.
2 J. Gindin, Postwar British Fiction, 1963 and F.R. Karl A Reader's Guide to the Contemporary English Novel, 1963.

characters from all social classes and many professions, although he naturally feels most at home with the middle-classes. To take only one book as an example of his wide range, the characters in Anglo-Saxon Attitudes (1956) include: a group of Medievalists, a former cloak-room attendant, a property owner, a waiter, a secretary, a radio celebrity and journalist, a company director, an ex-actress and suffragette, a lady's companion, a coachman and chauffeur, a market-gardener, a former naval petty officer (now a garage proprietor), a sociologist, a housekeeper, a biographer and a sculptress. In an interview, Angus Wilson gave these reasons for his Dickensian range of characters:

> [1] All fiction for me is a kind of magic and trickery - a confidence trick, trying to make people believe something is true that isn't. And the novelist, in particular, is trying to convince the reader that he is seeing society as a whole. This is why I use such a lot of minor characters and subplots, of course. . . . because they enable me to suggest the existence of a wider society, the ripples of a society outside. . . . I try to multiply the worlds I put into the books. . . . You believe in [Shakespeare's tragedies] more because those others from outside confirm them. . . . The third reason for all the characters is the Proustian one . . . that the strangest and most unlikely lives are in fact interdependent. This is especially true in times like ours when the old boundaries and demarcations are becoming blurred.

Although Angus Wilson is a social novelist he is not concerned with detailing the minutiae of class distinctions (this alone sets him apart from most contemporary social novelists). The psychological, not the social, problems of his characters interest him. His view of characters is markedly Freudian, and again this is unusual in an English novelist, though not in an American. [2]

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1 Writers at Work, The Paris Review Interviews, 1958.
2 Martin Green in 'British Marxists and American Freudians' Innovations, ed. B. Bergonzi, 1968 draws attention to this.

"Simple, naïve people I'm impatient of, because they haven't faced up to the main responsibiltty of civilized man - that of facing up to what he is and to the Freudian motivations of his actions." [1] In many of his novels his characters have to obey impulses which give them no freedom of choice. Bernard Sands, an idealist, hero of Hemlock and After (1952), is very much aware of these influences. He "becomes afraid that though he may have escaped from the straitjacket of religious orthodoxy, his actions are predetermined by his own psychological needs." [2] In Anglo-Saxon Attitudes he shows the effect on the children of their parents' problems, and No Laughing Matter is almost a case-book study of the impact of bad parents on their six offspring. The Old Men at the Zoo (1961) explicitly emphasises the parallels between man and animals in their instinctual behaviour.

In line with Freudian thinking, Wilson suggests that a large part of the human personality is built upon the false assumption of roles. He endeavours to separate the "person" from the "persona". "Self-realization was to become the theme of all my novels, offering death to Bernard Sands . . . life and release to Gerald Middleton . . . and to Meg Eliot." [3] Of these three only Meg Eliot, the heroine of The Middle Age of Mrs Eliot (1958), comes convincingly to life, perhaps because, as he admits, he consciously identified himself with her. Bernard Sands had for the most part imaginary and literary sources, and this is apparent in the novel itself. [4]

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1 Writers at Work, The Paris Review Interviews, 1958.
2 C.B. Cox, The Free Spirit, 1963.
3 The Wild Garden, 1963.
4 ibid.

Angus Wilson is one of the few contemporary male writers to have written convincingly about women, neither romanticising them nor degrading them. He has not chosen the easiest method, that of making his heroines extra-ordinary: both Meg Eliot and Sylvia, the heroine of Late Call (1962), are very ordinary women.

The death of Meg's husband and her altered social and financial status force her to attempt to create her own existence, to develop her own attitudes and values. J. Gindin suggests that it could be described as "a novel of sensibility in an almost Jamesian sense".[1] This has been achieved at the cost of a certain lack of dramatic interest, and there is rather too much commonplace observation, but it is a sympathetic study of a woman struggling with what Christina Rossetti called "the black death of living alone".

In Late Call the peripheral characters are stronger and offer a distraction and relief from exploring the sensibilities of the heroine. Syliva is even less intellectual and more "ordinary" than Meg. Her ailments force her to retire from her job as a hotel manageress and to live with her widowed son and grandchildren in a New Town. They are kind to her and her difficult husband, but she feels redundant, inadequate and useless. She is not wanted, neither as a grandmother nor a housekeeper, and she has no answer to the problems of retirement after an active life. The generation-gap is further widened by the intellectual gap, for Sylive is not clever or well educated as her relatives are. She finds the New

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1 Postwar British Fiction, 1963.

Town strange and uncomfortable, designed for the young and progressive. The story traces Sylvia's gradual adjustment and the growth of a relationship between her and the other members of the family. Syliva is one of the most fully-drawn and fully-realised heroines in contemporary fiction.

Margaret Drabble wrote of Angus Wilson: ". . . it is hard to think of any other writer who can communicate so easily on so intelligent a level."[1] She is of course exaggerating, but the point she makes about Angus Wilson's intelligence is an important one. He is a thinker, and the themes and subjects of his novels are never trivial or merely fashionable. The Old Men at the Zoo is "a Snow novel written by someone with more talent for fiction." [2] It tests the liberal principles of the ageing in power against the facts of the post-war world, with Leacock advocating "limited liberty" and Falcon advocating the restriction of liberty. The power game played by these and other characters, including the organisation man Simon, parallels the struggles for power in other governmental spheres. Anglo-Saxon Attitudes is a complicated statement on the nature of truth, with the hero Gerald coming gradually to realise he has evaded truth all his life. In Hemlock and After the central theme is the contradiction between the need for authority and the distaste for power. Bernard struggles with his conscience in a constant effort to reconcile his public and private behaviour and to examine the nature of his humanism. The violent excitement he felt at the arrested

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1 Penguin Book News, May 1968.
2 Edmund Wilson, The Bit Between My Teeth, 1956.

young homosexual's terror jolts him into realising his humanism does not go far enough. In The Middle Age of Mrs Eliot Meg and her brother David "represent respectively the humanist possibilities of the active and the passive life". [1] Late Call is a statement of faith in humanity. Syliva, with no special gifts, is demonstrably superior to the others who are conscious of their moral duty to society but whose personal relationships are a mess. No Laughing Matter is conceived as a fable for the century – each character, though an individual, represents a political or social type. A reviewer [2] suggested that the central arguments are "about laughter, what things it is proper to laugh at, and in what style." The children's self-defensive mockery of their parents becomes more than a game when they grow up – they become the characters they play in their mocking charades. A less recondite interpretation is that the children were driven by their reaction to their parents to seek fame and wealth, but their hateful childhoods have destroyed their ability to love.

Angus Wilson recognises that: "The myth element has grown stronger with me as I've written." [3] There has been an epidemic of contemporary novels which are either based on classical myths or, more interestingly, attempt to construct myth from the contemporary scene. Angus Wilson in The Old Men at the Zoo and No Laughing Matter tries to do the latter, but although it has helped with construction problems – construction is

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1 C.B. Cox, The Free Spirit, 1963.
2 TLS 8.10.1967
3 In an interview with Frank Kermode, 'Myth, Reality and Fiction', The List., 30.8.1962.
4 See Chapter 3C.

not Angus Wilson's strong point - it also tends to falsify and distort. The imposing of a rigid pattern makes for lifelessness and is dangerous in a writer whose intellect tends to swamp his imagination. His best novels - The Middle Age of Mrs Eliot and Late Call - are his least intellectual and contrived, and his most compassionate. Angus Wilson the liberal humanist does not always allow his feeling for humanity full play. His chief defect as a novelist is his coldness, his lack of passion. The sense of "felt life" is often missing from his characters. Excelling in so many other ways, he fails in this. His fondness for myth is unlikely to cure it. Angus Wilson is strikingly original, but he is also very often dull.

WILLIAM PLOMER. Turbott Wolfe established William Plomer as a South African writer of international standard. There is a clear motif running through this and three of his later novels [1] : the sense of estrangement, of human beings looking for a home but not finding it. In Museum Pieces (1952) he explored a related irresoluble conflict - that between past and present. The book begins in the 1920s and ends with World War Two. It is a portrait, as the title indicates, of two Edwardian Museum Pieces, Susannah Mountfaucon and her son Toby d'Arfey. They are Waugh and Powell characters; aristocratic, eccentric, extravagant and talented, but where Waugh and Powell caricature and satirise such figures, Plomer develops them into wholly convincing human beings.

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1 Sado (1931), set in Japan, The Case is Altered (1932) and The Invaders (1934), which are set in England.

His approach is frankly nostalgic. He likes and admires them for their "style" and "flair" and for their courage. He regrets that they are museum pieces. He has wisely chosen not to narrate their story himself, but to tell it through the eyes of a youngish woman who becomes their friend. She has a sharply critical intelligence and does not come from the same aristocratic milieu, so she is able to view them with greater objectivity.

Of Toby, who tries to put his talents to use in an increasingly vulgar commercial world she writes:

> Toby's life seemed to have been the expression of an insatiable appetite for something unattainable, something that included peace and power and order, something of the confidence that his ancestors may be supposed to have sometimes had. . . . What his life had lacked, biologically, was the power of adaptation. Toby was a civilized man. He was always on the side of creators against destroyers, he was an enemy of the banal, and if he had strayed in search of easy amusement, he knew and always returned towards what was enduring and vigorous and best . . . .

Toby's limitations are seen as clearly as his virtues but he attains a genuinely tragic stature with his suicide. The passing of Powell's characters - who are essentially the same - is not a matter for regret; the passing of Plomer's is seen as the passing of much that was best in England. The book ends with these lines:

> As I looked back, that one precarious life seemed to me even in its frivolity to have had a certain grandeur, like a joke made on the scaffold by a man about to be put to death as a punishment not for what he has done or not done but for what he is.

<u>SYBILLE BEDFORD</u> Although Sybille Bedford belongs to the older generation of writers, her first novel, <u>A Legacy</u>, was not published until 1956. It was highly praised by, among others, Evelyn Waugh and Nancy Mitford. Her appeal

to those two writers was predictable, for she writes of the aristocracy and upper-classes of the turn of the century with the same sureness and skill which they display. Unusually for an English writer, her characters are not English, but French or German.

In A Legacy a young German girl tells the history of two families, her father's and his first wife's. The wife's family, the Merz's, are Jewish upper-bourgeoisie; the Von Feldens are Catholic landed gentry. The period - before the First World War - is convincingly evoked, but it is in the latter half of the novel, the history of the Von Feldens, that she displays her remarkable insight into the German mind, traditions and history. Johannes, one of the Von Felden brothers, is sent to a cadet corps: "the rigours of the Prussian cadet institutions were notorious and intentional. They were places where boys . . . were left to spend seven or eight years in a formative atmosphere of organized hunger, brutality, and spiritual devastation." He escapes, but is returned by his autocratic father. His adored younger brother is killed trying to catch the train Johannes is sent back on, and Johannes himself goes mad. In contrast to the Von Felden's, the Merz's are painted in warmer colours, but they are members of a decaying and decadent class. The families are two of the strands which go to make up the German character, a subject which has fascinated many English novelists, but few have written on it so well. [1]

Two of Sybille Bedford's later novels, A Favourite of the Gods (1963) and A Compass Error (1968), are linked with

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1 Gabriel Fielding's The Birthday King (1962), Piers Paul Read's The Junkers (1968), Richard Hughes's The Fox in the Attic (1961) provide interesting comparisons.

each other, the first being the mother's story, the second her daughter's. They are curiously dated, irrelevant and mannered novels. The period detail is faultless, as in A Legacy, but it is impossible to feel sympathy with the sophisticated and elegant characters and to care deeply about their moral intricacies. "One is uncomfortably aware . . . that, for the world which fascinates Mrs. Bedford, it is all too easy to talk about sex and love and passion and despair, but that wine and intelligent conversation and debonair good taste are what really count." [1] It is difficult to take her characters at their own, and Mrs Bedford's, high valuation and the sensitivity of her writing is inadequate compensation for the many longueurs. Sentimental nostalgia for the past golden age is a trap for the older novelist, and Sybille Bedford has not, in her later novels, managed to avoid it.

NANCY MITFORD. The nostalgia with which Nancy Mitford writes of the upper-classes of her generation is tempered with well-bred elegance and wit. Her style, subject and characters are not unlike Evelyn Waugh's, but where Waugh satirises the assumptions and presumptions of the ruling classes, Nancy Mitford sees them as material for good-natured entertainment. Her novels provide a necessary corrective to Waugh's for she emphasises the considerable charm and elegance of a society where class and breeding really mattered after all. Her characters make no claim to be profound, as do Sybille Bedford's, and she has not the tragic sense of William Plomer, but she has a fine gift for comedy. She has the knack of making

the outlandish seem natural, the natural bizarre. The Pursuit of Love (1945), perhaps her most successful novel, was, on her own admission, largely autobiographical. It introduced the Radlett family who reappeared in The Blessing (1951) and Don't Tell Alfred (1963). The last book is set in Paris after 1945 and a number of young post-war characters are introduced. In spite of her attempts to make them contemporary (two of them are beatniks, for example) she is obviously uncomfortable and ill at ease with a species which is so foreign to her. Her heroine Fanny has become more like the heroine of a woman's magazine story, ordinary rather than eccentric, and much of the vitality and exuberance of her earlier novels is missing. As a social novelist and entertainer Nancy Mitford deserves a niche in literary history, but her refusal to take a strong moral standpoint has been, perhaps undeservedly, held against her. She does not deplore the extravagance and selfishness of the class she depicts, a class which took its pleasures and comforts seriously, and in this she in unfashionable. Her novels offer an interesting comparison with Anthony Powell's Music of Time series, a series which has received almost unanimous acclaim. Next to her Powell seems artificial, his characters cardboard, and his style strains after a wit and elegance which Nancy Mitford achieves apparently without effort.

PAMELA HANSFORD JOHNSON has all the qualities that make for a novelist popular with middle-class female readers. She is a stern moralist, appalled at: "The all-permissive,

the 'swinging society': under its Big Top, the whole garish circus of the new freedom to revel, through all kinds of mass media, in violence, in pornography, in sado-masochism." [1] She writes a wholly undistinguished prose which follows her maxim : "Writing is not a private game to be played at a private party" [2] – there are no stylistic eccentricities which might alienate a reader. She avoids satire which she once defined as ". . . the revenge of those who cannot really comprehend the world or cope with it." [3], but her books are lightly sprinkled with humour. There is even a dash of sexual titillation, tastefully presented, which shows her to be, like her readers, a woman of the world. Her subjects and characters are those which would interest her readers (to use a doctor as the hero of An Error of Judgement, 1962, was characteristically astute). Her novels are neither light nor heavy, and while they do not aim at abstractions, they are consciously intelligent and socially aware.

The Unspeakable Skipton (1958), Night and Silence! Who is Here? (1963) and Cork Street, Next to the Hatters (1965) are written around a set of characters and although the novels are not obviously planned as a trilogy, they may be regarded as such. The first book is pleasantly entertaining although the characterisation is thin. In the next two she abandons frivolity for a firm morality. In Cork Street she offers an analysis of the state of culture in Britain today. 'A nice clean-living young man, Tom, decides to write a play to demonstrate that censorship is necessary, that there is a limit to what

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1 On Iniquity, 1967.
3 Quoted by Kathleen Nott in an article in Encounter, February, 1962.
2 List., 11.8.1949.

audiences will accept. (It is not explained how he knew enough to write the most pornographic play in English literature). Predictably, the play is accepted and the critics persuade the public that it is profoundly significant. Tom emigrates in disgust (to America, where the best pornography is written!). Another thread of the story provides the opportunity for exposing the modelling profession, for delivering a homily on the criminal classes and for jibing at modern poetry, the mass media and fashions. Presumably modern painting and sculpture will be attacked in a later novel. The book was a best-seller.

In The Survival of the Fittest (1968) Pamela Hansford Johnson has written the story of the lives of four young people from 1930 through to the 1960's. It is a thinly disguised autobiography but in her determination to fictionalise her material she has destroyed its interest as an autobiography, and it is too dull and lifeless to be considered as a novel. On the evidence of this chronicle novel and the earlier trilogy, Dylan Thomas's description of her has a hollowly prophetic ring:

> [1] And why the desire to look like everybody else? If you were the usual gutless, unimaginative, slang-flinging flapper, your adherence to a conventional style of looks would be excusable.

MARGERY SHARP Margery Sharp is a very prolific writer whose appeal is to the same group of readers as Miss Hansford Johnson's - the middle-class female. Amongst her novels is a series written around the character of Martha, an artist. All Margery Sharp's work is

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1 He was commenting on a photograph of her in a letter to her in late October 1933. Published in Selected Letters of Dylan Thomas, ed. C. Fitzgibbon, 1966.

entertaining, light and undemanding and she has none of the intellectual pretensions of Pamela Hansford Johnson, but her skill and craftsmanship are usually underestimated. Since Margery Sharp is one of the better women novelists to cater for what is essentially a conservative female readership, a brief examination of The Eye of Love (1957) the first of the Martha series, may serve to illustrate some of the ingredients necessary for success with this group.

The Eye of Love is in essence a romantic love story between a plump middle-aged furrier and a decaying, scrawny woman he calls his Spanish Rose (she calls him King Hal). Their happy idyll is broken when his mother decides he must marry into a more successful firm of furriers in order to save the business. Margery Sharp's portraits of the matriarchal Jewish families are a far cry from the sort Philip Roth paints, but the same "typical" Jewish characters appear. The father and 'King Hal' form a sympathetic alliance against the women. There is a crisis, but true love conquers all. Martha is a minor character in this novel - she is a young girl living with the Spanish Rose.

As can be seen from this summary, the plot is slight but sufficient and the darker side of the affair is kept to the minimum. But it is not entirely a "formula" novel and the characterisation is more than adequate. It is amusing without being giggly and just avoids being sentimental. In the later novels, of which Martha, Eric and George, (1964) is one, Martha develops into a fuller character. Wholly devoted to her art, unconventional and

ugly, she is a far cry from the "woman's magazine" artist while not attempting to be a female Gulley Jimson. There in not much to choose between the Martha novels and Pamela Hansford Johnson's The Unspeakable Skipton (1958), as far as craftsmanship goes, but Miss Johnson has the advantage of being accepted as a serious novelist for reasons which are based less on her actual performance than on her pronouncements as a moralist. Margery Sharp is usually dismissed as a mere "entertainer".

The next two novelists have explored the same themes: the decline of the British Empire and its effect on those involved. It is a theme which seems peculiarly well adapted to lengthy treatment, but it has not yet attracted a great novelist.

DESMOND STEWART. The Sequence of Roles , a trilogy by Desmond Stewart, centres on three generations of a Scottish-Irish family, covering the period from 1890 to the present day. It is a parable of the decline of the British Empire and the tale of one family's protracted love-affair with Egypt. In The Round Mosaic (1965) Andrew Lomax goes there with his wife and children. He is a visionary, but a practical one who puts his theories to the test by building an oasis in the desert. His brand of imperialism is contrasted with that of Kitchener and his followers. The death of Andrew's brother forces him to return to Scotland. The Pyramid Inch (1966) is set between the years of 1919 and 1932, and ends with Andrew's death. Removed from his beloved Egypt, he had spent his last years on trivia. His wife, a monstrously

selfish woman, her sisters and their children are the central characters in this book, and it is at this point that one feels Desmond Stewart is straining his material to illustrate his themes. The cast of characters is large, but the book is too short to do more than sketch them. Only the archaeologist son Jay shares his father's love for Egypt. The Mamelukes (1968), the concluding volume, is also the most disappointing. The firm grasp of geographical and historical atmosphere which made the first novel convincingly authentic has been smothered by his concern to keep the story moving. He continues to follow the family's love affair with the Middle East but the characters are only names.

The trilogy fails, partly because in the second and third novels Stewart has attempted to paint too large a panorama on too small a canvas. He compresses where expansion seems called for. Part of the failure is due to a determination to illustrate his themes, which leads to an over-schematic organization. In The Mamelukes he writes:

> The novels of this sequence . . . illustrate two major themes: the conception of the mediaeval Arab philosopher Ibn Khaldun that three generations can reduce a dynasty from vigour to decadence, and the older concept of Pythagoras that there are three kinds of man: the man who takes part in the games (Andrew), the man who contemplates them (Jay) and the man who applauds the contestants (William).[1]

In The Sequence of Roles Desmond Stewart has not managed to avoid all the pitfalls of the chronicle novel, but he has avoided the most common one - tediousness.

PAUL SCOTT has written two massive novels, The Jewel in the Crown (1966) and The Day of the Scorpion (1968), and projects a third to complete his study of the decline of

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1 The hero of The Mamelukes.

British India. The Day of the Scorpion is not exactly a sequel to the first book, rather it is a refinement, a reflection. The same events are followed out and extended. The central situation of the first book was a love affair between an Indian brought up in England and an English girl who was raped by a gang of Indians. The case becomes complicated by the disturbances and tensions of 1942 when the war against the Japanese was going badly and leading Indian politicians were arrested after the Congress Committee had passed Gandhi's Quit India Resolution. The Day of the Scorpion gives new information about these events and their aftermath, but essentially it is an attempt to analyse their meaning. The novel is about the crumbling of an empire, and the attitudes of those who have served it as soldiers and administrators, those English who have no other home, and the Indians who are waiting to take over. The characters, and there are a a large number of them, represent not only themselves as individuals but also represent typical attitudes and personalities of those involved in India. They are witnesses to history. There is, for example, a conventional soldier, a young officer of the old school who believes the magic of the regiment's name will bring back its deserters. He dies in an ambush. A spinster missionary sets fire to herself, dying because her India is dead. Two Indian politicians, one a humane idealist, the other a slippery opportunist, watch from the side-lines.

Paul Scott's achievement is impressive. Although there inevitably are dull patches and passages of exposition by characters who owe their presence to the attitudes

they represent, his ambitiousness is justified. Scott never loses sight of his central concern in the maze of detail and this gives his work a solid overall structure. His temperament seems well suited to the chronicle novel but it is questionable whether he accomplishes more than E.M. Forster in his very much briefer A Passage to India.

The remaining novelists in this section have not completed their sequences and it is not always possible to see patterns emerging, so only a tentative guess can be made as to whether they will become enduring additions to the chronicle novel.

JILLIAN BECKER. The Keep (1967) is the first novel of a projected trilogy by a young South African writer. Her choice of subject matter - the lives of a Russian-Jewish family in Johannesburg before the war - makes comparison with Doris Lessing, Dan Jacobson and Nadine Gordimer appropriate, but her concern is less with the political scene than with the family and their relationships with each other. The father, a lawyer, has grandiose political ambitions and rhetoric to match; the mother has pretensions to culture and a nostalgia for her romantic youth. Their two children, Josephine and Simon, scarcely impinge on their lives and grow up alone. Simon is a more brutal version of Henry James's Miles [1], a type which occurs frequently in contemporary fiction. [2] Simon is angelically beautiful and totally evil. His sadism, which is shown developing throughout

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1 The Turn of the Screw, 1898.
2 Writers like Richard Hughes and William Golding have explored this further, but there are also a number of writers who use the "little monster" for comic effect - Kingsley Amis and Muriel Spark do this.

his childhood and youth, culminating in his watching his mother die from snake-bite. His sister Josephine, who worships him, is the only person who can communicate with him. The portrayal of an evil person is a bold venture, and Simon is not always convincing, but Jillian Becker's portrait of the parents, their relatives and other minor characters have a credibiltiy, an authenticity, which mark her as a potentially fine social novelist. She manages, too, to keep her political themes under control; forming an essential part of the background but not, at least in this novel, becoming an intrusive foreground.

ISOBEL COLEGATE is an accomplished historical novelist (as she showed in Statues in the Garden, 1964) and Orlando King (1968), the first of a projected trilogy, is set in Europe in the 1930s. It follows the fortunes of a young man brought up on a remote island by a retired don who teaches him to shun material things and to love the simple life. But Orlando is restless and goes to London with letters of introduction which start him on a meteoric career in Business, Industry and Government. He adapts to his new life with alarming rapidity. The coming of war forces him to re-examine himself - and the book ends as he returns to the island. A reviewer wrote of this book:

> Where Miss Colegate persuades us completely into the suspension of both disbelief and criticism is in her attention to detail, both historic and stylistic: there is hardly a sentence to fault, or a snatch of dialogue to improve on, once the reader has accepted Orlando and his contemporaries as the spokesmen of a generation now, thankfully, being put in perspective.

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1 TLS 19.9.1968.

EDWARD UPWARD. Nearly thirty years after his Kafkaesque last book, Edward Upward embarked on a trilogy of which only In the Thirties (1962) has been published. [1] It is a record of what it was like to be a young Communist in the 1930's. The book records the conflict between the young hero's imaginative life (he was an aspiring poet) and his political life which gradually corroded his natural gifts. The proof of his thesis lies in the book itself. Its overwhelming dullness, its determination to leave nothing out and its very limited appeal make it a literary curiosity. It can be read as a political record, an autobiography or a social study - but the material has not been transmuted by the imagination into a novel.

COLIN SPENCER has written two novels in his projected tetralogy which centres around the lives of the Simpson family. A reviewer wrote of The Tyranny of Love (1967), the second volume, that the "intricate and sometimes hilarious tension of suburban passion is well conveyed by Mr. Spencer in flat, even monotonous, narrative and dialogue." [1] This story of a young man's hatred for his father and the effect this has on his life and loves, is told also in exhaustive detail. As in D.H. Lawrence's Sons and Lovers, the portrait of the father is painted in such black colours that the reader perversely prefers him to his feeble son. The father has a vigour and vitality which makes him more interesting than the younger man who has Lawrence's habit of presenting damning evidence against the father whenever possible - and making it too damning to be convincing. But in the end it is the monotonous narrative which finally numbs the reader.

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1 Times Sat. R. 12.10.1968.

Chapter 4 Part B:

The Picaresque Novel

Paul West [1] distinguished between the Bildungsroman which "piles up facts towards a total conception of a character" and the picaresque novel which "presents life as just one thing after another, with the minimum of manipulation". It was natural that both forms should have been revived by the post-war Contemporaries, who are primarily social novelists. The Chronicle or Bildungsroman novelists looked to the nineteenth century for their models: the picaresque novelists looked to the eighteenth century. These forms were not revived simply as a reaction to the Modern novel, but because the Contemporaries found in them a peculiarly apt method of recording post-war British society.

The use of either the chronicle or the picaresque novel enables the writer to range widely through the classes, and in the picaresque novel he is able to convey the flavour of society through a series of impressions or snapshots. In his wanderings the picaro becomes involved in a variety of situations, meets a variety of people and cuts across a number of social strata. The picaresque novel is a comedy of situations, which P. West [1] describes as: "people defining themselves against vicissitudes, not tradition". The heroic and picaresque novel are not unalike in form but " . . . in the latter the actions happen for their own sakes, because actions, of a type, are entertaining. Heroic action is always a test." [2] The

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1 P. West, The Modern Novel, 1965.
2 A. Alvarez, 'Art and Isolation', List., 31.1.1957.

picaresque hero exists in a society where social mobility is possible; a society which is in a state of flux, as Britain's is now. The picaresque hero is essentially rootless, a wanderer. He owes no allegiance to any class, and feels himself to be an outsider and onlooker.

The central theme of the picaresque novel is the search for identity, one of the great twentieth century themes. "The hero accepts the fact _that_ he is, but wonders what kind and degree of adjectival postulate he can build upon his existence."[1] The uncommitted hero wanders through society looking for some value to which he can attach himself, seeking to discover who and what he is.

In 1953 John Wain published _Hurry on Down_, one of the first and most influential of the contemporary picaresque novels. In a discussion [2] on form in the novel, John Wain wrote: ". . . quite often it happens that a form becomes viable again after it has been rested for a century or two. (The picaresque novel is an example of this in English Literature)." The picaresque novel had appeared in earlier twentieth century fiction in novels like J.B. Priestley's _The Good Companions_ (1929) and Joyce Cary's novels, most memorably _The Horse's Mouth_ (1944), but it was not until the 1950s that it became one of the chief forms of the twentieth centuy novel. K. Allsop [3] commented thus on the influence of _Hurry on Down_:

> This journeying with a central character through a sequence of picaresque events, with the staccato omnivorousness of a cinema newsreel stimulated a fashion that still continues. . . . Hurry on Down set a new style in recrudescence, of the intellectual rebel without a cause wandering through the deserts and jungles of the post-war world trying to find somewhere to pitch his tent.

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1 J. Gindin, _Postwar British Fiction_, 1963.
2 _Essays on Literature and Ideas_, 1963.
3 _The Angry Decade_, 1958.

The hero of Hurry on Down, Charles Lumley, is a young university graduate who feels that his middle-class upbringing has been stultifying, so he resolves to "try and find himself" by leaving his old life and going to live in a town where he knows no one and depends on no one. The rest of the novel is a simple picaresque adventure story, with Charles becoming in turn a window-cleaner, car delivery driver, hospital attendant, chauffeur and finally a gag-writer. Through his jobs he meets a cross-section of society and has a variety of adventures. In his last position, a materially comfortable one, he apparently feels he has found the neutrality which he was seeking. His friend Mr Blarney describes it as a racket for the type who: "Doesn't want to take sides in all the silly pettiness that goes on. Doesn't want to spend his time scratching and being scratched. Wants to live his own life." His life by then includes the woman he pursued with the ardour of a young man two hundred pages and many adventures earlier.

The form Hurry on Down takes is, in the opinion of C.B. Cox[1] a solution to the structural problems which face the modern novelist of liberal inclinations.:

> Charles Lumley tries to escape from a degenerate society. He dreams of being left alone to grow naturally into his true self. . . . Wain's humanist sympathies with individualism. He wishes to make no roots in society but to be independent of class. . . . Wain's purpose is to show how extraordinarily difficult it is to realize such an ideal. Lumley is forced back into contact with society by his need for money and his passion for Veronica. There is no possible way in which he could gradually develop an independence of his own; as a result the structure of the novel is picaresque, a series of dramatic scenes to illustrate his own dilemma. Every attempt to escape is followed by a recommital to the evil of society. . . . no climax or resolution; during a sequence of adventures he repeats the same patterns of escape from society followed by recapture. Wain here creates a

1 The Free Spirit, 1963.

> narrative structure which can express the frustrations of a liberal who has lost his belief in meliorism and therefore can no longer devise plots which move inevitably through conflict to some form of resolution.

The picaresque novel depends chiefly on three things for its success: the character of the hero, the story of his adventures, and the value of its social commentary. Considered from these three angles, Hurry on Down is not a success. Its importance in the literary history of the 'fifties must be acknowledged, for to it can be credited the revival of the picaresque, and also the introduction of the vogue for anti-intellectualism.[1] But as a work of literature it has very little merit, and even its philosophy is muzzy.

In the first chapter Charles speaks of "the deeper and more personal problems which he had shelved for years on the promise of this tranquil interlude." These problems are never articulated and indeed the search for solutions is submerged in the need to scrape a living for himself. Charles has not been able to seek answers to his problems before:

> . . . because the University had, by its three years' random and shapeless cramming unfitted his mind for serious thinking; partly because of the continued nagging of his circumstances . . . and partly for the blunt, simple reason that his problems did not really admit of any solution.

In going to live in a working-class milieu he is not attempting to join the working-classes, whom he loathes, and he is at pains to point out the difference between himself and

> . . . all the expensive young men of the Thirties who had made, or wished to make, or talked of making, a gesture somewhat similar to his own, turning their backs on the setting that had pampered them; and how they had all failed from the start because their rejection was moved by the desire to enter, and be at one with, a vaguely conceived People, whose minds and lives they

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1 A vogue which reached its lowest point with the publication of 150 Works of Literature We Could Do Without, by Brigid Brophy, M. Levey and C. Osborne, 1967.

> could not even begin to imagine, and who would in any case, had they ever arrived, have made their lives hell. At least, Charles thought with a sense of self-congratulation, he had always been right about *them*, right to despise them for their idiotic attempt to look through two telescopes at the same time: one fashioned of German psychology and pointed at themselves, the other of Russian economics and directed at the English working class. A fundamental sense of what life really consisted of had saved him at any rate from such fatuities.

This passage is not ironic, as it might appear out of context. Wain takes his hero very much more seriously than it is possible for the reader to do. Illogical, ignorant and arrogant, he displays the smugness, self-deception and fatuity he professes to find in others. The tone of the novel is apparent in this extract - it is not a mood of rebellion, but of bad-temper. The fiery brilliance of a Jimmy Porter is toned down to a petulant whining; the humour and satire of *Lucky Jim* is here a sly sniggering.

Like so many of Charles's metaphysical statements, the "fundamental sense of what life really consists of" is left vague, and the reader is forced to conclude that what life really consists of is a little gentle slumming, sneering, despising the rich because they are rich - and finding a girl and a well-paid job. The more sympathetic interpretation that C.B. Cox gives, that Charles is sincere in his searching, but cannot realise his independence for his "every attempt to escape is followed by a recommitment to the evil of society"[1] is supported by F.R. Karl[2] who suggests that his "honesty of intention is transformed into the expedience of reality". Or perhaps Charles is not looking for values at all, but for a place for himself in society and, in passing, material for a book.

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1 *The Free Spirit*, 1963.
2 *A Reader's Guide to the Contemporary English Novel*, 1963.

Hurry on Down was widely acclaimed for its moral seriousness and also for its comedy. It is hard to see why. This is an example of his undergraduate-satirist manner:

> His tirade was drowned in an attack of choking, for the labourer next to him, after arranging the shavings of twist in a clay pipe, had actually gone to the length of lighting them. Dense,blue smoke gathered around Froulish and forced its way into his eyes, nose, throat, and lungs. Charles started back before he, too, should be overwhelmed. Getting up, he took his drink and stood about six feet away from the evil-smelling volcano . . . . Froulish dragged himself to his feet; his figure could be dimly made out through the fog. 'This way!' shouted Charles. They had become characters in a film trying to escape from a jungle fire, or convicts breaking away in a Dartmoor fog. Clawing the air in front of him, his face green and soaked in perspiration, Froulish emerged; and Charles, swiftly catching his swaying figure, seized him by the arm and dragged him out in the clear air.

There are many other set-pieces described in the same facetious manner - the lecture Froulish gives on his novel, the scene in the night-club, Charles learning to drive, and so on.

Two critics who were not dazzled by the aura of success and publicity which surrounded John Wain were Anthony Burgess [1] and Kenneth Allsop [2]. Allsop sees Wain as typifying the star-building system of the 'fifties.

> Wain's self-confidence combined with the climate of acceptance into which he first appeared have created a curiously freak reputation. . . . it has mostly been done in deliberately high-brow terms. . . . Wain is undoubtedly the most over-rated writer of the fifties and stands as a lesson in present-day careerism - how, if he is aggressive enough about it, a writer can get himself accepted at his own evaluation, irrespective of talent.

In the light of this it is interesting to compare the reception of John Wain's later novels. "Disappointing" seems to be the general verdict - but in fact there is little to choose between Hurry on Down and, say, The Young Visitors (1965). In Living in the Present the

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1 The Novel Now, 1967
2 The Angry Decade, 1958.

picaresque structure is tidied up into a quest. In The Contenders(1958) the picaresque element is subdued to more complex purposes.

The picaresque novel was seen by many of the writers who followed John Wain as a simple solution to the problems of form. Their novels are a collection of anecdotes which serve no real purpose other than to entertain - which they often do delightfully. There is not always a convincing reason for the hero being an outsider, so there is no sense of dilemma. Edmund Ward's Summer in Retreat is mentioned by K. Allsop [1] as having this failing. Instead of the hero's adventures being a way of viewing and criticising a cross-section of society from an unusual angle, the emphasis has shifted to recounting his sexual adventures. The Randy Picaresque has replaced the Social Picaresque.

The picaresque novel has proved particularly attractive to writers whose heroes are working-class because it is the working-class which has been most affected by the breakdown of the class system and the new social mobility. The Redbrick University heroes, characters like Kingsley Amis's Lucky Jim, are usually picaresque. Educated out of their own class, but outsiders in the next class up the ladder, their adventures are often hilarious and their observations keen.

It would be repetitious to discuss in this chapter the many picaresque novels in contemporary fiction, for the patterns vary very little. In any case most of the picaresque heroes are more interesting as examples of either the contemporary

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1 K. Allsop, The Angry Decade, 1958.

anti-hero or as provincial heroes. The anti-hero has been called the "standard fictional representative of his age"[1] and the provincial novel the "liveliest post-war trend in English fiction".[2] It has been decided therefore to discuss the picaresque hero within one or other of those groups. The picaresque anti-hero is discussed along with other types of anti-hero in Chapter 5A; the provincial picaresque hero is included in Chapter 4C.

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1 J. Gindin, Postwar British Fiction, 1963
2 The British Imagination, 1960.

Chapter 4 Part C:

The Provincial Novel

In 1960 a critic[1] wrote: "The liveliest post-war trend in English fiction is probably the investigation of values in a provincial setting - a theme with as much social as literary interest." Since that was written there are signs that the trend is less lively. Although provincial novels continue to be written and be published there is a disturbing sameness about most of them and few of the recent ones have brought anything very original to the genre. As with all literary fashions, there has been a reaction against the excesses of those who jumped on the band-wagon, but when the provincial novel became established in the 1950s it was seen as an important and refreshing stimulus.

Typically, the provincial novel is concerned with the working-classes, and more often than not with the urban working-classes. There is no middle- or upper-class provincial novel. The terms "provincial" and "working-class" are nearly synonymous in current usage, and in this chapter they are used interchangeably. The industrial north, particularly Yorkshire and the West Riding, is the most popular setting, although there are a number of Irish novels with a rural setting. The Irish novels form a distinctive group and will be discussed separately.

There are a number of possible reasons why the provincial novel should have come into prominence when it did. The time was ripe for a new kind of novel to appear. "For ten

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1 _The British Imagination_, A Critical Survey of the Arts, 1960.

or fifteen years before these writers began to publish in the middle 'fifties, British writing seemed anaemic and concerned with well-executed trivia."[1] Most of the writers had been established before the war and few of these had much to say about or even interest in the contemporary world. The provinces and the working-classes were neglected in their novels.[2] When the provincial novel appeared and opened up new territory, its originality was striking.

The reaction against the Moderns, which was gaining strength at this time[3] created a favourable climate for the acceptance of the provincial novels which were Contemporary in style, subject and concerns.

Although some of the writers of provincial working-class novels were not themselves provincial or working-class[4], most of them were[5] and to the older literary Left they seemed a fulfilment of their hopes that an articulate working-class would emerge one day if given the chance.[6] It was natural that the presence of these writers, sons of coal-miners[7], Yorkshire grocers,[8] school drop-outs[9], should have been regarded as in itself hopeful, however much the books themselves may have displeased some of the older generation with their attacks on the Welfare State the pre-war Socialists had helped to build. It seemed that the proletarian novel had at last arrived.

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1 J. Gindin, Postwar British Fiction, 1963.
2 Discussed by E. Shiels, 'British Intellectuals', Encounters, ed. S. Spender et al, 1953-1963.
3 This has been discussed in Chapter 2.
4 J. Wain and K. Amis were not working-class, Amis was not born in the provinces, neither was J. Osborne.
5 A. Sillitoe, J. Braine, B. Kops, D. Storey, S. Barstow, K. Waterhouse, A. Wesker, S. Middleton amongst them.
6 J. Lehmann, 'Radicalism Then and Now', List., 9.8.1962.
7 A. Sillitoe, S. Barstow, D. Storey.
8 K. Waterhouse.
9 A. Sillitoe, C. Wilson, S. Delaney, B. Kops and others.

Ironically, the Welfare State was largely responsible for giving these young men the opportunity to become writers. Admittedly D.H. Lawrence had pioneered acceptance of the provincial working-class novelist but it was less Lawrence's example than the Welfare State itself which made the emergence of such writers likely. Free education and a higher standard of living, together with the breaking-down of class barriers made it easier for the would-be novelist to acquire the necessary literary techniques and sufficient leisure and freedom from worry and want to devote himself to writing. As George Orwell pointed out[1], poverty reduces man to an animal where even his sexual urges (which are linked to his creative or artistic urges) are sublimated in his search for food. For the worker who recognises that he is doing an essentially meaningless job that is in no way fulfilling, this knowledge of his own uselessness acts as a deterrent sexually. None of the new wave of provincial novelists seems to have experienced real poverty and, judging from their novels, neither did they lose their sexual urges.

The courting of youth by commerce and the discovery of the "teen-ager" as a potentially valuable market created a youth-cult in the post-war world, and since most of the provincial novelists were young, they benefitted from this attitude. K. Allsop[2] suggests that Michael Hastings, an eighteen year old tailor's cutter from the East End is typical of those who benefitted from the state of:

> a full-employment economy, with a vast monied juvenile market, [in which] youth is cultivated, flattered and pampered, and bestowed with a glamour that it has never previously had . . . . That is not necessarily alleging

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1 Down and Out in Paris and London, 1933.
2 The Angry Decade, 1958.

> that these ultra-young of the youth brigade cannot write . . . . what is so regrettable about the fashion of the fifties for publishing those whose bones are barely set is that it does the writers themselves so much harm. There is nothing unique, not even new, in young people writing. Almost every professional writer has made his first attempts . . . in his teens. . . . The difference is that the writer - short of the authentic genius - was aware that this was his apprentice stage . . . . not until today have writers going through this necessary stage been indecently encouraged by publishers to display their precocious jottings to the public . . . .

Kenneth Allsop has touched on a very important point - the harmful effect of premature publication on the writer. Very few of the young provincial writers of the 'fifties have developed much beyond the point reached in their first novels, and many of them have retrogressed. As J. Lehmann[1] said of the theatre: "Once the novelty has worn off, unless genius declares itself, they [the middle-classes] will surely prefer to return to something that at least in part enters into their own middle-class world." The novelty has worn off in both the drama and the novel, but writers have continued to re-write their first novels in the hopes of repeating their success. The need to publish and keep their names before the public has not allowed them to develop and mature. The provincial novel has not ~~not~~ gone beyond the point it reached in the 1950s, and many of the writers who were hailed then have since proved disappointing. The reaction has set in and the provincial novel has lost its vitality.

There were, then, a number of reasons why the provincial novelists should have found a ready climate of acceptance in the 'fifties. For most of the novelists who were born and brought up in the provinces it is not necessary to seek reasons for their choice of provincial settings, but the reasons have not always been autobiographical.

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1 'Radicalism Then and Now', List., 9.8.1962

A. Sillitoe expressed regret that: "Working men and women who read do not have the privilege of seeing themselves honestly and realistically portrayed in novels."[1] There is no way of knowing whether the working-classes do want this privilege. R. Rabinovitz[2] suggests that they do, offering as "proof" the success of some of these novels when made into films, but it is more likely that cinema attendances were high because of other factors - the chief one being the sexual content of the films. Nor is it possible to point to the success of such stage plays as Osborne's or Wesker's, for theatre audiences are mainly middle-class. Wesker's Centre 42 venture, which aimed at bringing serious theatre to the working-classes has not been a conspicuous success. It is probable that the middle-classes rather than the lower-classes have profited from the realistic and honest portrayals of the latter in contemporary fiction.

The provincial working-class novel has attracted middle-class novelists, and there are less obvious reasons for their choice of such settings and subjects. J. Gindin[3] suggests that the middle-class writers have examined the traditional attitudes of the working-classes

> . . . not from any allegiance to them as such, but in an attempt to work out, for their heroes, the sanest and most effective way to survive in contemporary society. . . . British writers have come increasingly to recognize the applicability of traditional working class attitudes. The skepticism about authority and leadership, the sense that man controls so little of his destiny, and the realization that what man can achieve is limited and personal have all been strongly reinforced by the history of the last fifty years. . . . The contemporary writer turns to the traditional values of the working class not to find a proletarian utopia or to endorse some vague notions about improving conditions or the equality of

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1 Writers at Work 3, Paris Review Interviews, 1968.
2 The Reaction against Experiment in the English Novel, 1967.
3 Postwar British Fiction, 1963.

> all men. Primarily, the writer values the working class for its traditional responses within a society it cannot control, for learning to live within a limited compass.

One writer who did seek out the working classes with "vague notions about . . . the equality of man" was Doris Lessing, but in In Pursuit of the English[1] she admits that she found that: "The people from the working class are simply less verbally skilful, less proficient in handling the forms, less sophisticated versions of their counterparts who comprise the Establishment." It is surprising that she should have expected anything different, for as a Marxist Doris Lessing would be aware of the effect of a man's environment on his character.

Doris Lessing's remark is interesting chiefly because she reaches the same conclusions about the working-class as the young provincial writers reach about the older generation. If the picture of provincial society which emerges from the 1950s novels is to be believed, the older and younger generation are so different as to be almost separate races. The generation gap which occurs in every society has been aggravated in this one by the speed at which the provincial working-class world has changed. It is not years which divide the generations; it is worlds.

A portrait of the older generation of provincial hero is given in Walter Allen's All in a Lifetime (1959). Although this book was published in the late 'fifties, it was not one of the new wave of provincial novels but an example of the work of an older writer, one of those who kept the provincial novel alive in the 'thirties. (B.L. Coombes, John Hampson, and Leslie Halward were,

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1 A report on post-war England published in 1960.

according to John Lehmann[1], similarly employed). In Reading a Novel (1963) Walter Allen wrote that he views the novel as "a sort of resistance movement against rigid and impersonal concepts of man and his duties" and as "a revelation of the novelist's own self-discovery". The hero of All in a Lifetime is an old man looking back across an epoch which radically changed the lives of his class. Billy was "always one for changing the world, you and your socialism"[2] but he can find no place for himself in the world he helped to create. His autobiography is an attempt "to find out where things went wrong; if they did. I'm going to come to terms with myself and with life. At least I'm going to try."[3] Walter Allen's hero is not unlike the kind of working-class man Doris Lessing described - somewhat inarticulate and unsophisticated. His inarticulacy is a drawback in a hero and Allen's decision to cast the novel in letter form removed the possibility of the book being enlivened with dialogue. But Billy emerges as a sincere, puzzled man who had fought poverty and unemployment in his youth, only to find that Socialism had created unforeseen problems while solving these. It is typical of the more aware working class of his generation that he should have sought a political solution. The younger generation has no faith or interest in political ideologies. The nearest they come to taking a political view is in novels like Alan Sillitoe's which display an anarchic bitterness wholly foreign to Allen's generation of writers.

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1 'Radicalism Then and Now', The List., 9.8.1962.
2 Chapter I, page 7.
3 Chapter I, page 10.

The provincial hero of the 1950s is more articulate and irresponsible and less innately conservative than the 'thirties hero. Unlike his predecessors he makes no attempt to hide his working-class origins when he finds himself amongst the middle-classes as a result of his education. With his cocky arrogance and sharp eye for cant and hypocrisy, his quick wit and talent for getting himself into awkward situations, he is often an attractive hero. He displays a sophisticated cynicism and a refusal to be grateful or appreciative for being better off than his parents were. He expresses his disgust and frustration very vocally - and the Angry Young Man became a feature of the 'fifties. Not all the Angry Young Men were working-class but they expressed a violent dislike of the middle- and upper-classes, preferring the working-classes who they found less false. In the chapter on the anti-hero (Chapter5A) there is a discussion of the three main types of "rebels" or dissenters, represented by John Osborne's Jimmy Porter, Kingsley Amis's Jim Dixon and John Braine's Joe Lampton. Most of the heroes of provincial novels belong to one or other of these types and could be discussed in that section, but some of the provincial novelists are more interesting as provincials than as Angry Young Men or anti-heroes, and these will be discussed here.

Keith Waterhouse, Sid Chaplin, Stan Barstow, Alan Sillitoe and some other less well-known writers are very conscious of belonging to the provincial working class and from their novels it is possible to form an idea of what it is like to be born and brought up in such a society. The heroes

of their novels fall roughly into two groups - the adolescents and those over twenty. The novels of the first group are often comic, for however real the agonies of an adolescent may be, they are endemic to his age group. His antagonism towards his parents and the older generation is at its most violent and the desire for sexual experience is at its most obsessive. He has fewer responsibilities at that age than when he is older and he is very self-absorbed. His picaresque adventures form the body of these novels, which usually end with the sexual initiation of the hero.

Keith Waterhouse's Billy Liar (1959) is perhaps the most successful novels of this group and it shows the typical pattern very clearly. Billy, an undertaker's clerk in a drab Yorkshire town, despises his working-class family, his job, his employer and anyone else whom he suspects of being humbugs. His ambition is to go to London where he has the tentative offer of work as a gag-writer for a comedian, but although he gets as far as buying a train ticket, in the end he does not leave. His "rebellion" is the grumble of an adolescent, which makes his defeat more poignant. Billy tells the story himself in a marvelously vivid, lively argot. His fantasy life and the compensatory day-dreams which console him for the boredom and greyness of his real life, his misfortunes and failures and the appallingly tangled situations in which he finds himself provide material for one of the best contemporary novels. Billy's courtship of orange-eating Barbara is a disaster, but he eventually manages to lose his virginity with a girl he calls the Witch. She is everything Billy would like to be and has not the courage to be - a free spirit, an

unconventional person who is not tied by any place or group of people.

Sid Chaplin's _The Day of the Sardine_ (1961) shows another young man struggling not to become one of the sardines, to fulfil his mother's lodger's prophecy that: "You'll sail the seas. And when I say the seas, I mean deep seas, 'cos you're not the type to hide in the bottleneck . . . you're no sardine." Arthur, like Billy and the other rebellious young provincials, refuses to accept the values and way of life of the people around him. Arthur does not have Billy's knack of creating a fantasy world to serve as an escape-shaft out of reality, and neither does he have Billy's lively sense of humour. He is finally defeated by loneliness and joins a gang of hooligans, the only alternative to boredom in a bleak and dreary northern town. His first love affair is with an older woman but he is too immature to sustain such a relationship. Following a gang fight he runs away for fear of the consequences, returning home after some sobering adventures - the picaresque hero does not always enjoy his role. Arthur's ultimate fate is a question mark: will the pressures be too great for him to remain outside the sardine shoal? His hatred of falseness and humbug is fiercer than Billy's and his disillusion with the adult world more profound. Billy is able to escape - at least in the imagination - from his situation, but Arthur lacks his resources. The two books have in common also a remarkably clear and accurate picture of the depressing towns and slow, unimaginative people who live in them.

Trevor Bostock's _Up the Monkeys_ (1964) and Robert Holles's _Religion and Davey Peach_ (1962) are both entertaining

provincial novels with similar themes. Robert Holles's _Captain Cat_ (1960) is the story of the struggle of two young army cadets to remain independent. Inevitably, they fail. One commits suicide, the other conforms and betrays his friend. The army is an extreme example of a rigid society, and they are too weak to fight it.

Philip Callow' _Going to the Moon_ (1965), the first of a projected sequence, is less exuberant than Holles's book. It follows the usual pattern - misunderstood adolescent, first love affair - but the picture it paints of northern life is grim and gray.

> We were haunting the streets, shackled invisibly, drifting round corners like shadows, and in the winter especially we stayed away from the main arteries where the traffic rammed through indifferent to us; long-distance heavies, big stuff. These were rancid, poor days.

The heroes of Alan Sillitoe's novels are older than those already discussed, and their rebellion is more than an adolescent restlessness. Arthur Seaton, the hero of _Saturday Night and Sunday Morning_ (1958) is a go-getter like John Braine's Joe Lampton, with the difference that his ambitions are not to "better" himself but to grab all he can while he can. He shares John Osborne's Jimmy Porter's hatred of the neat, nice, respectable, smug and apathetic, but unlike Jimmy he believes that the working classes still have real grievances which have not been cured by the Welfare State. Arthur Seaton sees himself and his generation as victims, and all who represent authority are "them"; and "they" never cease from grinding the faces of the poor. Such an attitude links him with the proletarian writers of the 'thirties and it also gives his work a slightly old-fashioned air.

Alan Sillitoe depicts provincial life with a harsh realism. Sillitoe's world is a jungle. "Governed by unjust and inhumane restrictions, confronted with the essential cruelty and stupidity of human nature, it resembles the jungle where creature fights creature without order or principle." [1] Arthur Seaton sees life as a cruel joke and retaliates with cruelty, violence and selfishness. Since the world is a cheat, he cheats everyone, from his foreman to his women. He has been born into a world where good jobs and good pay are easy to come by, but it is also a boring world where he has to find adventure in chasing after married women, flaunting his conquests almost in the face of their husbands, and playing one women against another, or two others. Money is needed only to buy enjoyment; his standards are entirely materialistic, his ends hedonistic.

Sillitoe's style is one of habitual violence, "a deliberate reflection of the hated, cheated prole,. crossed by a certain awkward artifice which is correlative with the hero's self-education." [2] John Lehmann [3] praised Sillitoe for his ability to "describe a working-class scene and make working-class people talk with vivid authenticity." Sillitoe has been compared to D.H. Lawrence (they were born within a few miles of each other), but his promise has not been fulfilled.

Only in The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner (1959) [4] has he been able to organise his form and overcome the difficulties of his style successfully. The vigorous, anarchic Arthur Seaton is replaced in Key to the Door (1961)

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1 J. Gindin, Postwar British Fiction, 1963
2 F. Kermode, Continuities, 1968.
3 'Radicalism Then and Now', The List., 9.8.1962.
4 Discussed in chapter 5A, page 26.

by a vaguely nice character, Brian Seaton. Brian's working-class childhood in Nottingham and his years in Malaya on National Service are traced in exhaustive detail. The book is roughly 450 pages long, with a pace so steady and regular, and surprises too few, that it is almost a day-by-day account of Brian's growth from child to man. The General (1960) was described by Anthony Burgess [1] as "Kafka-and-water", and of The Death of William Posters (1965) a critic is reported to have said [2] that it would be uphill work if the going were not so flat.

In 1967, Sillitoe published another hefty tome, A Tree on Fire, a sequl to The Death of William Posters. This novel makes it clear that the intransigence of Saturday Night and Sunday Morning was based on something more lasting and more radical than raucous bloody-mindedness: Sillitoe's proposition is that ". . . Revolution is the only remaining road to spiritual advance." One of his heroes, a communist, goes gun-running for the FLN in Algeria; the other is a talented painter who has just become fashionable but tries to remain exiled and unemployed in spirit. The painter says: "The world hasn't got to be only lived in. . . . but it has to be continually attacked, raided, sabotaged, marauded, plundered, insulted and spat on." Compare this with Arthur Seaton's words: ". . . now he was awake once more, ready to tackle all obstacles, to break any man, or woman, that came for him, to turn on the whole world if it bothered him too much, and blow it to pieces."

David Storey, Stanley Middleton, Christina Stead and the playwright Arnold Wesker can also be termed "northern

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1 The Novel Now, 1967.
2 A. Burgess, ibid, mentions it.

realists". The picture they paint of life in the provinces is very little different from Sillitoe's and they share his anger and bitterness. Like Sillitoe, they have a penchant for rhetoric:

> [1] Your life's moving in cycles to a certain end and you can't escape it; though you are howling and bawling through the universe that's closing in on you. Can you escape? For you're no airman, no, pet; you're an earth creature. No, it's a fateful thing you came to Roseland, it's a fateful thing you met me, it's a fateful thing you met those who sucked your heart dry, and the hour is now, pet! it's my voice that is telling you the right thing; listen . . . .

A refreshing contrast to these writers is provided by Stan Barstow, who had been writing for eight years before he achieved success with <u>A Kind of Loving</u>, in 1962. Its appearance coincided with the vogue for the provincial novel, but its success was not wholly due to this happy chance. <u>A Kind of Loving</u> is "a tale of drab affection and hasty marriage""[2] set in West Riding. Stan Barstow offers none of the verbal fireworks of Keith Waterhouse or the passionate rhetoric of Wesker and Sillitoe; he impresses with the sincerity and gentleness of his writing. Like most of the provincial writers, he has been compared to Lawrence but R. Rabinowitz [3] points out that he is closer to Bennett and Zola, for where Lawrence emphasised the hero's struggle with himself, Barstow's theme is the struggle with society. Lawrence's coal miner becomes, in Barstow's novels, "an elderly relative, lovingly posed with his brass-band culture against the industrial background of the author's childhood, already doomed by the new technology of electric power and cybernetics." [4] Barstow's picture of lower-middle class life is drawn with documentary

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1 from Christina Stead's <u>Cotter's England</u>, 1966.
2 M. Ratcliffe, <u>The Novel Today</u>, 1968.
3 <u>The Reaction against Experiment in the English Novel</u>, 1967.
4 L. Kitchin, 'The Zombies' Lair', The <u>List.</u>,4.11.1965.

realism, and he neither condescends to, nor sentimentalises, the lower classes.

Unlike many of the Northern writers who appeared at the same time as he did, Barstow has continued to set his novels in the provinces. In an article [1] he wrote:

> A novelist can only offer his view of the human predicament in terms of the kind of people and area of country he knows best. That my work is mostly set in the West Riding was to my advantage at first. People who ought to know tell me that now, with that North Country vogue . . . on its way out, I'd do better to broaden my field. When I'm ready. In the meantime I'm busy trying to plough that same field with a little deeper furrow.

Ask Me Tomorrow (1962) is about an embryonic writer's break-away from the pit, and his loves, lusts and dramas thereafter. Joby (1964) is told in dialect by a small boy. It takes place in the summer before the war. Joby's world is secure and uneventful, with the "tuppenny rush" at the cinema the high-light of the week, but when his mother goes to hospital, all this is changed. By the end of the book, Joby has left his childhood behind him. In The Watchers on the Shore (1966), Barstow takes up the story of Vic and Ingrid, the characters in his first novel.

A Raging Calm (1968) is Stan Barstow's most ambitious work. His range of characters has been widened to include a respected town councillor, a lively young teacher and a young man studying at Oxford, but only in his depiction of the affair between the teacher and the councillor's secretary does he show signs of having over-extended himself. The novel is a closely-textured, carefully-plotted tale of three love affairs. Barstow's characters, and his sympathetic and credible picture of life in Yorkshire, provide a necessary contrast to the novels of Sillitoe and the other "northern realists". Barstow's novels pass the test of "felt life". [illegible]

The Irish novelists are distinct from the other provincial writers, partly because they tend to choose rural settings in preference to urban settings for their novels, and partly because of the differences between Irish and English provincial life.

Poverty has not become a folk-memory among the Irish as it has, for the most part, among the English; it is a very real factor in their lives. The Irish family structure is more rigid than the English, with the parents having greater control over their children, which makes it harder for the young hero to break away from home. The family ties are reinforced by Catholicism, which affects every facet of Irish life. The young heroes who rebel, define themselves against a stronger, more tangible force than the English heroes whose dissatisfaction is generalised. Irish life as it is depicted in most of these novels is primitive, bleak and often tragic. Only the poetic beauty of their language and speech rhythms, and the flashes of robust humour, link the Irish heroes with such English ones as Keith Waterhouse's Billy Liar.

John McGahern in The Dark (1965), Kevin Casey in The Sinner's Bell (1968) and Brian Moore in The Emperor of Ice-Cream (1966), have all written well on the effect on the sensitive young person of the brutality and cruelty of Irish life. The pattern is familiar from other provincial novels, but these novels are even more harshly realistic than those by the "northern realists".

In contrast to these writers is John Broderick, who is older and more mature than they are. He has used none of the clichés of the provincial novel: his heroes are not

adolescents; he does not write of the working-class exclusively; there is none of the whimsical Irish blarney which mars such novels as Bryan McMahon's The Honey Spike (1967); he does not obsessively describe the meals of potatoes down to the last eye; his Ireland is not the lush green land of the tourist brochures, but neither is it all bog. The Fugitives (1962) and The Waking of Willie Ryan (1965) show Broderick to have a more complex and subtle attitude to the Irish, and particularly to the effect of Catholicism on the Irish character, than do many of the other Irish novelists. Both his books are economically written, and are skillfully and neatly plotted. Broderick has a fine ear for dialogue, and his use of a group of Irish women as a kind of Greek chorus in The Fugitives, is particularly effective.

Before leaving the provincial novel, some mention must be made of a Scottish writer, Gordon M. Williams, and a Welsh writer, Emyr Humphreys, both of whom have recently had some critical success. Gordon Williams in From Scenes Like These (1968), depicts a rural Scotland where most of the agricultural work is apparently done in mid-winter. Williams is a Scottish Stanley Middleton, offering a similarly grey picture of provincial life.

Emyr Humphreys is a more versatile writer. One of his first novels, A Toy Epic (1958), is a simple tale of three Welsh boys growing up together before the war. In a later novel, Outside the House of Baal (1965), Humphreys has been more ambitious. His hero is an idealistic Preacher and Nationalist who has neglected his own family while helping others. He does not solve the clash between public and

private responsibility, and in his old age he even questions the beliefs which had sustained him, but it is too late for him to make amends to his family. As a portrait of lonely old age, both the hero's and his sister's, it is a very fine piece of writing. It is less successful in the description of their childhood on a Northern Welsh farm.

It was once fashionable for English middle-class novelists to describe the rigours of their public schools: the same obsessive concern with the agonies of adolescenee has inspired many of the provincial novelists. If the provincial novel is to survive and not fade away as it did in the 1940s and early 1950s, it must abandon the over-worked clichés of its genre. Is has been very firmly established that life for the working-class provincial is a kind of hell. The provincial novelists must now go beyond that point. The realism of some of these writers is also a falsification: life outside London is surely more varied than their novels would suggest.

Chapter 4 Part D:

The Exotic Novel

The English novel has been called parochial, but against this must be set the considerable number of exotic novels written by Englishmen. There was a vogue for exotic eastern fantasies in the mid-eighteenth century when India came under British rule, and the English novel-reading public has never lost its taste for the exotic. Some of the finest fiction in this century has been exotic, of which E.M. Forster's A Passage to India, D.H. Lawrence's Kangaroo, Kipling's stories, the novels of Joyce Cary and Graham Greene and, more recently, Olivia Manning's Balkan Trilogy, are outstanding.

The exotic novel divides naturally into two kinds - the novel written by a native of the United Kingdom which is set outside his own country, and the novel written in English by a native of a country outside the United Kingdom. The exotic novel has become very popular since the war and there is a large output of contemporary fiction of both kinds.

Popular novelists were quick to recognise that a banal little tale could be brightened up with a colourful setting.[1] There is no thematic reason why they should set their novels in one country in preference to another and, although writers like Simon Harvester and Eric Ambler have given authentic and convincing backgrounds to their novels, they are only backgrounds.

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1 The use of exotic backgrounds by thriller writers is discussed in Chapter 7, A(1) and A(2).

In contrast to the popular novelist's handling of the exotic is the travel-novelist's method. Here the travelogue is all and there seems no reason why the writer should have elected to cast it in novel form. Andrew Sinclair's The Hallelujah Bum (1963), the product of a sojourn in America, and D.J. Enright's novels are typical of the type, with their descriptions of curious local customs, their guide-book phrases, and their assumption that the reader's ignorance is boundless.

M. Kennedy[1] has aptly named and described a type of exotic novel which is characteristically contemporary: the Extra Currency Novel.

> There is a contemporary form of faking peculiar to English novelists since 1945. . . . Novelists are allowed extra currency for foreign travel if they can say they need to travel in order to write. On the same ground they can put quite a substantial cost of such travel into Professional Expenses, when making up their income tax returns. Many of them, on the strength of this, take a holiday in Ravenna or Mexico. A few are so very honest that they feel they ought to write a book about it. . . . Sometimes, of course, they really want to write this book and would have written it in any case. . . . The Extra Currency Novel gives a factual account of the author's trip. There is generally a good deal about food . . . There is some moderate sight-seeing . . . Into this travelogue are introduced fictitious characters . . . . They have a livelier time, when they retire for the night, than the honest author probably did. A love-affair blows up, idyllic enough to account for the high spirits which pervade the trip, sad enough to harmonize with the gloom in which we catch the homeward plane. Characters and setting are . . . incompatible . . . . It is a phenomenon which aptly illustrates the nature of faking and the impossibility of exploiting experience in the raw. In a genuine novel the landscape . . . went through some process of transformation before it was used.

Francis King is such a novelist. The Dark Glasses (1954) is set in Corfu, a land, it seems, of passion, drama, violence and terrible beauty. The locals contrast nicely

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1 The Outlaws on Parnassus, 1958

with the cold cerebral visiting Englishman. The dark glasses of the title are a symbol both of his blindness and of his affairs with a girl and her homicidal brother. Back in London he looks through the glasses with one shattered lens and is ". . . bewildered, thrilled and, in some extraordinary way strengthened by the terrible, morbid beauty of this world as it had at last been revealed to him. He knew now that he would always see it like that. It would never change."

The Custom House (1961) and The Waves Behind the Boat (1967) are set in Japan, a country Francis King appears to dislike but which provides the sort of exotic background which encourages his taste for melodrama. In The Waves Behind the Boat he launches an innocent, amazingly innocent, young English wife on a voyage of self-discovery. En route she discovers she has lesbian tendencies, and that the brother and sister (exotic White Russians) who attract and corrupt her are ambisextrous and incestuous.

The effect of his trips abroad (Francis King works for the British Council) has been unfortunate on a writer who is held in some esteem by critics. His best fiction is set in England , a country which seems to tone down his taste for melodrama. Battersea, shabby-genteel London and Brighton are the settings for three of his recent books. The Last of the Pleasure Gardens (1965) movingly explores the effect of the birth of an idiot child on its parents. The Widow (1957) compares well with Angus Wilson's The Middle Age of Mrs Eliot (1958) which has a similar subject. It is perhaps his finest book, showing a depth of understanding and compassion which his exotic novels contrive to hide. Perhaps Somerset Maugham and Norman Douglas were not far

wrong when they suggested that Englishmen tend to go to pieces east of Dover.

Frederic Raphael in The Trouble with England (1962) has achieved the unlikely feat of turning the Expense Account novel into a serious examination of the British holiday-maker abroad. Two English couples meet by chance at a small hotel on the French coast. They have nothing in common except their nationality, and Raphael delicately traces their relationship from initial dislike and distrust to the point where they suggest they holiday together the following year. But one small incident cracks open the happy surface and shows the great gulf which lies between them, and which they would never in normal circumstances have tried to close. The Trouble with England is a short, beautifully controlled and understated novel - wholly unlike some of Raphael's earlier novels which are chaotic and uneven. The Limits of Love (1960), a portrait of a Jewish family in London from the end of the war to the Suez crisis, and A Wild Surmise (1961), a complicated thriller set in an imaginary oil-rich dictatorship, have many brilliant passages - Raphael is potentially one of the finest writers of this decade - but the overall impression is of an over-rich confusion.

Brian Glanville's Expense Account novel A Roman Marriage (1966) is, like Raphael's, based on his observations of the Englishman abroad. His bed-sitter heroine's flirtation with an Italian on holiday becomes serious when he, instead of observing the rules of the game, wants to marry her. The rest of the book traces the difficulties of adjustment and suggests the gap between their different ways of life.

It is a simple and well-constructed, if predictable, novel. Brian Glanville is very good at "ordinary people" and he has not given the story more significance than it can bear.

Kingsley Amis's I Like it Here (1958) and One Fat Englishman (1963), and Alan Sillitoe's Key to the Door (1961) belong to the Expense Account group. They are set in Portugal, America and Malaya respectively and are of interest chiefly because they demonstrate that a widening of geographical horizons does not suit the talents of essentially insular novelists.

Two more Expense Account novels are Michael Frayn's The Russian Interpreter (1966) and Anthony Burgess's Honey for the Bears (1963), comic spy stories set in Russia. Neither novelist claims to have "inside information" - their English heroes are a tourist and a student. Burgess's novel is the better of the two (Frayn's is less a novel than a collection of Observations) but both novelists have shown that a visitor can be amused by a strange country's customs without taking a patronising attitude. Burgess's portrait of Russia draws deliberate parallels with America. Both novelists delight in turning the reader's preconceived notions of Russia and the Russians upside-down.

In a discussion of the short stories of Rudyard Kipling, Somerset Maugham wrote: [1]

> . . . in his discovery of what is called the exotic story he opened a new and fruitful field to writers. This is the story the scene of which is set in some country little known to the majority of readers. It deals with the reactions upon the white man of his sojourn in an alien land and the effect which contact with people of another race and colour has upon him.

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1 On Literature, 1967.

Although Maugham does not mention it here, the fact that Kipling wrote for an Anglo-Indian audience, and not for an audience who knew nothing of India, had a happy effect on his writing. He did not need to explain local customs or make his settings more colourful. Like that of the South African Herman Charles Bosman, his achievement was to make the local become universal without consciously striving for it. The besetting sin of exotic novelists is their urge to display their knowledge, stopping the narrative to describe a picture-postcard cathedral which the characters never enter, or explaining the intricacies of a tea-drinking ceremony when their characters obviously prefer whisky.

In Olivia Manning's Balkan Trilogy, Lawrence Durrell's Alexandria Quartet and Malcolm Lowry's Under the Volcano [1] the setting is moved from the background to the foreground. Malcolm Lowry's Mexican village is a vision of hell with Firmin already one of the damned. In Durrell's quartet Alexandria is a dream-city caught in poetic prose, his characters its reflections. Unlike Durrell's Alexandria which is "out-of-this-world"[2], Olivia Manning's Bucharest and Athens are geographically real. They are recognisable cities, not half-imaginary ones, but she has a poet's sensitivity to atmosphere and the fears and confusions of the times are reflected in her perceptions. The cities have personalities which are not static but which mirror the moods of their inhabitants.

All good exotic novelists are sensitive to the "character" of their chosen settings, but they more usually regard the background as a setting for their human characters, not as

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1 O. Manning's trilogy is discussed in the chapter on the Chronicle novel, 4A. Durrell's and Lowry's are discussed in the chapter on the Poetic novel, 3B.

2 A phrase used by S. Spender, 'Anglo-Saxon Attitudes', The Partisan Review Anthology, ed. W. Phillips and P. Rahv, 1962.

the main subject. These writers are aware of the influence of a country on a man's make-up but they regard this as only one influencing factor.

India has attracted several such novelists, amongst them two strongly contrasted ones, Paul Scott[1] and R. Prawer Jhabvala. Paul Scott's The Birds of Paradise (1962) asks what happens to a man's life when the dream that sustained it turns out be only a dream. Bill had been brought up in India but his father refused to let him follow him into the India Service, and it is not until Bill is middle-aged that he is able to return. He finds India has changed, it has lost its sense of purpose - or perhaps the India he thought he knew never existed. His old friends lead aimless lives and Bill's urge to serve India has no outlet.

In The Chinese Love Pavilion (1960) Tom, a young Englishman who believed India to be his spiritual home, is disillusioned when he comes to the real India, but is persuaded by an eccentric, violently alive botanist to stay. He is introduced to a man who is farming in the desert and Tom's idealism finds temporary fulfilment in working with him until the war comes. At this point the novel starts going steadily downhill, ending with a sentimental love story that should film very well.

Paul Scott is concerned with India's past. He holds the breakdown of the British Empire to be partly responsible for the enervation of British life. Gerald Hanley in The Journey Homeward (1961) is also more concerned with India's past than with her present. His book is set in India soon after

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1 Paul Scott's The Jewel in the Crown and The Day of the Scorpion are discussed in the chapter on the chronicle novel, 4A.

the British have left and she is beginning to tackle the problems of Independence. He concentrates on the events in one poverty-ridden state but reaches an impasse with plot and characters which he solves with an earthquake. Much of the material and many of the characters appear in similar guises in Paul Scott's books, but they are handled here in a more popular and less serious manner.

R. Prawer Jhabvala writes about contemporary India. She was born of Polish parents in Germany, educated in England and is now married to an Indian architect in Delhi. These biographical details are relevant for they affect her perspective on her subjects and suggest her themes. In her sixth novel A Backward Place (1965) one of the European characters says: "one either merges with Hindu civilisation or is drowned in it." Her heroine, an ordinary English girl married to an Indian aspiring actor, has merged. The other Europeans have not. An ageing blonde, the arbiter of taste, has not seen Europe for fifteen years and knows that, although she claims to hate India, she will never leave now. A penniless, bouncy woman who lives off the generosity of others persuades herself that India is her spiritual home. There is a German couple who have studied the country from books but see only what fits in with their preconceived views. The chairwoman of the Cultural Dais is concerned only with her own image and is appalled when a group of Indians attend a cultural evening. The tragi-comedy of the Europeans in India today offers a refreshing contrast to Scott's tragic view of India yesterday. R. Prawer Jhabvala's treatment of her characters is beautifully ironic but she has compassion for their weaknesses. Her characters reveal

themselves in their speech and there is little authorial comment. She writes a lucid, astringent prose and has a talent for comedy. She resists the temptation to fill in with local colour and, paradoxiaally, this makes her India more real and more interesting than in the run-of-the-mill exotic novel. The European relics of the Empire, the hangers-on who were left behind in the exodus, and the newcomers who either merge or drown in Hindu civilisation; these are her subjects.

Other novelists who have written exotic Far Eastern novels are Susan Yorke in Capitan China (1961), Mary McMinnies in The Flying Fox (1956) and Katherine Sim in The Jungle Ends Here (1961), all of which are set in Malaya. Like Anthony Burgess in his Malayan Trilogy (called The Long Day Wanes in America) which he completed in 1959, all these writers are concerned with studying the state of transition in British colonial territories. Similar themes inform the African novels of Gerald Hanley (such as The Consul at Sunset, 1951), Thomas Hinde (A Place Like Home, 1962) and Anthony Burgess's The Right to an Answer (1960), which is set in an imaginary caliphate resembling Zanzibar. It is surprising that more novelists have not written on the great subject of the death of an Empire and the struggles of the newly-independent countries but this may be because it is still an emotionally charged one, and a longer perspective is needed.

The last novels to be discussed in this section are set in Europe, one in Germany, the other in Poland. Gabriel Fielding in The Birthday King (1962) has written a novel which reads like "some exceptionally brilliant translation of a great unknown liberal survivor of the Nazi regime"[1].

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1 A. Burgess, The Novel Now, 1967.

In the Preface Gabriel Fielding writes that it grew out of his "long obsession with the innocent malevolence of the Nordic mind", and it is this rather than the purely historical portrait that concerns him. He follows the fortunes of a Jewish Catholic family of industrialists in Germany from 1939 to 1945. Ruprecht, the birthday king of the title, the child-for-the-day, is a scientist, a rationalist and a man of action who consents tacitly to the régime and runs the factory until the end of the war. He betrays his aesthetic, religious pacifist older brother who is sent to a concentration camp, but survives to return. Other important characters are an influential Baron whom Ruprecht uses and then betrays, a bewildered camp Kommandant of the old school, his crazy wife and sinister son who is one of the new Germans, disclaiming knowledge, responsibility or involvement in the atrocities committed by his nation. The Birthday King is not an attack on Germany or the Germans; it is an attempt to understand them and even to feel compassion for such a man as Ruprecht who is a victim of his nature and heritage. It is a very much more successful novel than for example Fielding's In the Time of Greenbloom (1956), for Fielding's painstakingly careful writing is an advantage in the German book where it is not in the English one with its lonely, introverted and sensitive hero. Although Gabriel Fielding is a published poet, his books have none of the vivid, intuitive flashes of the imagination which would relieve the sameness of his writing, but this is to quibble, for Fielding achieves his declared aim; the examination of the innocent malevolence of the Nordic mind.

The last novel to be discussed in this section is one of which M. Ratcliffe said: "If a novel can be ever said to

advance the frontier of human understanding . . . The Ice Saints surely does."[1] Frank Tuohy's reputation as a novelist rests on very few books, of which The Animal Game (1957, set in Brazil) and The Ice Saints (1964) are the best-known. For the latter he was awarded both the James Tait Black Memorial Prize and the Geoffrey Faber Memorial Prize. It is a short disturbing book about the effect on a Polish family of a visit from the English wife's sister, Rose - and of Poland's effect on her. It is a social rather than political novel although a comparison between Capitalist and Communist countries is implied. The greyness and drabness of the industrial town where her sister lives strikes Rose less forcibly than the type of character it has bred. The national schizophrenia which accepts the official condemnation of the West while anxiously trying to keep up with its fashions is characteristic of a people caught between an ideology and their very human desires. The central proposition seems to be that the very different histories of these two peoples are such that only by a supreme imaginative effort is it possible to make real contact. The complexities of the Polish character are too deep for the intelligent but unimaginative and essentially shallow English girl to understand. "Looking back, she saw Mirek standing in his pale raincoat behind a wire fence, and beyond him a whole landscape waiting for explanation." In this beautifully subtle book there are no easy explanations nor any ready moralising; interpretations are left to the reader. The Ice Saints is one of those rare books which says more in a hundred and eighty pages than most authors can say in three hundred.

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1 M. Ratcliffe, The Novel Today, 1968.

The exotic novels discussed so far have all been written by Englishmen about foreign countries, but the category of the exotic novel also includes novels written in English by non-English writers. Apart from writers of European extraction, like William Plomer, Patrick White, Doris Lessing, Nigel Dennis and others who are not English born,[1] there is a growing body of literature by writers of non-European extraction. Africa, particularly West Africa, the West Indies and India are the chief geographical areas. It is not possible to discuss the fiction of these countries in any detail - it is a very specialised field, and not all the works are available in this country. But the contribution of some of these novelists to the character of contemporary fiction is such that some mention of their work seems called for.

Janheinz Jahn[2] traces the development of what he calls "Neo-African" literature from its early origins, but it was not until after 1950 that African writing in English came to be recognised as a significant part of world literature. It is chiefly these writers' use of language which has established them in this position.[3] There have been a number of very individual solutions to such problems as finding a way to approximate to the vernacular idiom, of retaining the rhythms of the vernacular without destroying the rhythms of English, and of distinguishing between the classes of speakers.

Chinua Achebe in No Longer at Ease (1960) writes a basically simple, direct prose. His characters speak the English of the educated, pidgin English or English seasoned with proverbs in the same manner as in vernacular conversation.

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1 They are discussed elsewhere as they are not purely 'local'.
2 A History of Neo-African Literature, trans. O. Coburn and Ursula Lehrburger, 1968.
3 A.Wilson suggests this in Approaches to the Novel, ed.J.Colmer, 1966.

("Do not be in a hurry to rush into the pleasures of the world like the young antelope who danced himself lame when the main dance was yet to come.") In his fourth novel, A Man of the People (1966), Achebe's style has become more complex:

> . . . I do honestly believe that in the fat-dripping, gummy, eat-and-let-eat regime just ended - a regime which inspired the common saying that a man could only be sure of what he had put away safely in his gut or, in language ever more suited to the times: "you chop, me self I chop, palaver finish"; a regime in which you saw a fellow cursed in the morning for stealing a blind man's stick and later in the evening saw him again mounting the altar of the new shrine in the presence of all the people to whisper into the ear of the chief celebrant - in such a regime, I say, you died a good death if your life had inspired someone to come forward and shoot your murderer in the chest - without asking to be paid.

Amos Tutuola's The Palm Wine Drinkard (1952) earned him an international reputation (although he is a joke amongst the non-literary Nigerians). He has the voice of a man with little schooling who talks marvellously. He breaks the grammatical rules of English with what is either a joyous unconcern or immense subtlety, as in these passages from Ajaiyi and his Inherited Poverty (1968), a novel drawn, like his others, from folk-lore.:

> As soon as the gate-keeper heard the noises of the drum, he hastily opened the door he asked us to go in. It was like that we danced to the town of Creator after we had spent about six months in the jungles with severe punishments which we received from the harmful and merciless creatures.
>
> . . . and there we met all kinds of people who were black, white and light blue people . . . .

Gabriel Okara and J.P. Clark were described by a reviewer[1] as "primarily poets". Okara explores the difficulty of imposing the alien rhythm of English onto Ijaw patterns of thought. His solution is to write English which follows the patterns

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1 TLS 18.1.1968.

of Ijaw, as in this line from The Voice:

> These splinters of firewood he saw and heard drop on the embers.

Wole Soyinka is best known as a playwright, but he is also the author of the novel The Interpreters (1965) in which he writes the simple formal English of the "teachers", contrasted with the rich, poetic language of the "peasants".

Other African writers whose work has been well-received include Alex la Guma, Ezekiel Mphalele, Camara Laye (who writes in French), James Ngugi, Nicholas Roland, Legson Kayira and Cyprian Ekwensi.

Although it is the style of these writers which is most immediately striking, their novels are not simply exercises in verbal ingenuity. Most of them are social novelists, seriously and deeply concerned with the problems which face their peoples, and particularly with those that arise from the state of transition. In addition, "almost all west African novelists, even the least craftsmanlike, have one basic gift: they can tell a story, without self-consciousness or Forster's 'Oh dear", as if this were a writer's natural function."[1] The form of their novels is largely traditional, "but the use of language and a totally different view of life show how the traditional may yet be transformed."[2] The influence of African writing in English may well open new directions for the novel, bringing "new vitality to the language, new visions, new overtones."[3]

A number of Caribbean writers have an international reputation. V.S. Naipaul, Samuel Selvon, Edgar Mittleholzer and

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1 TLS 17.8.1967
2 Ob.R. 5.2.1967.
3 A. Wilson, 'The Dilemma of the Contemporary Novelist', Approaches to the Novel, ed. J. Colmer, 1966.

Wilson Harris come to mind, and there are a number of less well-known writers like Garth St Omer, Michael Anthony, Earl Lovelace, George Lamming and John Hearne whose work has attracted favourable critical attention. V.S. Naipaul[1] has discussed the difficulties and common failings of West Indian writers. His criticisms have a wider application: with a few modifications they are true of many other multi-racial societies with a British Colonial inheritance, such as South Africa.

> Living in a borrowed culture, the West Indian, more than most, needs writers to tell him who he is and where he stands. Here the West Indian writers have failed. Most have so far only reflected and flattered the prejudices of their race or colour groups. Many a writer has displayed a concern, visible perhaps only to the West Indian, to show how removed his group is from blackness, how close to whiteness. . . . To the initiated one whole side of West Indian writing has little to do with literature, and much to do with the race war.
>
> The insecure wish to be heroically portrayed. Irony and satire, which might help more, are not acceptable; and no writer wishes to let down his group. For this reason the lively and inventive Trinidad dialect, which has won West Indian writing many friends and as many enemies abroad, is disliked by some West Indians. . . . . they object to its use in books which are read abroad. . . . The Trinidadian expects his novels, like his advertisements, to have a detergent purpose, and it is largely for this reason that there are complaints about the scarcity of writing about what is called the middle class. . . . It is not easy to write about the West Indian middle class. The most exquisite gifts of irony and perhaps malice would be required to keep the characters from slipping into an unremarkable mid-Atlantic whiteness. They would have to be treated as real people with real problems and responsibilities and affections - and this has been done - but they would also have to be treated as people whose lives have been corrupted by a fantasy which is their own cross. . . . The involvement of the Negro with the white world is one of the limitations of West Indian writing, as it is the destruction of American Negro writing. The American Negro's subject is his blackness. This cannot be the basis of any serious literature . . . .

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1 The Middle Passage, 1962. This quotation is given at length because it so clearly pinpoints the reasons for the failure of many exotic novels to have any other than local interest.

Before leaving this rapid survey of exotic fiction, mention must be made of R.K. Narayan, an Indian writer. Graham Greene has made him his protégé and found a publisher for his work. In a review of The Financial Expert (1952),[1] Graham Greene suggests the source of Narayan's appeal:

> All Mr Narayan's comedies have had this undertone of sadness. Their gentle irony and absence of condemnation remind us how different comedy is in the West today . . . . comedy needs a strong framework of social convention with which the author sympathizes, but does not share . . . . the life of Malgudi - never ruffled by politics - proceeds in exactly the same way as it has done for centuries, and the juxtaposition of the age-old convention and the modern character provides much of the comedy.

The Sweet-Vendor (1967), R.K. Narayan's tenth novel since his youthful Swami and Friends (1935) opens with this characteristic epigram:

> "Conquer taste, and you will have conquered the self."
> "Why conquer the self?"
> "I do not know, but all our sages advise us so."

The sweet-vendor of the title is a gentle - and often ridiculous - aesthete, a widower with a son he spoils but has no real contact with. He is sadly misused by his "modern" son, but he is pushed too far and refuses to lie to keep his son out of jail on an illegal liquor charge. The sweet-vendor gives up what is left of his life and his wealth to the upkeep of a religious grotto. "I will seek a new interest - different from the set of repetitions performed for sixty years. I am a free man." It is a slight story, staying happily within the confines of the local scene without the author's losing sight of the larger issues involved, and also without his being tempted to obtrude these. Graham Greene suggests that Narayan is closer to Chekov than to any English writer, with a sense of beauty and sadness underlying the humour.

1 Collected Essays, 1969.