THE CHARACTER OF CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH FICTION

VOLUME II

by

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Chapter 5 Part A:

The Contemporary Hero

"The unheroic hero has become the standard fictional representative of the age." [1] Some critics prefer to call the contemporary hero a "non-hero" or an "anti-hero" but few would dispute the truth of Gindin's statement. The term "hero" in post-war fiction has lost its heroic connotations and means no more than the central character of a novel. Since the term "anti-hero" implies that the hero is against something - and this is not always true - the term "non-hero" has been preferred. To define the characteristics of today's non-hero and to discover some reasons for his omnipresence, it is necessary to look at the literary, religious, social and political changes which have affected writers in this century and altered the concept of the hero.

F.R. Karl [2] finds non-heroes in some of the works of Dickens, Thackeray, Meredith and George Eliot, but he considers that he was most consciously developed in the novels of Stendhal, Flaubert, Maupassant and Zola. These writers, known as the French Realists, led the reaction of the novel to Romanticism. Colin Wilson [3] suggests that Flaubert's Madame Bovary marks the actual turning point. The concept of the hero as "an aristocratic Christian knight in modern dress"[2], a romantic concept, was replaced by a realistic picture of contemporary man. In the realistic novel there is no place for the romantic hero and the substitution of the non-hero can be seen as a move away from romanticism towards realism.

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1 J. Gindin, Postwar British Fiction, 1963.
2 F.R. Karl, A Reader's Guide to the Contemporary English Novel, 1963.
3 Essays on Books and Writers, 1965.

Discussing the effect of realism on fiction, Saul Bellow [1] said:

> I think that realistic literature from the first has been a victim literature. Pit any ordinary individual - and realistic literature concerns itself with ordinary individuals - against the external world, and the external world will conquer him, of course. . . . Serious realism also contrasts the common man with aristocratic greatness. He is overborne by fate, just as the great are in Shakespeare or Sophocles. But the contrast, inherent in literary tradition, always damages him. In the end the force of tradition carries realism into parody, satire, mock-epic - Leopold Bloom.

The hero is known by his character and by his actions. The development of the study of psychology made the creation of a credible hero not only more difficult but also less desirable, for psychological realism diminishes the hero. Conrad in Lord Jim described a man of whom heroism could be expected, but he is self-destructive, a shell, and even his final act of "heroism" could be construed as the suicidal act of a coward. There are no heroes in E.M. Forster's novels. Joyce's Bloom is a tragi-comic figure whose non-heroic character is underlined by the mythic structure of the book. The transformation of the Greek hero Odysseus into the Irish non-hero Bloom is a striking example of the effect of psychological realism on the novel. The stream of consciousness technique used by the Moderns focussed attention on the inner lives of men, drawing attention away from their outer lives. The hero became self-absorbed and inward-looking. The unconscious springs of his actions were revealed and he was seen to be motivated not by abstract ideal such as honour and a sense of fair play, but by primitive urges.

Karl Marx's theories also had an effect on the hero of the

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1 Interviewed in Writers at Work 3, The Paris Review Interviews 1968.

novel. L.P. Hartley [1] points out that Freud and Marx combine "to undermine the individual's sense of responsibility". Marx held that our actions are conditioned by the world to which we belong, Freud that our actions are subject to influences - pre-natal and juvenile - over which we have no control. The hero is essentially a man responsible for his actions: the non-hero can abdicate such responsibility. R.H. Gardiner [2] holds a similar view: "Marx and Freud's contribution was to reduce man from a free, rational, responsible being of the Renaissance, to a pathetic and somewhat disgusting creature, sweating beneath the double yoke of economic and psychological slavery." The effect of this type of thinking is most marked in the non-heroes of working-class novels and novels about criminals or bullies.

The hero is recognised by his actions, but in the contemporary world it is difficult to believe in the possibility of significant action. Religious, political and social changes have made man "less sure of progress, virtue, God, and the independent uniqueness of his own soul."[3] The evolutionists in particular shook man's belief in God, and the effect of this loss of belief on the novel and on the concept of the hero was to further reduce the significance of his actions. Colin Wilson [4] noted: "The modern decline of religion is a further reason for the decline of the hero. For at least the Church dignified man by supposing him capable of damnation and salvation, thereby conferring a certain heroic stature on him." A. Mauriac [5] wrote: "The collapse of the novel is due to the destruction of this fundamental concept: the awareness of good and evil."

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1 The Novelist's Responsibility (1967)
2 The Splintered Stage (1965)
3 J. Gindin, Postwar British Fiction,(1963)
4 Essays on Books and Writers (1965)
5 Writers at Work I,(1958)

Graham Greene, like Wilson and Mauriac a Catholic, wrote [1]: "for with the death of James the religious sense was lost to the English novel and with the religious sense went the sense of the importance of the human act." These three writers and William Golding, a professed Christian, have continued to create heroes in their novels, whereas atheists or agnostics more usually create non-heroes. In a world destitute of spiritual values, actions are without meaning, and the heroic action is seen as the least meaningful of all.

The Nietzschean notion that God is dead led directly to the view of the hero as an absurd being. Deprived of a reason for its existence, the universe loses all meaning, and man's position in it becomes absurd. "The sense of metaphysical anguish at the absurdity of the human condition is, broadly speaking, the theme of the plays of Beckett, Adamov, Ionesco and Genet." [2]. The absurd hero continues to behave as if his actions were meaningful, illustrating a situation which is essentially comic. The Theatre of the Absurd was given its chief expression in France where Beckett led it to its logical conclusion, the state where no action is possible. In England the comic potential of the Absurd hero was more often recognised by dramatists than novelists, (N.F. Simpson and Harold Pinter for example), although Peter Everett in Negatives (1964) has written an Absurd novel.

"The collapse of public labels, public ties that would help the individual define himself leads to man's necessary reliance on himself as the only means available." [3] This is the Existential position with its insistence on "dealing with concrete facts of experience, multiple and unsystematic

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1 Collected Essays, 1969.
2 R.H. Gardiner, The Splintered Stage, 1965.
3 J. Gindin, Postwar British Fiction, 1963.

though they may be, rather than theorizing about the general nature of essences."[1] The effect of existential thought on the literary hero has been to produce a man who recognises no values other than those derived from his own perceptions. Iris Murdoch, who has written a critical study of Sartre, has been most directly influenced by this thinking, but its effect is apparent on other novelists whose heroes rely on their perceptions and distrust the abstractions which society accepts without examination.

Both World Wars had the effect of devaluing the worth of the individual: bureaucracy has had the effect of denying him individuality. The non-hero is essentially one of the masses, a little man, living in a confusing world. His bewilderment is often a source of comedy for his creator, but tragedy is denied him for he has not the stature of a tragic hero. Before the Second World War there were causes to believe in and glaring social abuses to be attacked, particularly poverty, unemployment and class privilege. With the birth of the materially comfortable Welfare State, poverty and unemployment were virtually eliminated, which left only the target of class privilege still standing. A number of non-heroes, particularly the working-class ones, have attacked it directly, but the middle-class non-heroes are concerned less with the injustices of class than with the difficulties of living in the post-war society. English manners continues to be the main concern of contemporary novelists. Some of the non-heroes who have appeared in contemporary fiction resemble earlier literary creations, but they are sufficiently different to be considered as characteristically contemporary, products of the Welfare

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1 J. Gindin, Postwar British Fiction, 1963.

State. Some of these types will be discussed for the remainder of the chapter. The clumsy word "non-hero" will be dropped, and "hero", unless otherwise specified, will be used as a name for the chief character.

For the sake of convenience and to avoid undue repetition only the best-known or most representative character of each type will be discussed in detail. The young anti-heroes are all "rebels" in one way or another, and they have been divided into The Angry Young Men (John Osborne's Look Back in Anger [1]), The Redbrick University Graduate (Kingsley Amis's Lucky Jim), The Pusher (John Braine's Room at the Top)and the Dropout (Anthony Burgess's A Clockwork Orange). The middle aged heroes are discussed in the latter half of the chapter.

Jimmy Porter, the hero of John Osborne's play Look Back in Anger, which was first performed in London in 1956, was dubbed a rebel by the critics, and the label "Angry Young Man" was coined to describe him, his creator, and the many similar characters who began to appear immediately afterwards. The dramatic and literary qualities of the play were overshadowed by the endless discussion of Jimmy's character.

Jimmy is lower middle-class, but lives with his wife Alison in an attic in a large Midlands town. In partnership with his friend Cliff he works as a stall-holder in a market. There is nothing new in this situation. The English novel (if not very often the stage) has shown "slumming" before, particularly during the 'thirties. The slumming socialist

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1 Although Look Back in Anger is a play and not a novel, it was felt that as Jimmy Porter is virtually the archetypal model of this group, the play should be discussed here.

was either guilty of his privileged position as a member of the upper classes and wished to improve the lot of the lower classes, or he believed that they had the key to the honest and simple life and were in some way admirable because they were poor. The socialist's energies were devoted to raising the standards of the working-classes, and their anger was directed against the men who denied them the right to raise their standards. The Welfare State was the achievement of the pre-war socialists who fought and worked for it. But Jimmy, who was born into the Welfare State, is violently angry. He rejects the advantages of free education; he refuses to take the career opportunities open to him, and instead lives an apparently aimless existence in his attic.

Jimmy's anger has been variously described as "ill-natured spleen against the Establishment" or "worked-up militancy" [1] but although such phrases draw attention to the frequently false quality of his anger, they do not explain its sources. "There aren't any good, brave causes left" is a key phrase to the understanding of Jimmy. Jimmy envies the older generation who had something to work for, whose anger had direction, but he resents the safe, secure, comfortable world that grew out of their ideals. Jimmy has the energy, the desire which marks the rebel, but there is nothing tangible for him to rebel against. The play is a hymn of frustration and envy. His wife's middle-class father, who was in the Indian Colonial Service is derided and scorned by Jimmy, but he is also envied, for his life had a purpose. Jimmy's nostalgia for a past he never knew is expressed in his love of music-hall patter and songs and in jazz.

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1 A. Kazan, Contemporaries, 1963.

Jimmy is essentially a romantic, but can find no way to express his passion. Alison says of him towards the end of the play: "I have discovered what is wrong with Jimmy. . . . He was born out of his time. . . . There's no place for people like that any longer - in sex, or politics or anything. That's why he is so futile."

Once Jimmy's anger is understood the reaction of the older generation to the play can also be understood, for although they were appalled by his sadism and often by his language, this alone does not explain the furore the play caused. J. Lehmann [1] sums it up in these terms:

> Jimmy Porter, in fact, is envious of my generation because we could go and get killed fighting against fascism in Spain. That was colourful, that was a real cause a radical could throw himself into heart and soul: and because there appear to be no such causes any longer, he turns in exasperation against the Welfare State - that more-than-half-way-house to social justice my generation has so passionately desired and worked for - as a main source of the smugness, drabness, and petty provincial ideals of post-war Britain.

In his Foreword to the Evans Play edition, John Osborne says that Jimmy "speaks out of the real despairs, frustrations and sufferings of the age we are living in, now, at this moment." This may have been the author's intention, but the "realness" of Jimmy's despairs, frustrations and so on are not altogether convincing. Jimmy's anger, and his energies, often look like a pose, a way of excusing himself from any effective action. He accepts without question that there are no real injustices to fight, no real causes to believe in, and indulges in a lively display of verbal pyrotechnics which colour and dramatize his "misery". It is unfortunate that Jimmy's articulacy, which is one of the chief merits of the play, should also be one of the factors

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1 'Radicalism Then and Now', <u>List.</u>,9.8.1962.

which makes one suspect his vaunted self-honesty. Look Back in Anger is an extreme example of the narrow provincialism which characterises so much of English fiction, and indeed the English character. If Jimmy had decided to emigrate, to leave the Welfare State he detests and seek a country where his energies might find some direction, it would be easier to believe in the genuineness of his anger and his energy. As it is, the play ends with Jimmy and Alison retreating tnto a fantasy world where they pretend to be squirrels and bears.

Look Back in Anger did not, as might have been expected, produce a rash of imitation-Jimmy Porters on either the stage or in the novel. But the mood of dissent which he had articulated appeared in several guises in later works. Dissent or rebellion flavours the picaresque and most of the provincial working-class novels of the 'fifties and 'sixties. It is rarely fired by the sort of frustrated idealism which made Jimmy's rebellion more complex than a straightforward hatred of society. More often than not the anger became an expression of the conflict between the older generation and the younger - a conflict which has a biological basis rather than a social one (which is why so many of the "rebels" who came after Jimmy were younger than he was, adolescents rather than immature adults). Anger became with some an expression of envy, envy of the money, success or affluence of the upper classes. Hypergamy became a popular theme, an ugly expression of this envy.

One of the few true suceessors to Jimmy Porter was Dominick Shapiro, the sixteen-year old hero of

Bernard Kops's The Dissent of Dominick Shapiro (1966). Dominick illustrates some of the changes which have overtaken the Angry Young Man in the last ten years. He has a middle-class family background as Jimmy had (although Dominick's is Jewish) and he has Jimmy's idealism and desire to find a cause in which he can believe. But he is a very much more sophisticated and less naive character than Jimmy, more honest with himself and more perceptive about others. He leaves home and joins a group of beatniks in Soho, believing them to be genuine rebels who have rejected the values of their society, but he eventually realises their rebellion is superficial and that they are only seeking "kicks". They have no philosophy to support or justify their behaviour and their ties with their families are not severed - the rebel of today is the conformist of the morrow. After various adventures, including his first sexual experience, Dominick returns to his family (about whom he writes very amusingly and well).[1]

A very different type of rebel from the hero of Look Back in Anger is Kingsley Amis's Jim Dixon, the hero of Lucky Jim. The novel - Amis's first - was published in 1954, two years before Look Back in Anger. The cries of joy - and disgust - which greeted its appearance have tended to obscure its literary qualities.

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1 Billy Waterhouse's Billy Liar (1959) and Sid Chaplin's The Day of the Sardine (1961), which are discussed in the chapter on the Provincial novel (Chapter 4C) are also examples of the direction which Anger has taken. There are obvious parallels between all these English rebels and the American Holden Caulfield who appeared in 1951 in J.D. Salinger's Catcher in the Rye. Holden is an idealist who sees himself surrounded by "phonies" but he is a real outsider, a real rebel. His rejection of society is complete and whole-hearted. The lively narrative technique - a sort of dramatic monolgue - has been widely imitated.

Class distinction has long been a popular theme among English novelists, but until Lucky Jim there were two accepted ways of treating it: either one could rail against its iniquities or one could concentrate on elevating oneself to a higher class. (These are the methods of John Osborne's Look Back in Anger and John Braine's Room at the Top respectively). The rebels and the social climbers were both approved of, for their presence implied that all that was best in English society and culture could be found at the top. It was therefore unnerving for the Establishment to discover a new breed of heroes had emerged since the war who were conscious of class differences, but were unimpressed by the pretensions of the class above them. Although Jim marries a girl above his class and enters the world of the rich, it is not through his own social-climbing efforts that this was achieved. This point would have been made clearer if his creator had resisted the temptations of a romantic ending, but as the title says, Jim was lucky.

Somerset Maugham [1] voiced the protests of those who objected to the working class man not knowing his literary place. The working classes at university have been traditionally regarded by novelists as either pathetic in their attempts to be "one of us" or wildly funny in their social gaucheness. Maugham was appalled to discover that men like Jim - or Amis, for identification of the creator and creation inevitably occurred - had replaced their illustrious predecessors at university. Zuleika Dobson's young men had disappeared and the "white-collar proletariat" had entered the portals. "They are scum", Maugham concluded.

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1 The Sunday Times, 25.12.1954.

Lucky Jim became "one of those novels, regardless of its absolute importance, that set a tone of feeling for a whole decade." [1] "Lucky Jim" passed into the language as a label for "a post-war genus of cocky university graduate who had scholarshipped his way out of the working class but was still rather truculently with them in spirit." [2]

Although many of Amis's techniques were admired and imitated, it was the character of the hero, Jim Dixon, which attracted most attention and comment. Jim is one of the Great Incompetents, a type of character which lends itself readily to comic treatment. He is a "bumbling, self-conscious hero who stumbles against the established social and cultural world, making fun of both the world and himself in the process." [3] He was not an entirely new creation, and a number of critics have drawn attention to his resemblance to Wells's Kipps, Mr Polly and George Ponderovo, but his type was uncommon in post-war fiction. [4] There was also an essential difference between the working-class heroes of Wells's and Amis's novels: Jim is not fighting a class-war. He is intent only on possessing his own integrity. "He refuses to be taken in by the

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1 The British Imagination, 1960. (TLS publication).
2 K. Allsop, The Angry Decade, 1958.
3 J. Gindin, Postwar British Fiction, 1963.
4 Two forerunners of Lucky Jim were Philip Larkin's Jill (1946) and William Cooper's Scenes from Provincial Life (1950), but they did not capture the public's imagination in the way Lucky Jim did. Jill broke fresh ground for the novel with its portrait of a working-class student at Oxford during the war years. John Kent is a rather sad and pathetic creature compared to Jim, and has none of his resilience. His attempts to join the "in crowd" and to hide his working-class origins are only superficially comical and his invention of a sister, Jill, showed only his loneliness and inadequacy. Joe Lunn, Cooper's hero is a physics master in a provincial secondary school in 1939. The witty, colloquial, laconic style, the mocking, anti-culture, anti-literature, anti-art tone, were to influence later writers. The comedy is a little thin.

the deceits of social eminence or hard cash and his clownish destructive energy is devoted wholly to the maintenance of his own equilibrium."[1] The theme of this novel could be described as "adjustment", adjustment of the individual and his aims to the wider society in which he lives. Jim is not a rebel, unless passive dissent can be described as such, and he does not aspire to acceptance in a higher social class. His observant and irreverent gaze sees through the genteel pretensions of his "superiors". "It is self-questioning that redeems the new fictional hero and makes him tolerable."[2]

Lucky Jim's chief influence on the contemporary English novel has been to pave the way for the highly articulate, irreverent and often very amusing lower class and lower-middle class heroes who appear in such numbers in the novels of the 1950s. Amis's style, particularly his use of the "dramatic monologue" has been widely imitated.

Both Edmund Wilson [3] and James Gindin [4] have commented on the influence of American slang, wisecracking and film language on Amis's comic style. His language is full of word play and verbal jokes, and any chance observation is likely to bring forth a list of vaguely associated comic improbabilities. For example, he tries to visualise Christine's face and this leads him to thinking of other sorts of faces:

[5]
> . . . very remote from her own. There was the permanent grin of an acrobat, or partner in an apache-dance routine; the sun-dazzle of some Honourable trollop photographed motor-boating on the Riviera; the sulky mindless glare theoretically delectable on the face of a pin-up; the frown of a plethoric and not very nice little girl.

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1 The British Imagination, 1960.
2 P. West, The Modern Novel, 1965.
3 The Bit Between my Teeth, (1956)
4 The Postwar British Novel, 1963.
5 Chapter 16.

Amis also phonetically reproduces various forms of speech for comic effect. He attempts the voice of the upper-class young man over the telephone:

1 "Hallaher, hallaher. . . have yaw a Miss Kellerhen steng with yaw, pliz?"

Much of the charm of Lucky Jim and some of Amis's most successful humour comes from Jim's knack of mimicry and mime, a knack which has been widely adopted by other heroes. It appears for the first time here:

2 Quickly deciding on his own word, Dixon said it to himself and then tried to flail his features into some sort of response to humour. Mentally, however, he was making a different face and promising himself he'd make it actually when next alone. He'd draw his lower lip in under his top teeth and by degrees retract his chin as far as possible, all this while dilating his eyes and nostrils. By these means he would, he was confident, cause a deep dangerous flush to suffuse his face.

It is a way of getting his own back on people and is a form of release, but is is also a form of self-mockery. He lacks the courage to be honest except with himself and outwardly he conforms to what is expected of him, but his secret acting helps him retain his self-respect. It also provides a comic perspective, distancing him from the events and people around him. It is, of course, an essentially childish trait - and Jim is not above indulging in school-boyish pranks - but it endears him to the reader. No other character in Amis's novels has quite this quality.

One of Amis's most marked talents is for farce, and the farcical element in courtship and sex in particular does not escape him. It is a dangerous talent for it too easily degenerates into a pointless romp and, in Amis's case,

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1 Chapter 16
2 Chapter 1

it too frequently interrupts a crucial scene or relationship. One of his farcical set-pieces is the drunken lecture scene which has become a cliche, a guarantee that the writer is one of the Contemporaries. D.J. Enright in Figures of Speech (1963) varies the formula with a sober lecturer and a drunken audience. In 1968 it was still a favourite stand-by of novelists - both Edward Taylor in Hearts of Stone and Lawrence Durrell in Tunc use it.

Amis's satire is based on shrewd observation of how people speak and behave, but it is often mockery rather than genuine satire, though no less sharp for that. Amis has been criticised [1] for not being a real rebel and for not being deeply involved with the problems of society, but Jim Dixon is not, and his creator has not attempted to make him, an Angry Young Man. An insistence on the need to grapple with real social problems, which is Raymond William's thesis, disregards the value of Amis's attacks on provincial gentility and cant.

Stephen Spender [2] said of the Contemporaries, of whom Amis is one, that: "They attack the modern world but they do so by standards which are of it. They do not consider their own way of feeling and thinking is perhaps conditioned by the fact that they themselves live and think and feel in this world." Their satire, then, is not truly objective and they have no absolute standard against which to measure the world they see. Paul West [3] wrote: "The great danger is that such English novelists as . . . Amis . . . stop short of the universally mythical as distinct from the socially mythical. A similar observation of Amis,

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1 F.R. Karl, A Reader's Guide to the Contemporary English Novel, 1963 and R. Williams, The Long Revolution
2 'Moderns and Contemporaries", The List., 11.10.1962.
3 The Modern Novel, 1965

Osborne and Wain has been made [1]. They "can all define their antipathies more clearly than they can explain their affirmations".

The moral basis of Amis's satire is less obvious in this his first novel than it is in his later work. In 1957 Amis wrote:

> [2] We are in for a golden age of satire, in my opinion, and if this is so we will be fortunate indeed. Satire offers a social and moral contribution. . . A society such as ours, in which the forms of power are changing and multiplying, needs above all the restraining influence of savage laughter. . . . [Modern satire is] fiction that attacks vice and folly as manifested in the individual.

The laughter in Lucky Jim and the novels by other writers which followed it is rarely savage, for their targets are seldom major ones. But their laughter offers a fresh perspective. The sombre, solemn working-class men in novels by Walter Allen and Edward Upward have been shouldered aside by the humorous and often witty non-heroes of the younger generation. A new type of university graduate was introduced to the reading public, setting a fashion for Redbrick university comedies, of which Malcolm Bradbury's Eating People is Wrong is perhaps the best. The use of farce, and the use of the *deus ex machina* to solve plot problems have become typical of the post-Lucky Jim novel.[3]

Joe Lampton is the hero of John Braine's Room at the Top, a book which sold 35,000 copies in its first year of publication in 1957. Its success was due less to its literary merits than to the portrait of Joe, a working-class hero who seemed peculiarly contemporary in the

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1 J. Gindin, Postwar British Fiction, 1963.
2 NYTBR 7.7.1957.
3 David Lodge's entertaining The British Museum is Falling Down (1965) is one of the novels to use this method.

nineteen fifties. Superfically he resembles H.G. Wells's Kipps or Arnold Bennett's Derry Machin, for he is also a social climber, but he is not driven by an admiration for the class above him, by simple ambition or a desire for self-improvement. Joe is a ruthless egoist, pursuing material success with a determined single-mindedness, an "ambitious predator" [1]. He uses any means of advancement available, including what Anthony Burgess [2] calls "hypergamy" - marrying into the class above.

Even after the social upheavals of the Second World War the upper classes retained their privileges, and Joe, who despises them, is determined to take some of the privileges for himself. He attacks the class-system not by shouting against it but by joining it, turning it to his own advantage and becoming what K. Allsop calls an "expedient-conformist". What Joe wants is simple: " an Aston-Martin, three-guinea linen shirts, a girl with a Riviera suntan." The cultural pretensions of the upper classes do not interest him except as a means of gaining entrée to the magic circle. His seduction of Susan is also motivated by an accumulation of inherited resentment as he shows in his comments on her family mansion: "The man who built it was dead . . . all the St Clairs were dead; I was alive, the mere fact of my survival was itself a victory over them."

If Joe were nothing more than a self-seeking egoist, our interest in him would be limited. But he is not a modern version of the mediaeval vices. He emerges as a complete

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1 K. Allsop, The Angry Decade, 1958.
2 A. Burgess, The Novel Now, 1967.

character, a round character, for whom the reader feels a reluctant sympathy. Joe is saved from simplification by his ability to distance himself from his actions, and to anticipate our criticisms of them by voicing them himself. He is not self-deluded, he knows he is a predator, but accepts that the ends justify the means. His observant, sardonic eye is turned as much on himself as on the people and society around him. In making his choice between the true love of Alice and the false love of Susan, he is carrying his philosophy to a logical conclusion, but he does not anticipate how sour the fruits of victory will taste. Alice kills herself and Joe realises what he has thrown away in his relentless pursuit of his ambition - his chance of happiness.

The aggressive, pushing, ambitious and unscrupulous hero of Braine's novel has appeared in thinly-disguised forms in a number of other contemporary novels. Joe Lampton was employed at the Town Hall, but most of his successors have belonged to professions which have a more attractive surface glamour and offer more substantial rewards. Advertising men, Public Relations Officers, Television and Newspaper journalists - they appear in these novels as sophisticated con-men, parasites on society, involved in a world which has no ethics and where the law of the jungle is the only law. [1]

In Kingsley Amis's I Want it Now (1968) a more sophisticated Ronnie Appleyard replaces Joe Lampton. Ronnie runs a television discussion programme and belongs to a world

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1 John Bowen's Storyboard (1960) is one of the few to offer a sympathetic portrait of the world of advertising.

apparently far removed from Joe's Yorkshire town, but it too is a jungle where only the most adaptable and strongest survive. Ronnie is an opportunist, he knows what he wants, and he "wants it now". What he wants includes of course a girl, Simon, rich and beautiful, but in the course of getting her Ronnie divests himself of some of his more meritricious ways. He attains an honesty he had not possessed before, and is rewarded by the author giving him what he wants. Towards the end of the book Ronnie says to Simon:

> Very odd, this whole thing. I was a shit when I met you. I still am in lots of ways. But because of you I've had to give up trying to be a dedicated full-time shit. I couldn't make it, hadn't the strength of character.

Where Joe envied and sneered at the rich, Ronnie hates them. The savagery of Amis's attacks on such diverse targets as the cynical world of television (where culture and sincerity are both saleable commodities), the meanness of the very rich and the vileness of the Southern States "niggerwhippers", makes this novel more social in its concerns than Braine's. Amis offers a less ambiguous moral viewpoint, but he is also more romantic in his suggestion that the love of a woman can change a man and persuade him to discard his former beliefs and ambitions.

John Braine's The Crying Game (1968) has as its hero Frank Belcombe, an ambitious reporter from the provinces "going to the top" in London. After a number of disillusioning experiences, including betrayal by a man he trusted, Frank opts out of the rat-race and is rewarded with the love of the nice Catholic girl he had rejected earlier on.

Patrick Skene Catling's hero in Tourist Attraction (1965) is a Public Relations man who fraudulently claims money from a dead woman's estate to further his ambitions. In The Early Life of Stephen Hind (1966) Storm Jameson introduces a young man, the bastard son of a whore and spiritualist, whose tenacity has brought him to the position of private secretary to a diplomat. In the course of the novel he marries a pregnant rich girl, but his motives in saving her from disgrace are not entirely selfless, and inevitably he meets another girl when it is too late. The novel ends with a remark which could have been made by any of these heroes: "He saw the next step he would take clearly, so clearly, with such intense almost personal excitement, that he knew there was not the smallest danger he would miss it."
Jack Trevor Story, in Live Now Pay Later and Something for Nothing (1963), offers a slight variation on the character of the ambitious hero - Albert Argyle is a wide boy, living on his wits, and finally defeated by his own cleverness. Although he is more transparently dishonest than most of the literary heroes of his type - in Something for Nothing he tries to defraud a stamp-trading firm - his ambitions and methods are not dissimilar. His plans fail because he over-reaches himself, and of course he loses his girl and is trapped by another who is very nice but quite unsuitable. To his former mistress he sadly admits: ". . . and now you've got nothing and I've got nothing."

John Osborne's hero in The World of Paul Slickey (1959) is a gossip-columnist who personifies the workings of the

bitch-goddess Success, but who sees himself as a victim rather than a manipulator, blaming "them" for forcing him and his like into the rat-race. He is consequently an unattractive creature used by Osborne as a mouthpiece for his social satire, but the degree of objectivity required for satire is alien to Osborne, and the rockets he fires are wide of their targets. In Look Back in Anger this did not matter because the man who was firing them was more important than his nominal targets, but Slickey is sentimentalised and too feeble to carry the play.

The Room at the Top pattern occurs again in Sid Chaplin's Sam in the Morning (1965) but Sam is already half-way to the top, and the top he aims at is higher than Joe Lampton even dreamed of. In the 1965 version the young thruster from the Midlands is fired by a lust for power, power over people and their destinies, rather than by the more modest material ambitions of a Joe Lampton. On the first page of Room at the Top Lampton says:

> My clothes were my Sunday best: a light grey suit that had cost fourteen guineas, a plain grey tie, plain grey socks, and brown shoes. The shoes were the most expensive I'd ever possessed, with a deep, rich, nearly black lustre. My trench-coat and my hat, though, weren't up to the same standard . . . .

Compare this with the first page of Sam in the Morning:

> The door snapped shut on my past. It snapped not me but my past. Shapeless overcoat, suit from the hook, cheap shirt, stained tie, down-at-heels shoes were all so much camouflage. The shapeless black overcoat was a cloak for a new man and a gleaming, razor-sharp mind. I knew my way; I had been there before; I knew it was made for me.

In the ten or so years between the two novels Joe has been replaced by a tougher, brasher character who does not try to hide his origins or make a good impression, but uses his class as a weapon, even exaggerating it to emphasise

how far he has already climbed. Sam takes an almost perverse pleasure in refusing to conform. He loses the girl he wants, but is happy with the woman he does marry, only sometimes feeling that there is something missing in his life. The pat moral ending which is so characteristic of this type of novel is thus avoided, but this gain in realism is off-set by Chaplin's predilection for fantasy. His view of big business is so startlingly unreal that it is impossible to believe either in Sam or in his success. A large portion of the book is devoted to showing Sam at the office, where his time is spent impressing and manipulating people, people who are themselves unlikely, and the reader is expected to take Sam's brilliance as a businessman for granted. He must have been very good at his job (whatever it was), for there is no other apparent reason why this insufferable young man should have been tolerated even in 1970, the date in which the book is set. [1]

William Golding in Pincher Martin (1956) has drawn a portrait of the complete egoist, a man we can only admire for his perverse tenacity and courage. In Pincher the desire to survive is so strong that at the moment of death he invents a world where his ego can survive. Before he went inco the navy, Chris (his descriptive nickname was given to him later) was an actor, and brief flashbacks of his life are interspersed with his struggle to survive on a rock in the Atlantic. In Chapter 8 he is chosen to act the part of Greed in a

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1 Men at work are rarely convincing in contemporary novels, and the subject is seldom central. Some exceptions are: Wilfred Sheed Office Politics (1966), Michael Frayn Towards the End of the Morning (1967), John Bowen Story-Board! (1960) and Shirley Hazzard People in Glass Houses (1967)

play and the producer says:

> Let me make you two better acquainted. This painted bastard here takes anything he can lay his hands on. Not food, Chris, that's far too simple. He takes the best part, the best seat, the most money, the best notice, the best woman. He was born with his mouth and his flies open and both hands out to grab. He's a cosmic case of the bugger who gets his penny and someone else's bun.

He has always taken what he wants and when he meets a woman he can love, he rapes her because she will not give in to him. She marries Nathaniel, an innocent and good man whom Pincher tries to murder. His love-hate relationship with Nathaniel stems from his fear of being weakened in his resolves and ambitions. Nathaniel's goodness threatens the autonomy of his selfish ego, for a feeling for someone other than himself would destroy his solitude and independence. The strength of Pincher's will to live, his ruthless egoism, is the key to the interpretation of the book, for if Pincher had not been such a man he would not have invented the rock where he struggles for survival.

Three years after Pincher Martin, William Golding published Free Fall in which the hero, Sammy Mountjoy, is a more subtle version of Pincher. Where Pincher is shown as he is, Sammy tries to discover at what point he became what he is. Pincher is an evil man, but Sammy is less obviously so and he tries to pinpoint the moment in his life when he lost his innocence. Like all the pushing heroes who have been discussed in this chapter, Sammy has used women, not in this case for the purpose of advancement, but out of a sense of power and a desire to impose his will on others.

Jocelin, the hero of William Golding's The Spire (1964) would not at first sight appear to have much in common with Joe Lampton and his type. He is a churchman who succeeds in getting a spire built on the church - largely through his own efforts. The power of his will is tremendous and it is used to further his spiritual ambitions rather than material ones, but he is of the same breed as Joe Lampton. A ruthless egoist whose motives are suspect, he is the cause of deaths and disasters among those who come in contact with him.

In all the novels discussed so far, the pushing young hero has been seen from the inside (Jocelin is older but he is not an exception). In Anthony Powell's twelve-novel sequence The Music of Time (begun in 1951) the pushing young men is seen from the outside, from the point of view of those he is pushing out. The Music of Time chronicles the social history of the upper class, public school, Oxbridge young men of the 1920s and 1930s. They are a doomed species, anachronisms, pushed finally into extinction by the aggressive, power-hungry, energetic lower class type represented here chiefly by Widmerpool.

A. Mizener [1] suggests that there is a major contrast implied between Stringham "the man of imagination with his heightened sensitivity to the promises of life and his objectless passion . . . on the verge of disintegration" and Widmerpool "the self-absorbed man of will . . . on his way to success." Mizener writes of: "Powell's deep, quiet sense of the twentieth century as a wrecked civilization grubbing along in the shadow of its greatness's

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1 The Sense of Life in the Modern Novel, 1965.

ruins, a world nearly transformed by the Widmerpool's though still haunted by the Stringham's." Another critic [1] saw the incursion of Widmerpool into the lives of the Stringhams and Gorings as "significant of the changing form of society and also a portent of Widmerpudlian wrath to come." Walter Allen[2] suggests that Jenkins, the narrator, is interested in the analysis of human behaviour and the motives that prompt it. "The main motive appears to be the will to power, seen at its most grotesque and also at its most formidable in Widmerpool."

Widmerpool appears in these novels as a clown, a vulgar buffoon, the butt of the refined witticisms of his "superiors". But it is Widmerpool who gets to the top, the others who fade away or die. Although Powell's approach to his material is ironic, it is clear where his sympathies lie. Consequently he sees in Widmerpool only material for farce - an attitude which contrasts strangely to that of writers like John Braine. Widmerpool cannot be taken seriously by the author, the other characters or the reader: he is a grotesque. Such an attitude severely limits the truth of Powell's picture of the decay of an effete society and the growth of one more vulgar but more vital. Widmerpool's effect on the tight circle of the Stringhams, Gorings and Walpole-Wilsons is the matter of the comedy of manners, but in Powell's hands it is almost the matter of farce, and the two do not quite mix. From the point of view of the upper-classes in Powell's novels, Widmerpool is a figure of fun. By the 1950s such figures are taken seriously - society (and fiction) has been forced to change its attitude.

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1 TLS: The British Imagination, 1960.
2 'The Music of Time', The List., 3.4.1958.

Jimmy Porter, Jim Dixon and Joe Lampton were three of the most important characters to appear in English fiction in the 1950s. They are important not only because of the number of imitations they inspired - and only a few of the better ones have been discussed here - but also because they were characters who were immediately recognised by critics and readers as truly contemporary creations. Their resemblances to pre-war literary characters is superficial; they are products of the Welfare State.

One further group remains to be discussed before leaving the young non-hero: the delinquent, the drop-out, the social reject, the petty-criminal. He is the true rebel.

Since the war, delinquents and juvenile criminals have provided fodder for sociologists, criminologists, psychologists and The Times letter-writers, but novelists, perhaps not wishing to compete with the experts, have tended to shy away from the subject. There is no body of delinquent literature and no vogue for delinquent heroes, in spite of the obvious contemporaneity of the subject. Some of the few novels with delinquent heroes are of interest, and because there was no model for the type, as there was in the other three groups, they are surprisingly varied.

Alan Sillitoe's The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner the title story of a volume of short stories (1959) is a brief but perceptive study of a juvenile delinquent. The hero is a Borstal boy, a magnificent athlete and runner. The Governor of the Borstal wants him to win a race, and he wants to win it himself, but for the sake of pure defiance he forces himself not to. The clear

division between "us" and "them" which was noticeable in Sillitoe's Saturday Night and Sunday Morning is even more marked here. Smith, the boy, must prove to himself he is really a free individual and he prefers social ostracism to loss of inner liberty. His refusal to win is a revenge on a society which had nothing to offer him. F.R. Karl [1] points out that two conflicting ideas of society are in opposition to each other: "the social 'normality' of the governor in his corrupted values and the personal defiance of the angry Borstal boy with his integrity and purity." The reasons for the "anti-social" behaviour of the delinquent, Borstal boy, are made explicit without the aid of sociological or psychological explanations.

Anthony Burgess's A Clockwork Orange (1962) is the autobiographical confession of a juvenile delinquent, Alex, who lives in an unspecified but not very distant future, a future where regimentation and mechanisation have increased. The delinquent is essentially a non-conformist and when Alex is caught by the police and kills a cell-mate, society decrees that he should be re-educated. Back in the world he meets a sympathetic man who says:

> [2] You've sinned, I suppose, but your punishment has been out of all proportion. They have turned you into something other than a human being. You have no power of choice any longer. You are committed to socially acceptable acts, a little machine capable only of good. . . . But the essential intention is the real sin. A man who cannot choose ceases to be a man.

Alex is eventually "re-re-educated", the conditioning is reversed and he returns to the world older, but much as he was when the book began. But he finds he no

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

longer enjoys gang life and the book ends with Alex deciding to find a girl and settle down. Burgess's view of the teen-age or delinquent problem is simple: they will grow out of it. Alex is drawn into the gang because he is bored and because it offers a kind of security and friendship, a sense of belonging, which his home-life does not.

Anthony Burgess does not gloss over the cruelty and thoughtless sadism and destructive_ness of Alex and his kind, but he does succeed in engaging the reader's sympathy and liking for him. The book is successful on another level too: it is stylistically exciting.

> [1] There was me, that is Alex, and my three droogs, that is Pete, Georgie, and Dim, Dim being really dim, and we sat in the Korova Milkbar making up our rassoodocks what to do with the evening, a flip dark chill winter bastard though dry. The Korova Milkbar was a milk-plus mesto, and you may, O my brothers, have forgotten what these mestos were like, things changing so skorry these days and everybody very quick to forget, newspapers not being read much neither. Well, what they sold there was milk plus something else. They had no licence for selling liquor, but there was no law yet against prodding some of the new veschches . . . poet it with . . drencrom or one or two other veschches which would give you a nice quier horrorshow fifteen minutes admiring Bog And All His Holy Angels and Saints in your left shoe with lights bursting all over your mozg. . . . Our pockets were full of deng, so there was no real need from the point of view of crasting any more pretty polly to tolchock some old veck in an alley and viddy him swim in his blood while we counted the takings and divided by four, nor to do the ultraviolent on some shivering starry grey-haired ptitsa in a shop and go smecking off with the till's guts. But, as they say, money isn't everything.

This teenage slang, a sort of underworld lingo with slav roots, "nadsat" they call it, is very effective. It is easy to understand and, curiously, is more successful at conveying the essential "outsiderness" of the delinquent than are most attempts at realistc recording of contemporary

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1 Chapter 1.

teen-age speech. A comparison between, say, J.D. Salinger's The Catcher in the Rye (1951) and Burgess's novel shows how curiously dated Salinger's novel has become in a few years. As a sociological study it is still of interest, but as a novel it lacks the freshness and timelessness of Burgess's book.

Colin MacInnes has been described by Paul West [1] as "the Hogarth of the cleared-streets era . . . . A connoisseur of underdogs, Flash Harrys, and wanglers. . . ." MacInnes's territory is the neglected wastes of Kensal Green, Bayswater, Notting Hill Gate and Ladbroke Grove, and his people are the Spades/and Jumbles who live there, sometimes in a state of uneasy truce, and sometimes in a state of violent conflict. MacInnes has been described [2] as a "documentary novelist" whose novels are fictionalised versions of his essays and articles. In England, Half English (1966) MacInnes answers this criticism:

[3]

> In my own case a theme, later to be evoked in fiction, has always 'moved in on' me and has become, without any deliberate intent, a part of my life almost before I was aware of it, and certainly long before I thought of writing of it. During this period of saturation such apprehension as I have is intuitive, then thoughtful; the factual 'documentation' always comes long afterwards . . . . I would thus describe City of Spades or Absolute Beginners – no doubt flatteringly – as poetic evocations of a human situation, with undertones of social criticism of it: wildly romantic in mood, and as rigorously analytic as I can be, by implication.

Colin MacInnes has published a number of books which deal with delinquents and near-delinquents, of all colours. His chief interest, though, is in the coloured immigrants who he sees as victims of racial prejudice. Like Anthony Burgess's delinquent, they are outsiders, alien to the society in which they find themselves. In City of Spades (1957)

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1 The Modern Novel, 1965.
2 amongst others by J. Wain in Essays on Literature and Ideas, 1963.
3 From his essay 'Sharp Schmutter'.

he traces the downfall of a Nigerian who comes to England with high hopes for his future, but who becomes entangled in the law and finally returns home. He tells his story himself in an exuberant lively argot, the argot of the black underworld, the drop-outs, drug-pushers, ponces and petty thieves, men who pride themselves on their elegant sophistication, who live with flair and a certain style. Their names are reminiscent of Damon Runyon characters: Misery Kid, Zesty-Boy Shift, The Fabulous Hoplite, Call-me-Cobber, Ex-Deb-of-Last-Year, and so on. The hero tells his story like this:

> This didn't seem to be my lucky day for gay society, because the next person who accosted me was no one less but a well-known idiot from back home called Ibrahim Tondapo, a thoroughly gilded youth, who just because his Dad owns two small cinemas that regularly catch on fire and burn up portions of the audience, allowed himself in Lagos great airs of class distinction, earning hatred and laughter everywhere around. He looked at me up and down and shook his body in his expensive suit as if he was shivering cold water off it. So 'Hullor, chieftain,' I said to him, 'How is each one of your six mothers?' (this being a reference to his not knowing really who his mother was, because his Dad is volatile, and he quite unlike any of his brothers).

Colin MacInnes is not attempting strict naturalism of language because:

> [1] it would in the case of social exotics such as these, result in a 'period dialect': pedestrian, and fixed for ever in the time stream. So I tried . . . to re-invent, from reality, a more 'real' - and therefore timeless - language, as Dickens did, I believe, with Samuel Weller's speech.

In Colin MacInnes's view, young men, whether black or white, become delinquents primarily because of the pressures of society. (There are of course some very nasty characters among them - MacInnes does not sentimentalise his portraits).

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1 England, Half English (1966).

Jane Gaskell is a very much younger novelist than Colin MacInnes, and the view she gives of delinquents is from a different angle. In <u>Attic Summer</u> (1963) her young heroine meets a group of "leather-jacket" boys. The world of the gang with its rigid mores, its aping of adults, its essentially adolescent and innocent behaviour, and its undercurrent of violence, is discovered by the heroine when she becomes the girl-friend of one of them. In <u>All Neat in Black Stockings</u> (1966) her hero is not from the middle-classes as in her earlier book, but is one of the "leather-jacket" brigade. He is a window-cleaner whose chief leisure occupation is the pursuit of girls.

Alex Hamilton in <u>Town Parole</u> (1964) also tells his story from the point of view of a petty-criminal and drop-out. Many questions about the hero are left unanswered but he appears to be in London on parole from a mental home. He returns to his old haunts, Soho mainly, and his picaresque adventures begin. In spite of his efforts to avoid the mistakes he made before, he finds he is trapped in his old identity, and he gives up and returns to his "hotel". Hamilton gives a vivid picture of the seedy underworld of Soho and of some of its characters, but he offers no sociological or psychological "explanations" of their condition. If he is making a point about these people, it is only the obvious one that they cannot be "cured" if they return to their old environment - society does not recognise change in personality and one's old identity is a trap for the new.

Rupert Croft-Cooke in his seventeen or so novels has specialised in portraying delinquents, criminals and drop-outs from society, but he is concerned more with

telling a good story (which he does very well) than with offering fresh insights into the criminal mind. Croft-Cooke's psychology and sociology are fairly conventional but his characters are reasonably convincing. Clash by Night (1962) has a character who is a first-offender and Croft-Cooke implies that not only was his downfall inevitable, given his home life, but that by the time he comes to realise the game is not worth the candle, it will be too late for him to change. Paper Albatross (1965) was possibly inspired by the Great Train Robbery - the hero is one of the new-style criminals with brains, ability and common-sense, but he is trapped when his share of the proceeds from a robbery turns out to be larger than he can handle, and he has no idea of what to do.

The portrait of the delinquent which emerges from the pages of these writers is a sympathetic one, but all the writers are outsiders looking in on the group (although Alex Hamilton gives the impression of having a closer view than the others). The other young non-heroes discussed in this chapter had a convincingly autobiographical "feel" to them. A novel by a delinquent could well start a fashion for this rather neglected hero.

The non-heroes discussed so far have all been young,[1] either in their teens or early twenties. They have all protested or rebelled against the Welfare State or post-war England. Their rebellion has taken a number of

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1 William Golding's heroes must be excepted from these generalisations - his characters are too complex and original for them to properly belong to a "school".

forms, but it would be wrong to suggest that they are revolutionaries. The so-called rebels do not want to change the world, but to alter their small corner of it; the delinquents and drop-outs build a world for themselves outside society. They are "reactionaries", a more negative kind of rebel than "revolutionaries." They are reacting against the society into which they were born, but their reaction can be seen in another light as simply a contemporary manifestation of the age-old conflict between generations. In many of these novels the young hero is reacting against or escaping from his parents and the kind of lives they lead. Of course it is his parents and their generation who have made the post-war world what it is, so in effect the young hero is rebelling against society, but if these novels are seen as generation-conflict novels, rather than attacks on society, a new light is shed on their importance. In the 1950s many readers and critics hoped that the Angry Young Men (the name became a blanket term for all the new non-heroes) would lead a revolution which would affect the future of literature and, it was hoped, society. This has not happened and from the perspective of ten years later it can be seen that the rebelliousness of many was simply a fashion. The heroes have "grown-up" and both they and most of their creators have conformed, establishing themselves as solid, serious-minded adults. The rebellious young hero appears less frequently in the novels of the late 1960s, but the influence of the 1950s writers continues to be felt in other ways. Their real contribution to the contemporary novel was to revitalise the provincial novel and to introduce the witty, loquacious,

irreverent young hero.

It was suggested at the beginning of this chapter that "the non-heroic hero has become the standard fictional representative of his age."[1] Although the young non-hero has attracted more attention than the middle-aged hero, partly because he seemed particularly contemporary, there is too a contemporary type of middle-aged hero. His likeness to pre-war heroes is more marked, but he is contemporary because the problems he faces are unique to the post-war world. Like the young non-heroes the middle-aged ones are often victims of society or rebels against society, or seekers of a place in society, but their methods of protest are very different.

It has already been pointed out that the rebelliousness of the young non-hero is often without direction, a generalised rather than a particularised feeling of discontent. The essential difference between these and the middle-aged hero is that the latter can define his antipathies more clearly, but because he is not an adolescent from whom non-conformism is expected, even demanded, he finds it more difficult to escape from the shackles of society. His rebellion comes too late. His behaviour is looked on by the rest of society as a form of childishness or insanity, and he is seldom strong enough to withstand the pressures of a society to which he has belonged for forty or more years. He becomes a victim, for while society condones extraordinary behaviour in the young, it does not tolerate it in the middle- or old-aged.

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1 Postwar British Fiction, 1963.

There are two types of middle-aged rebel - those who have conformed all their lives and now try to break out, and those who have never conformed and are fighting to retain their independence.

In the first group the heroes rebel against routine, against nine-to-five jobs and five-to-nine wives. Frequently they live in comfortable, featureless suburbs and have teen-age children whose freedom they envy. Their rebellion is expressed either by trying to leave their old lives behind them and starting afresh, or by breaking some of the rules of their society.

The most commonly broken rule is the rule of monogamy. The hero is bored, bored with his job, his wife, his children and the settled routine of his life. He expresses his boredom not by leaving home but by having an affair with another woman. The affair begins as an idle flirtation - usually with a younger woman - but the predictable complications and crises arise and the hero is put in the position of choosing between love and duty. Usually he chooses the latter and returns to his wife nursing a broken heart and showing a brave face. The essential triteness and banality of this pattern presents peculiar difficulties to the novelist who attempts it, and few of the novels of this type rise to any literary heights.

John Brophy's <u>The Prime of Life</u> (1954) illustrates some of the difficulties. His hero is a very dull, somewhat pompous man, but he is more credible than the heroine who is obviously as much a puzzle to the author as to the

hero. She is not, however hard Brophy tries to make her so, a member of the post-war generation. Robin Maugham's The Green Shade (1966) suffers from the same handicap, as do Stanley Middleton's Terms of Reference (1966), John Williams's Death is a Lizard (1963) and J.D. Scott's The Pretty Penny (1963). Pamela Hansford Johnson varies the formula in The Humbler Creation (1959) by making the hero a clergyman, tempted into sin.

Kathleen Nott in An Elderly Retired Man (1963) produces a hero so monumentally dull, so fond of introspection and soul-searching that it raises the question of whether it is possible to depict a boring character for any length of time without boring the reader. William Sansom in Goodbye (1966) solves this problem by using a delicately ironic approach to his subject. His hero may be a boring little man to his wife, but he does not bore the reader. Similarly, Honor Tracy's The Beauty of the World (1967) gains by the humorous and ironic treatment of her hero.

None of these novels is a love story. They are simply tales of restless middle-aged men having a last sexual fling before settling down into old age with their memories to warm them. [1] Their rebellion is as pathetic as the rebellion of some of the adolescents previously discussed, but rarely as funny and lively. Most of the novels have pat moral endings, though few are quite as pat as in Martha Gellhorn's Pretty Tales for Tired People (1965) which proposes that adultery and pride are always followed by a fall. Iris Murdoch in The Sandcastle (1957)

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1 In William Sansom's novel it is the wife who leaves the husband, so these remarks do not apply to this book.

shows that the situation has possibilities if the love between the hero and his mistress can be shown to be genuine and not merely a therapeutic fling. The Sandcastle does not deviate from the typical pattern but the love affair arises naturally and inevitably, not because the hero is seeking a romantic attachment. The love-affair is a castle of sand, for the hero gives up his chance for personal happiness and obeys the calls of duty, obligation and social expedience, but their love is nonetheless genuine.

None of the heroes and heroines of these novels is making a complete break with his old life, and most of them return to it a little chastened. In contrast to these heroes are the ones who try to leave their old lives behind them and start afresh. Their rebellion is more positive but it is also more dangerous, for while adultery is not considered by society to be a grave crime, the total rejection of a way of life is. The adult is expected to behave responsibly, and society is against those who try to give up their responsibilities and start their lives afresh. In the two novels chosen to represent this group, society is the victor.

Brendan Mulholland's The Commuter (1967) is a brief novel which tells of one day in the life of a not particularly endearing creature who commutes to London from his semi-detached. Recently he has been feeling claustrophobic on the train and has been getting off at an earlier station, with the result that he is late for work. On this day he is warned that he will be fired, and he

expresses his anger, frustration and resentment in a riotous night. He is put on the train by a policeman, fights with his wife when he gets home - and next day he is on the commuter's train. He has no choice. His rebellion is feeble, but it is all that he can manage.

John Wain's *The Smaller Sky* (1967) is a more direct criticism of a society which does not allow for non-conformists. A middle-aged scientist goes to live on Paddington station, the only place where he does not hear drums beating and he can feel at peace. He goes there to hold on to his sanity, but a "well-meaning" friend discovers him and the process of forcing him to conform begins. A television team learns of his story and they come to film him. He panics and climbs onto the station roof where he feels a brief peace under "the larger sky" before falling to his death. "As Geary died, two good things happened. The drums ceased, and the snow went on falling." Society does not allow such men as he to find their own salvation or seek their own answers: non-conformity is construed as insantiy. A psychiatrist came to talk to him, the television men came to film him. His eccentric behaviour is sensational material - his reasons for being there interest no one.

The last group of middle-aged heroes is the most interesting because of the variety of character who belong to it. They are all men who have never conformed, who have been able to remain relatively free from the pressures and demands of society. All of them have retained a freedom that the nine-to-five worker can never have. Their independence

has been hard-won and they fight to retain it with a grim tenacity. Inevitably most of them are creative artists, a breed noted for its non-conformity. The novels usually show the heroes at a point where they are fighting a battle to remain individuals outside society.

Anthony Burgess's Mr Enderby first appeared in 1963 in Inside Mr Enderby (published under the pseudonym of Joseph Kell) and later a sequel under Burgess's own name was published, Enderby Outside (1968). Anthony Burgess's thesis is that the lyric poet is essentially an adolescent and if he is forced to grow up, to become an adult, he loses his gift for poetry. Mr Enderby is a plump middle-aged poet who has arranged his life around his work. He lives on a small annuity in a tiny flat in a seaside boarding-house, and his life is entirely devoted to his work. He reluctantly goes to London to receive an award, but the evening is a disaster. There is a drunk lecture scene (shades of Lucky Jim) and Enderby finds himself penniless. He is adopted by an intelligent and glamorous magazine editor, Vesta Bainbridge, who bullies him into living with her and marrying her. Enderby is "growing up", his inspiration - or his muse- leaves him and he cannot write. He tries to commit suicide and is given a new personality by the psychiatrists. He is fairly happy in his new role - but will never be a poet again.

Mr Enderby's literary ancestor is Joyce's Leopold Bloom, but he is not a pale copy of him. Enderby writes most of his poetry while sitting on the lavatory, and his bath

is filled with sheets and scraps of paper. His sexual life is restricted to onanism. He is haunted by the memory of his huge, coarse and revolting step-mother, seeing her in every woman he has met. His greatest treasure is his privacy, but he is no match for Vesta, the woman of the world.

Anthony Burgess has succeeded in this novel in not only showing the creative process of the poet's mind, but also in offering convincing proof that Enderby's lyric poetry was good. He thus overcomes the difficulty of persuading the reader to believe in Enderby's genius, and the ironically "happy" ending is seen as a tragedy.

Enderby Outside is a disappointment because it spoils the completeness of the first book. Obviously the sequel was not originally planned but was written because the first book was a critical success. In it Enderby finds his gift has returned. Enderby, a sworn enemy of the Establishment, and finally its victim, should not rise like a rather grubby Phoenix in the later book.

Enderby is one of the most successful portraits of the creative artist in contemporary fiction,[1] and he illustrates very explicitly the clash between society and the non-conformist. It would be repetitive to discuss any more of these heroes here , for all of them show the same fierce defence of their freedom.

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1 In Aldous Huxley's Crome Yellow, Scogan asked: "Why will you young men continue to write about things that are so entirely uninteresting as the mentality of adolescents and artists?" Both are still favourite topics with writers - a selection of novelists who have written about an artistic character would include: Angus Wilson, Stan Barstow, John Berger, A.S. Byatt, Sylvia Clayton, J.B. Priestley, Honor Tracy, Arnold Yarrow, Michael Blakemore, Margaret Drabble, Maureen Duffy, Elizabeth Jane Howard, Storm Jameson, Wilfred Sheed, Alan Sillitoe, Muriel Spark.

One of the few artistic heroes who has not followed the same pattern is Jake Donaghue, the hero of Iris Murdoch's first novel, Under the Net. Because this book was published in 1954 it was linked in the public's mind with Wain's and Amis's first novels, and it does, superficially, resemble them. The hero is rootless and restless and his picaresque adventures lead him through London and Paris. The humour and the several scenes of high farce - the capture and release of Mars for example - linked Under the Net with Lucky Jim. A closer examination of the book shows that the resemblances are fortuitous and that Jake has little in common with either Charles Lumley or Jim Dixon.

Jake is a struggling peripatetic writer who earns his living from translating. He is in his thirties and is an intellectual. Moreover he is a true Bohemian whose restlessness arises more from an instinctive desire to test out the range of his own adaptability than from any strong hatred of a particular atmosphere or milieu. "He is less aware that our social structure is wrong, or airless, or oppressive, that that it is rum, and it is the rumness that he's exploring, in a sense even philosophically." [1] He sees through intellectual shams, but he has no particular axe to grind or protest to make. Unlike the other, younger, rebels who have been discussed earlier, there is no likelihood that he will ever conform and the book ends more or less where it began, with Jake going off to find some lodgings. Jake does not resemble the other artistic heroes, such as Enderby, very closely because his art is not the whole of his life. He is

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1 G.S. Fraser, 'Iris Murdoch', International Literary Annual, ed. J. Wain, 1959.

not defending his artistic integrity, he is defending his philosophy and his right to be himself.

Under the Net has no plot, there are no crises or resolutions and the reader is not encouraged to look for a moral or even an emergent generalisation about life. Jake's hallucinatory quest leads him "through half-literary and only half-understood events, with the lower-half of the London scene flickering like a magic-lantern in the hands of an excited idiot child."[1] Under the Net is, then picaresque, but it would be more accurate to describe it as an Existonialist novel. "'All theorizing is flight. We must be ruled by the situation itself and this is unutterably particular.' So . . . Jake . . . moves from situation to situation in a curiously dreamlike post-war London, coping with events as they occur, engaging the problems of existence without philosophising about essences."[2] Jake's existentialist position is indicated in the following extracts:

> [3] This was what always happened. I would be at pains to put my universe in order and set it ticking, when suddenly it would burst again into a mess of the same poor pieces, and Finn and I be on the run.

> [4] But marriage remains for me an Idea of Reason, a concept which may regulate but not constitute my life. . . . I hate solitude, but I am afraid of intimacy. The substance of my life is a private conversation with myself which to turn into a dialogue would be equivalent to self-destruction. . . . She took life intensely and very hard. Whereas I think it foolish to take life so, as if you were to provoke a dangerous animal which will break your bones in the end in any case.

> [5] "What you need is to become involved. As soon as you do something and knock into people you'll begin to hate a few of them. Nothing destroys abstractions so well as hatred."
> "It's true," I said lazily. "At present I hate nobody."

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1 K. Allsop, The Angry Decade, 1958.
2 A. Burgess, The Novel Now, 1967.
3, 4, 5, Penguin edition, pages 9, 31 and 103.

[1]"I've always travelled light," I said, "and I don't see that it's ever helped _me_ to understand anything."

The title of _Under the Net_ gives a key to Jake's position. The net can be seen as the net woven by society to trap and enmesh the individual and his private will. J. Gindin [2] offers a slightly different interpretation: "But planned ways of life are nets, traps, no matter how carefully or rationally the net is woven, and Jake discovers that none of these narrow paths really works. The nets range from logical-positivist philosophy and left-wing politics through miming theatricals to film scripts and sophisticated blackmail." Gindin's interpretation is not wholly acceptable because it implies that Jake tries to follow a planned way of life. He does not, unless endeavouring not to follow a planned way of life can be so interpreted. Jake's desire for solitude always preserves him from true involvement. In the light of this a remark made by Iris Murdoch is interesting: [3]

> We need to return from the self-centred concept to the other-centred concept of truth. We are not isolated characters, monarchs of all we survey, but benighted creatures sunk in a reality whose nature we are instantly and overwhelmingly tempted to deform by fantasy. Our current picture of freedom encourages a dream-like facility; whereas what we require is a renewed sense of the difficulty and complexity of the moral life and the opacity of persons.

Neither Enderby and the others like him (the creative artists who sacrifice everything except their independence for their art), nor Jake the Bohemian, are contemporary in the sense that the younger rebels were. All have about them ~~have~~ a slightly anachronistic flavour and would have been more at home in London or Paris at the turn of the

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1 Penguin edition, page 223.
2 _Postwar British Fiction_, 1963
3 Quoted by A. Kazan, _Contemporaries_, 1963.

century. Joyce Cary's Gulley Jimson is their prototype.

The last non-hero to be discussed in this chapter has most of the characteristics of the other non-heroes (including the rebellious young ones). He is in many ways the archetypal contemporary non-hero.

V.S. Naipaul in A House for Mr Biswas (1961), one of the finest novels in contemporary fiction, has created a memorable non-hero. Mr Biswas is born into a poor Indian family in Trinidad but he manages to get an education which leaves him discontented with the life of his parents, but ill-equipped for any other. He is an artist manqué, a man with cultural pretension who would like to devote his life to reading and writing but he is struggling with the complexities of a society where not only class but also race and caste present formidable barriers to the fulfilment of his ambitions. Mr Biswas is not physically prepossessing but he is trapped into an arranged marriage with a daughter of the Tulsi household. The Tulsi's are fairly well-to-do shop keepers, but Mr Biswas finds life barely tolerable with the fourteen daughters, two sons, sons-in-law and numerous children, headed by a stern matriarch and her adviser - all living in the same house. From the time he joins the Tulsi's his life becomes a struggle to retain his personality and to become independent of them.

[1] More important than religion was the Indian's family organization, an enclosing self-sufficient world absorbed with its quarrels and jealousies, as difficult for the the outsider to penetrate as for one of its members to escape. It protected and imprisoned, a static world, awaiting decay.

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1 V.S. Naipaul in The Middle Passage, 1962.

Mr Biswas would like to lead the life of a fastidious and cultured man, but without money - and a house of his own - this is impossible. Towards the end he does build a house for himself and his family and he dies happy in his achievement. But his house is mortgaged to the hilt and the son he adored and had great ambitions for is in England and has stopped writing to his family.

The outline of Mr Biswas's life story would suggest that this novel is a tragedy, for it is a story of a would-be independent spirit crushed by the forces of society. Even his apparent victory at the end is hollow. The outline suggests nothing of the considerable humour of the book. Mr Biswas is an absurd hero, the situations in which he becomes entangled are absurd, but he retains a vitality and optimism which gives him a kind of moral stature. He has a quick, irreverent and often facetious wit, and he never loses faith in himself. Mr Biswas is never defeated or pathetic in his own eyes for his faith in himself is supported by his lack of self-knowledge. He sees himself as a man of culture and education, and yet ironically he can only do two jobs well - sign-writing (which is not profitable and he has to abandon it) and reporting for a sensational newspaper (which changes its policies and puts him out of a job). His life is a series of mishaps, but he continues to believe in his freedom.

Although Mr Biswas, his character and fortunes, are the chief concern of the book, Naipaul's picture of the exotic society in which he lives is vividly drawn while it avoide the trap of offering a sociological study. Naipaul brings

a whole world to life.

In contrast to this book most of the novels discussed show a thinness of talent and a self-absorbed egoism which suggests that the delineation of a dissentient or rebel is, in the end, of limited interest. He must be more than that. Naipaul widens the range of this type of novel and by doing so indirectly shows up the narrowness of scope and even a certain timidity amongst the English writers. Naipaul has a Dickensian breadth, with a style and treatment which liken him to E.M.Forster. Mr Biswas, in spite of his nationality, is more universal, more representative, of the average non-fictional non-hero of this age than are any of the English non-heroes. He is, quite simply, the non-hero of the contemporary world.

Chapter 5 Part B:

Women Novelists

A. Burgess [1] refers to an attack Olivia Manning made on people who declare that they "never read women novelists", as though male and female fiction constituted two distinct and recognisable categories of art. All novelists, according to Olivia Manning, "are really a sort of blooming hermaphrodite". Her cry of fury is far from new, but it is interesting that even the "emancipated" woman writer of the twentieth century should still feel it necessary to make it. The woman novelist is still struggling to free herself from the label "lady novelist" and to have her work accepted on a par with the work of men.

The (usually) male reader is not wholly to blame for his refusal to read women novelists. The majority of women novelists are popular novelists whose speciality is the romantic women's magazine type of fiction. There are fewer male competitors in this field than there are in the other field favoured by popular women novelists, the detective story. Romance has therefore become their particular preserve, and it is natural, if foolish, to assume that a woman novelist one has not read belongs to the majority.

Such an assumption is given further weight by the fact that the subject matter and material of popular and serious novels written by women is very often the same. Jane Austen's novels, reduced to a plot outline, are love stories not unlike those of the typical story in _Woman_. In one way

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1 _Urgent Copy_, 1968.

or another, most women novelists are concerned with some aspect of love. In previous centuries this would necessarily have meant that men would have ignored their work, but the average twentieth century male is peculiarly fearful of being labelled effeminate. A glance at the most popular novels written and read by men shows that love plays a very small part in this fiction. Rape and lust replace seduction and love, and their women are figures of wish-fulfilment who bear little resemblance to actual flesh-and-blood women. Love is confused with sentimentality and banished to women's novels. There are signs that this position is beginning to change, for the younger twentieth century male born since the war, is more feminine and less aggressively masculine than his older brother or father. If this trend continues the woman novelist may find that she has been accepted, not through any efforts of her own, but because the attitude of men to such "sissy" subjects as love has changed.

A. Wilson [1] said of the younger generation:

> They have got rid of so much that destroyed my generation. I believe that to a great degree they are getting rid of what they would call "the hang-up" on sex. The whole concept of victimisation, the whole concept that there must be somebody destroyed, the whole idea of the necessity of pain in love affairs, the whole rigid idea of the little woman, the strong silent man, the flirt, the cad - all this goes. The old ideas disappear, of men here and women there, of the victim, the chase. All these hardened attitudes, and dogmatic homosexuality along with them. The whole thing is more merged and fluid.

In spite of this hopeful prognosis, at the end of the article A. Wilson says that he fears that ". . , this sexual revolution, like everything else liberal in England today, may well be threatened by the sudden panic that has begun over the loss of authority."

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1 'The Sexual Revolution', The List., 10.10.1968.

Olivia Manning's belief that novels written by men and women do not belong in separate categories, is interesting. She is, of course, right in believing that separate critical standards should not be applied, but it is doubtful whether she is right in averring that the sex of the author is not apparent in his novels. Virginia Woolf, in a review of R.Brimley Johnson's The Women Novelists [1], disagrees.

> . . . and yet no one will admit that he can possibly mistake a novel written by a man for a novel written by a woman. There is the obvious and enormous difference of experience in the first place; but the essential difference lies in the fact not that men describe battles and women the birth of children, but that each sex describes itself. . . . And finally . ... there arises for consideration the very difficult question of the difference between the man's and the woman's view of what constitutes the importance of any subject. From this springs not only marked differences of plot and incident, but infinite differences of selection, method and style.

Ian Watt [2] cites the example of Jane Austen to suggest that:

> the feminine sensibility was in some ways better equipped to reveal the intricacies of personal relationships and was therefore at a real advantage in the realm of the novel. The reasons for the greater feminine command of the area of personal relationships would be difficult and lengthy to detail; one of the main ones is probably that suggested in John Stuart Mill's statement that 'all the education that women receive from society inculcates in them the feeling that the individuals connected with them are the only ones to whom they owe any duty.' As to the connexion of this with the novel, there can surely be ltttle doubt.

Mary McCarthy [3] sees the fictional experiments of the twentieth century as having gone in two directions: towards sensibility and towards sensation. "The novel of sensibility was feminine. . . . In the modern novel of sensibility the shimmer of consciousness occupies the whole field of vision, Happenings are broken down into tiny discrete impressions." She suggests later that the novel's distinctive tone, even when at its most serious, is one "of gossip and tittle tattle". Women are not necessarily more inclined to gossip than men, but

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1 Review published in TLS 17.10.1918, reprinted in Contemporary Writers, 1965.
2 The Rise of the Novel, 1963.
3 On the Contrary, 1961.

they often have the knack of making gossip more entertaining.

A. Burgess [1] suggests a similar division of the novel to Mary McCarthy's. He uses the Chinese terms "yin" and "yang" to distinguish . . .

> two distinct, opposite and complementary, impulses in the novel. . . . the feminine and masculine poles in a pre-sexual or, if we like, metaphorical sense. The *yin* is the yielding, the *yang*, the forceful; the *yin* is concerned with the colour and texture of life, the *yang* with its dynamic: the *yin* prose-style is careful, exquisite, full of qualified statements, while the *yang* is less scrupulous, coarser, more aggressive. Henry James was a *yin* novelist; Ernest Hemingway belonged to the brotherhood of the *yang*.

Burgess points out that most women novelists belong to the *yin* impulse, and are most often influenced by the male *yin* writers.

There can be no doubt that there are differences between novels written by men and those written by women, and that they do form two distinct and recognisable categories. Some writers really are "a sort of blooming hermaphrodite", as Olivia Manning suggests [2]-: E.M. Forster, Henry James, William Sansom and L.P. Hartley come to mind. - but the sex of most novelists is immediately apparent to the reader of their works.

Attempts to discover exactly what distinguishes these two types of novel leads to the making of generalisations which call for modifications and qualifications. V. Woolf [3] quotes some of R. Brimley Johnson's statements:

> Women are born preachers and always work for an ideal.
>
> Woman is the moral realist, and her realism is not inspired by an idle ideal of art, but of sympathy with life.
>
> George Eliot's outlook remains thoroughly emotional and feminine.
>
> Wo Women are humorous and satirical rather than imaginative.
>
> They have a greater sense of emotional purity than men, but a less alert sense of honour.

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1 *The Novel Now*, 1967.
2 Quoted by A. Burgess, *Urgent Copy*, 1968.
3 'Women Novelists', *Contemporary Writers*, 1965.

Ian Watt [1] quotes Henry James as saying:

> Women are delicate and patient observers; they hold their noses close, as it were, to the texture of life. They feel and perceive the real with a kind of personal tact, and their observations are recorded in a thousand delightful volumes.

A. Burgess [2] suggests that women have a better natural fictional equipment than men:

> They notice surfaces, which is what novels are made out of; they have a phenomenal semantic range when it comes to dealing with texture, colour and nuance of speech; being the primal order of creation, they enclose men and see through them..Their faults are the faults a man finds in a woman: they chatter, they are deficient in moral values, they are too empirical, they fall in love with the accident and miss the essence, they are distracted by a golden apple.

More important than attempting to define the difference is to try to discover what effect the sex of a writer has on his or her work. Virginia Woolf believed that it had a very profound effect on women writers, and she concludes that it is impossible for a woman, any more than for a man, to free herself from "the tyranny of sex itself".[3] She discusses the effect on women novelists of the social restrictions imposed on their sex (restrictions which Nathalie Sarraute [4] suggests were designed to "mutilate their intelligence"). Novelists like Jane Austen accepted the limitations and worked within them, but writers like George Eliot adopted male pen-names in an attempt to ". . . free their own consciousness as they wrote from the tyranny of what was expected from their sex". Virginia Woolf suggests that both reactions are damaging to the women novelist. The writer who accepts society's limitations has not only to struggle with the problem of art but has also "to respect the ignorance of young women's minds or to consider whether the public will think that the standard of moral purity displayed in your work is such as they have a right

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1 The Rise of the Novel, 1963.
2 Urgent Copy, 1968.
2 'Women Novelists', Contemporary Writers, 1965.
3 TLS, The Writer's Dilemma, 1961.

to expect from your sex." The novelist who adopts a male pseudonym

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> . . . in an effort to free herself and to enjoy what appears, perhaps erroneously, to be the comparative freedom of the male sex from that tyranny, is another influence which has told disastrously upon the writing of women. . . . since any emphasis, whether of pride or of shame, laid consciously upon the sex of a writer is not only irritating but superfluous.

Contemporary women writers can be divided roughly according to whether they accept or reject the limitations imposed on their sex. The writers who accept these limitations are not characteristically "contemporary". There is very little difference between the books they are writing now and the books their predecessors were writing before the war. Many of them were in fact writing in the 1940s - Elizabeth Taylor is one - and very few of the younger writers belong to this group. Although they are often interesting writers, they are not "typical" of the period, and will not be discussed here. Elizabeth Jane Howard is one of the most accomplished, and Margaret Lane and Olivia also belong here, as do Charlotte Morrow and Elizabeth Montague.

The second group of writers, those who reject the limitations society imposes on them, have been very active in contemporary fiction. At the beginning of the 1960s a new wave of young women writers appeared. The theme which is common to their novels is the problem of being a woman in modern society. Their position *vis-à-vis* their suffragette forerunners is not unlike that of the young male rebels of the late 1950s *vis-à-vis* their socialist predecessors. The suffragettes and the socialists fought for the rights of women and for the underprivileged, and the birth of the Welfare State was seen as at least a partial fulfilment of their hopes.

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1 V. Woolf, 'Women Novelists', *Contemporary Writers*, 1965.

The shock was therefore considerable when the members of the younger generation, the beneficiaries of their struggles, announced, very vocally, that they did not like the Welfare State. The fiction which arose from this situation, and the reaction of the older generation to it, has been discussed in Section A of this chapter. The young woman writer has shown much the same disillusionment and dissatisfaction with contemporary Britain. The suffragettes changed the status of women and made a new freedom, a new social mobility, possible for them. But the inheritors of this freedom have had mixed reactions to it, and out of these reactions two types of heroine have emerged in contemporary fiction.

The first type appears in the early works of Edna O'Brien. Her emancipated young women bitterly come to realise that emancipation does not mean equality. There is not equality with men, neither socially nor sexually. Her heroines resent men, but they have a sexual need of them which puts them in an inferior position to the creatures they despise. When they attempt to enjoy the freedom men enjoy, their bodies betray and punish them.

The second type of heroine is best known from the novels of Margaret Drabble, although Penelope Mortimer was exploring similar themes some years before. The Drabble heroine is highly intelligent and, thanks to the efforts of the suffragettes, well educated. But she is also a female - and with the arrival of children, her life is changed. The frustrations and indignities of a B.A(Cantab.) with First Class Honours, relegated to domesticity, forms the central theme of these novels.

All of these writers are feminists, and they are aggressively resentful of men. The men in the lives of their heroines

turn out to be feeble creatures (often not even worth marrying), inferior to them in every way, but with the advantage that they live in a man's world. In this world women are used to satisfy their sexual drives, and when this results in pregnancy or disease for the women, it is she who bears the consequences.

The unique position of women in contemporary society has given a new direction to the feminist novel. The problem - the social and biological inequality of men and women - is not new, but the extreme frankness with which these problems are discussed and the particular form the problems take, warrant the consideration of these novels as a contemporary phenomenon. The suffragettes upset the traditional social status of women, but no new compromises have been found. The freedom of the contemporary woman seems empty, for it has not been accompanied by a radical change in society which would allow her to enjoy this freedom. Like the young male rebels, the young heroines are dissatisfied with the post-war world the suffragettes and socialists helped to create. And, like the young male rebels, the new women have shocked and upset the older generation who sees them as ungrateful and undeserving.

EDNA O'BRIEN. In 1960, Edna O'Brien published the first volume of a trilogy about two wild young Irish girls and their initiation into womanhood. In The Country Girls they experience their first betrayal by men, but the book is high-spirited, lively, amusing and bawdy. The resilience of Kate, the narrator, is shown in the last lines of the book after she has received a telegram breaking off her affair. "I came out to the kitchen and took two aspirins

with my tea. It was almost certain that I wouldn't sleep that night." Almost certain; a broken heart is still something to be romantically enjoyed. In The Lonely Girl (1962) [1], the girls are still in Dublin where they had moved at the end of the previous book. Kate, who works in a grocery shop, becomes the mistress of an older, rich and cultured man. He is attracted her innocence, freshness and ignorance, but when she becomes possessive, he discards her. In Girls in Their Married Bliss (1964), set in London, the high spirits ebb and the two girls are faced with the sheer awfulness of being women. "The militant note is struck. . . . Man, the randy menace, looms with his treacheries." [2]

August is a Wicked Month (1965) is Edna O'Brien's most bitter novel, and a logical development of the themes of her trilogy. It is ". . . about a woman whose marriage was broken, whose child was parted from her, and who went deliberately on this jaunt to the South of France to live as a man would - a homosexual. And the price she had to pay for it was ferocious." [3] Ellen's loneliness, her sexual frustration and her presumption in trying to abrogate to herself the freedom of the male, is punished by the death of her son, the loss of her self-respect and by the contamination of her body with venereal disease: "The perfect circuit of revenge", she remarks.

Edna O'Briend prefaced her collection of short stories, The Love Object (1968), with this quotation from Aristotle: "As matter desires form, so woman desires man". This is the key to the tragedy of her heroines.

[4] Woman continues to torment herself with longing for the man whom she knows to be unworthy of her love; pride and

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1 Published later as Girl with Green Eyes, 1964.
2 M. Ratcliffe, The Novel Today, 1968.
3 Edna O'Brien in an interview in Books and Bookmen, Sept.1968.
4 TLS 4.7.1968.

> desire are never to be reconciled in her pursuit of satisfaction: fulfilment never fails to bring a bitter and lonely reaction in which the desired becomes suddenly contemptible and distant.

There have been a number of women novelists who have written books which owe something to Edna O'Brien's example, but few of them have added anything new to what is rapidly becoming a fashionable stereotype. The success of her novels suggests that she struck a chord of response in women, who recognised the dilemmas of her heroines as genuine expressions of the situation of contemporary women. "Women . . . rallied, recognized a cry against the horrors of the emancipation previously so desired." [1]

The speed with which her themes and even her narrative methods were adopted is indicated by the appearance of three novels, reviewed in the Times Literary Supplement in May and September of 1967. Laura Del-Rivio's Daffodil on the Pavement [2], Barbara Comyn's A Touch of Mistletoe [3] and Madeleine Riley's A Spot Bigger than God [4] are all stories of two girls who come to London from the provinces in search of adventure, principally sexual adventure. A reviewer described the by now familiar pattern as it appeared in Laura Del-Rivio's novel:

> . . . up the junction and down the caff, the jeans and jive, abortions and aberrations, pop and pot, casual couplings followed either by accidie or by muzzy, half-baked philosophizing. And by the time the ragged little string of incidents is drawing to a close two more little illegitimates have arrived . . . .

Nell Dunn used her sociological studies of working-class women as a basis for her two novels, Up the Junction and Poor Cow (1967). Their sources are still apparent, but they are none the worse for that, for they gain in realism what

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1 M. Ratcliffe, The Novel Today, 1968.
2 TLS 4.5.1967.
3 TLS 4.5.1967.
4 TLS 21.9.1967.

they lose in imagination. The extroverted, sensual and loving nature of the heroine, one of society's victims, is revealed in a phrase like this from her letter to her gaoled lover:

"I'm so raped up in Your love I never wont to be unraped."

She is abandoned by the men in her life and, a victim of biology as much as of society, she becomes a barmaid, a model and finally a tart.

LYNNE REID BANKS The L-Shaped Room, Lynne Reid Banks's first novel, published in 1960, became the model for the "bed-sitter" novel. The heroine reacts against her middle-class parents and goes to live in London, where she has a baby. The L-shaped room of the title is her bed-sitter, and in this book and the crop of similar novels which followed it, the bed-sitter has acquired an almost symbolic significance. The girl who moves into one is signalling her independence from her family and her school-girl past, but it is also the beginning of a period of restlessness, insecurity and loneliness. Loneliness makes her promiscuous - and she usually becomes pregnant. The sordidness of the bed-sitter existence is contrasted with the eagerness, innocence and zest for life of the young girls who come to London, but the bed-sitter, and the men who prey on the bed-sitter girls, crush their high spirits in the end. [1]

MARGARET DRABBLE In an article, [2] Margaret Drabble expressed her admiration for "the profundity of George Eliot's attitude towards human experience", while deploring Jane Austen's social attitudes and her "lack of realism" in leaving her heroines at the altar, "when clearly they were all extremely difficult women and were not in for a happy life." As a critical observation it is not very valuable, but it

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1 Jane Gaskell's Attic Summer (1963) and All Neat in Black Stockings (1966), and Jill Neville's Fall-Girl (1966) are typical bed-sitter novels.

2 The List., 4.4.1968.

indicates Margaret Drabble's sphere of interest as a writer. Her women are "difficult" because they are intellectuals, and her books "show how the social machine takes the intelligent woman when she gets married and churns her up and tears her apart and scatters the bits about. At the same time she . shows up . . . that the intelligent woman demands her existence as an individual with a fierceness hardly understandable by people of my generation." 1

Margaret Drabble talks very persuasively of her concern for such women and for their less gifted sisters in an article in The Listener.

2

> I do still tend to see the Rights of Women interms of the right to work. . . . The main reason for the tedious discontent of educated women today is surely the difficulty of combining work with the bearing and rearing of children. . . . If one marries (as most women do) and if one has children (as most women do), then one can claim one's right to work . . . only at the cost of effort, fatigue, expense, and even social criticism.

It is from statements like these, rather than from her skill at exploring these themes in her novels, that she has acquired a reputation as the leader of a new Women's Rights movement.

In her first novel, A Summer Bird-Cage (1962), she wrote about the relationship between two sisters, the one beautiful and enigmatic, the other attractive and clever. It is good women's magazine material (the beautiful one marries a neurotic, and has an affair with an actor) lifted out of the banal by her lively picture of bed-sitter life. The clever one cannot find a career she wants to follow, and she does not want the kind of marriage - and babies - her friends have. Both sisters display a determinedly "modern" attitude to sex - it's as natural as eating - but their

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1 Angus Wilson, 'Sexual Revolution', The List., 10.10.1968.
2 The List., 4.4.1968.

determination to be frank does not hide a certain breathless excitement at their daring.

The Garrick Year (1964) is possibly her best novel, and the only one to explore the problems of the intelligent married woman with real insight and understanding. Her heroine, Emma, is married to an actor who is playing a season at a provincial repertory theatre. She has two young children but is thoroughly bored, missing her London friends and angry at having had to refuse a job in order to accompany her husband. She feels herself an outsider amongst the theatre people who "were leading a life of absorbing, passionate tension". Her husband is having an affair with a glamorous actress, and Emma, an unglamorous housewife, cannot compete. When she meets the producer, she sees in his face, "the kind of attention to which I am incapable of saying no, the kind of domineering, warlike intention that stiffens me throughout." Although she despises the weakness of her body, she loses the fight and they become lovers. There is a crisis, and she and her husband are reconciled. The plot is predictable, and important only because the situation it contrives is, no matter how often popular women novelists have debased it, the classical contemporary situation. Margaret Drabble brings to it an insight and freshness of approach which make it seem wholly new and original. Her heroine speaks with an attractive asperity:

> I often think that motherhood, in its physical aspects, is like one of those trying disorders such as hay fever or asthma, which receive verbal sympathy but no real consideration, in view of the lack of fatality.

In none of Margaret Drabble's later novels does she so clearly and unemotionally state her themes. The Millstone (1965) is an attack on the Welfare State maternity services, although

its ostensible subject is the problem of the (intelligent) unmarried mother. Virginity is traditionally the bane of young women, but the worst fate of all these days, it seems, is to be both a virgin and an intellectual.

In Jerusalem the Golden (1967), a provincial girl on a State scholarship comes to London and discovers Life, Self, Art, Love and Reality, largely through her contact with a family of brilliant, eccentric, beautiful Highgate liberals. None of it, not the unbelievably innocent heroine, not the fearsome mother from whom she is escaping, not her sophisticated friends, seems real. Both this and The Waterfall (1969) are at the level of women's magazine fiction, and there are no signs that Margaret Drabble will return to the standard of excellence of The Garrick Year. Astringency has given way to sentimentality, as this passage from The Waterfall shows:

> "All right," said James, "all right - " standing there with one hand on the open door, looking for something with the other in his jacket pocket, with such elegance of gesture that her heart stood still, with the vanity of her love.

Critical self-analysis has given way to chatty confidences and the large themes have become narrowed to a stereotypes. When compared to the perceptive studies of similar themes in Simone de Beauvoir's writings, Margaret Drabble seems to be a little trite. [1]

PENELOPE MORTIMER Like Margaret Drabble, Penleope Mortimer sees the horrors of marriage more clearly than she sees its joys. Her heroines are not ostentatiously intellectual, as Margaret Drabble's are; they are ordinarily intelligent, middle-class housewives who have become slaves to their children, husbands and homes. In The Pumpkin Eater (1962),

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1 Two other novels on the "intelligent female" theme are Sylvia Clayton's Top C (1968) and Peter Gaddess's Three Paces Through the Room (1968).

and her earlier The Bright Prison (1956), Penelope Mortimer shows the sheer awfulness of being a present-day mother with a Victorian household and no help. Her heroines lose their sense of identity, defining themselves in relation to their children and husbands. The note of underlying hysteria and the considerable humour, give these novels a tension which lifts them above the level of "women's novels".

My Friend Says It's Bullet-Proof (1967) is the story of a woman learning to adjust to the loss of a breast after an operation. The novel modulates with skill from the pages of her journal to a third-person narrative. The journal records her obsessive, neurotic - even masochistic - preoccupation with her deformity. Appalled at the thought of pity, or quickly-concealed disgust which a man would feel at her body, she has ended her affair with a man in London. On a trip to the United States she learns to adjust and to accept her deformity, even to be half-proud of it.

The heroines of all these novels are emancipated women. They can, if they choose, follow any profession. They can live independently of their families. They have a freedom no other generation of women has had. But their freedom seems only to have brought unhappiness, for they have not been emancipated from their bodies, nor from their instincts to mate and have children. Many of them find that social emancipation is also a myth: women are still in a state of subjugation to men.

Chapter 6:

The Popular and the Serious

The subject of this chapter is the relationship between popular and serious fiction. Popular fiction is not of interest solely to sociologists and a survey of contemporary literature would be incomplete if popular fiction were to be ignored on the grounds that it is, by its very nature, unworthy of serious critical attention. The division of fiction into "serious" and "popular" is a recent critical practice and one which is not altogether defensible. Popular and serious fiction echo and complement each other and the distinction between them is frequently less clear than the terms would suggest. While such a division has some value, this value has been reduced since the Second World War and can no longer be used as a critical basis for discussion of contemporary literature. In the next chapter the various types of popular fiction are discussed and an attempt is made to show that a number of popular novelists are producing work which has some claim to be considered as literature, while at the same time a number of serious novelists have adopted and adapted the stock-in-trade of the popular writer.

The terms "popular fiction" and "serious fiction", although in common use, are unsatisfactory. They imply that fiction which is popular, which is read by a large public, is necessarily frivolous and ephemeral: conversely, they imply that a writer of serious fiction can only appeal to a select, and hence relatively small, readership.

The terms came into common critical use in place of the value judgements "good" and "bad" in about 1930 as a result of the stratification of readers into "highbrow" and "lowbrow". Q.D. Leavis[1] suggests that the stratification occurred when novelists, influenced by the experiments of Balzac, Hugo, Turgeniev, Flaubert, Zola and Maupassant "determined to write novels which should be works of art . . . . The conscious cultivation of the novel as an art meant an initiated audience." The uninitiated - the majority -formed the "lowbrows" who were offered a body of fiction catering for their tastes and tailored to their needs, while at the same time they were cut off from the best works of fiction of the period. This is not to say that the masses have always preferred a Dickens to a George Reynolds - they haven't - but at least both writers were available to them, available in the sense that they were equally "readable" and comprehensible, whereas Joyce presented difficulties to a reader whose normal diet was Ethel M. Dell.

The distinction between Dickens and Reynolds was the distinction between major and minor art, not between major and non art. Andre Malraux[2] suggests that this is the difference between popular writers before the twentieth century and popular writers today - the latter are producing "non-art" for "they act in an opposite direction from the arts". M. Kennedy[3] points out that: "The gulf between the non-artist and the minor artist of any period seems to be much greater than that between minor and major artists . . . [for the minor artists] were doing

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1 Q.D. Leavis, Fiction and the Reading Public, 1932.
2 'Art, Popular Art and the Illusion of the Folk', The Partisan Review Anthology, ed.W. Phillips and P. Rahv, 1962.
3 M. Kennedy, The Outlaws on Parnassus, 1958.

the same sort of thing and doing it less well." Fiction between the wars, then, could be divided into art (serious) and non-art (popular). "Popular" became a derogatory epithet, which it had not been before, for many of the best earlier writers had been popular with both the high- and lowbrows.[1]

The term "serious" was used by Q.D. Leavis[2] to distinguish those novelists who "determined to write novels which should be works of art", but it has since been extended to apply to novelists whose intentions in the novel are "serious". Hence C.P. Snow is regarded as a "serious" novelist because he sees the novel as a vehicle for moral instruction rather than as a vehicle for entertainment. "Serious" has come to mean "morally serious" as well as "artistically serious". The intentions of a writer are not always easy to assess, but where they are found to be serious, he is often called a serious novelist, however bad a novelist he might be. The emphasis on serious intentions has also led to questioning the integrity of the novelist whose works are entertaining, for seriousness is readily equated with solemnity. The puritanical suspicion that entertainment and instruction are not compatible is not a new one, but it has assumed new importance with the employment of "serious" and "popular" as critical terms.

The term "popular" has also undergone changes in meaning since the 1930's. Q.D. Leavis's thesis [2] was that there was a decline in readers' tastes in the first part of the twentieth century - Joyce, Woolf and Lawrence do not appear

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1 This division in the novel has also been remarked on by A. Wilson in 'The Dilemma of the Contemporary Novelist', Approaches to the Novel, ed. J. Colmer 1966 and L. Stevenson, The English Novel, 1960.
2 Q.D. Leavis, Fiction and the Reading Public, 1932.

on best-seller lists, while Jeffrey Farnol, Ethel M. Dell and Edgar Rice Burroughs do. She therefore equated popularity with worthlessness, an equation which has become less tenable in the later years of the century. The relationship between worth and popularity will be discussed later, and it is sufficient to state here that the term "popular" is now a term applied to a certain kind of fiction, not to any book which has large sales. Its change in application is in itself an indication that Q.D. Leavis's equation is no longer acceptable and that the gulf between highbrow and lowbrow literature is less marked than it was in the 'thirties. "Popular" is not a label attached to any novel which has found popular favour, it is now a generic name for thrillers, westerns, science-fiction, historical romances, romances, ghost and horror stories.

But not all novels which come into those categories can be classified as "popular fiction" and a number of writers have attempted to explain the difference between such novels as, say, Tolstoy's Anna Karenina and Margaret Mitchell's Gone with the Wind, both of which are historical romances. If we leave aside the various uses to which the words "serious" and "popular" have been put we are left with the fact that there are several kinds of fiction developed in this century which, as L. Stevenson[1] puts it: "gratify the Philistine hankering for entertainment." What are the characteristics of such novels, and how do they differ from the other, serious ones?

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1 L. Stevenson, The English Novel, 1960.

Andre Malraux[1] offers this distinction:

> ... the "arts" desired by the masses who have lost their myth are arts in submission. These arts aim to act on those to whom they are addressed, for the exclusive benefit of those who further these arts . . . . Quality, when they care to have it, is not their raison d'être, but one of their means . . . . The novels . . . for the masses require a single talent, that for narration which assures the effect of the novelist upon his reader . . . . The "appeasing arts" are, then, in no sense inferior arts; they act in an opposite direction from the arts; they are, so to speak, anti-arts . . . .

M. Kennedy[2] holds a similar view and adds that artists, however bad, never think of their imaginary readers as "in any way inferior to themselves ". The popular or purely commercial writer angles his writing to a certain level of intelligence. He descends - or condescends - to this level. J.W. Saunders[3] also sees the relationship between reader and writer as the key to the differences between serious and popular fiction: ". . . generally these novels present nothing novel: their whole effort is designed to relax the reader by entertainment which appeals to preconceptions, prejudices and tastes definable in advance." Simenon[4] calls "commercial"

> ... every work . . . which is done for such-and-such a public . . . . Of course in commercial writing there are different grades . . . . But very seldom can they be works of art, because a work of art can't be done for the purpose of pleasing a certain group of readers . . . . In writing for any commercial purpose you have always to make concessions . . . . You can't write anything commercial without accepting some code . . .. Not always a happy ending, but something comes to arrange everything from the point of view of a morality, or philosophy.

Anthony Burgess[5] suggests other ways in which popular and serious fiction can be distinguished from each other:

> The serious novels probe into the world as it really is; the entertainments falsify the world, manipulate it . . . . But the factor in fiction-for-entertainment which

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1 The Partisan Review Anthology, ed. W. Phillips and P. Rahv, 1962.
2 The Outlaws on Parnassus, 1958.
3 The Profession of English Letters, 1964.
4 Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews, 1958.
5 The Novel Now, 1967.

> sets it outside the limits of literary enquiry is the concentration on content, not form; matter, not manner. There is rarely any attempt to use language imaginatively (cliches go down better with a mass-audience), and the true texture of life is always subordinated to the contrivance of plot. The popular novel is not an examination of the nature of reality; it is an escape-shaft out of reality, a device for engendering easy thrills or pleasant dreams.

D. Macdonald[1] can see no merit at all in popular fiction, which is "neither an emotional catharsis nor an aesthetic experience, for these demand effort. The production line grinds out a uniform product whose humble aim is not even entertainment, but merely distraction." The man in search of mere distraction is in fact more likely to turn to the cinema, television, radio or comic books rather than the novel, for the novel requires a minimum of co-operation between creator and audience which the other media do not.

The picture of the popular novel which emerges from these attempts to distinguish it from the serious, is an unflattering one. The major accusation levelled against the popular novelist is that he debases the relationship between artist and audience, making concessions to his readers which bring his artistic integrity into doubt. He is also accused of subordinating everything to the demands of his plot. Graham Greene[2] adds another charge - the popular novelist is merely an imitator, lacking in originality and talent. Q.D. Leavis[3] believes that popular novelists have damaged serious novelists by seducing their potential readers away and even of rendering these readers incapable of appreciating good books. She also suggests that serious writers themselves have been tainted by the air of commercialism surrounding the

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1 Against the American Grain, 1952.
2 Collected Essays, 1969.
3 Fiction and the Reading Public, 1932.

novel. None of these charges can be accepted without a closer examination.

The popular novelist makes concessions to readers' tastes: "he gives them what they want". But he can only give them what they want if he is attuned to the times, for to be a success he must gauge his readers' tastes as carefully as does an advertising man. Or as Shakespeare, Scott, Dickens and other popular writers have done. Their publics' demands may have had a detrimental effect on their writing - this cannot be discussed here - but they were able to satisfy both the high- and lowbrows, giving the lowbrows more than they asked for and yet not alienating them.[1] The level of taste of lowbrows can be raised, but it cannot be done if the artists neglect them. Giving their readers what they want does not necessarily destroy the integrity of an artist.

The popular novelist channels and feeds the fantasies and dreams of his readers, and also reflects their prejudices, beliefs and tastes. There is an element of escapism in all fiction, and if the popular novel does, as A. Burgess[2] suggests , provide "an escape-shaft out of reality", is this then so harmful? The factory girl who reads only women's romances may have some odd ideas about marriage but she adjusts to the facts pretty rapidly. Catherine Morland in Jane Austen's Northanger Abbey is soon disillusioned by "reality", and no irreparable harm was done. Fairy tales for children are not disapproved of, but fairy tales for adults are only admired if they call themselves myths or allegories.

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1 Walter Bagehot said of Dickens: "Such was the kind of writing which he wrote most easily. He found likewise that such was the kind of writing that was read most easily; and of course he wrote that kind." (Quoted by A. Burgess in Urgent Copy, 1968.)

2 A. Burgess, The Novel Now, 1967.

The charge of reflecting the prejudices, beliefs and tastes of his readers must be admitted to by the popular novelist, but at the same time the charge could be made against many serious novelists who are influenced by the climate of public opinion. The popular novel as a reflection of the mass of society has its own value to commentators and observers. Leslie Fiedler[1] justifies his studies of popular literature with the remark : "If we make a brief excursion from the lofty reaches of High Art to the humbler levels of Pop Culture - where radical transformations are reflected in simplified form . . . ." Lady Wortley Montagu[2] wrote:

> Perhaps you will say I should not take my ideas of the manners of the times from such trifling authors; but it is more truly to be found among them, than from any historian: as they write merely to get money, they always fall into the notions that are most acceptable to the present taste.

The popular novel as a reflection of society is not only of interest to sociologists, anthropologists, historians and psychologists: it is of interest to anyone who wishes to understand the society in which he lives.

The popular novel has been accused of pandering to "reader's tastes", but what are these tastes to which they pander? The first and most important is the demand for a "good story", which in the popular novel usually means one with action, suspense and a happy ending. The narrative function of the novel has been endlessly debated with E.M. Forster's[3] conclusion that "the novel, yes, oh dear, yes, does tell a story" being generally accepted. The popular novelist does exaggerate the importance of plot (while the serious novelist tends to underestimate it) but a good plot need

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1 'The New Mutants', <u>Innovations</u>, ed. B. Bergonzi, 1968.
2 Quoted from her <u>Letters</u> by Q.D. Leavis, <u>Fiction and the Reading Public</u>, 1932.
3 <u>Aspects of the Novel</u>, 1927.

not be the whole of the novel. It may be the only factor which keeps the reader turning the pages, but it does not prevent the writer from offering more than that. A strong element of "what happens next?" need not be harmful to a novel. There is nothing intrinsically bad in catering to the reader's demands for a "good story".

The opponents of the popular novel charge it with pandering to the tastes of readers for sex, sadism, violence, thrills, cheap romance and so on. It would be hard to prove that the serious novel is not often guilty of the same crime, for although its manner of presentation may be different, the content is frequently the same. This of course is the great censorship debate - which has been raging with some force in the 1960's. Sex, sadism and so forth are acceptable if the novel in which they appear has some claim to be considered as literature. Curiously, because the serious novelist has greater imaginative and linguistic powers, his evocation of violent or pornographic scenes is usually more vivid - and memorable? - than the popular novelist can manage. A reader in search of titillation would do better to search the serious novel shelves than those of the frequently stereotyped and unimaginative popular novel.

More extreme opponents of the popular novel take this charge of corruption a step further and blame the increasing crime rate on the popular novelist. Frederic Wertham[1] puts forward this thesis, and Pamela Hansford Johnson[2] holds similar views, although television is tending to replace the popular novel as a whipping-boy. The charge of influencing

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1 F. Wertham, Seduction of the Innocent,
2 Pamela Hansford Johnson, On Iniquity, 1967. See also Emlyn Williams, Beyond Belief, 1967.

its readers to commit acts of violence is a difficult one to prove and the furthest that most criminologists are prepared to go is to suggest that if a child or adult is already orientated towards delinquency by other factors, violence on the screen or in books might have a considerable effect on him. In 1901 G.K. Chesterton[1] made this contribution to the debate. He had "grown impatient with the thesis that a boy who could not read stole an apple because he liked the taste of the apple, but that a boy who could read stole an apple because his mind was aflame with a story about Dick Turpin."

Against the commonly held view of the corrupting effect of popular fiction on its readers, it can be pointed out that there is a whole body of popular fiction dedicated to proving that crime does not pay (the detective story), another which keeps chivalry alive (the western), and an even larger body which proves that it is the nice girl who gets the man (the romance). The criminal-as-hero and the nymphomaniac-as-heroine are to be found in the pages of serious novels, and rarely in the writings of those guardians of bourgeois morality, the popular novelist.

The popular novelist, who produces stereotypes rather than archetypes, is often accused of imitating and debasing the work of serious novelists. Graham Greene[2] drew attention to the way techniques developed by an original writer to cover his personal difficulties will later be taken over by imitators. This does of course happen, but it can paradoxically be of benefit to the serious novelist, for the imitative popular novelist can introduce and

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1 The Defendant, summarised by R.S. Turner, Boys will be Boys, 1948.
2 'The Dark Backward', Collected Essays, 1969.

familiarise readers with techniques and styles which would puzzle and irritate him in a serious novel. For example Hemingway's style was copied by popular novelists who found in it the ideal style for the thriller - and their readers could then read Hemingway without difficulty. Surrealism permeates popular culture and people brought up on surrealist comics such as Herriman's Krazy Kat can begin to understand a Max Ernst. Marx Brothers films and Goon Show radio programmes have demonstrated that surrealism, even if it is not labelled as such, can be enjoyed by the masses. Stream of consciousness is not uncommon in the popular novel, and experiments with time sequences are almost routine.

Popular imitation of a serious novelist can also force the latter into being more adventurous. Sir Walter Scott wrote in his review of Jane Austen's Emma[1]:

> The first writer of a new class is, as it were, placed on a pinnacle of excellence, to which, at the earliest glance of a surprised admirer, his ascent seems little less than miraculous. Time and imitation speedily diminish the wonder . . . . The stupidity, the mediocrity, the merit of his imitators, are alike fatal to the first inventor, by shewing how possible it is to exaggerate his faults and to come within a certain point of his beauties. Materials also . . . become stale and familiar . . . . And thus in the novel . . . the more rich and easily worked mines being exhausted, the adventurous author must, if he is desirous of success, have recourse to those which were disdained by his predecessors as unproductive, or avoided as only capable of being turned to profit by great skill and labour.

Such reasoning may in part explain why, for example, there was renewed interest in the picaresque novel in the 1950's. The serious novelist is forced to investigate new possibilities - or revive old ones - to keep ahead of his imitators.

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1 Quoted by M. Allott, Novelists on the Novel, 1959 from the Quarterly Review, Vol.XIV.

The popular novelist is not always an imitator. Sometimes what looks like imitation is in fact coincidence. Fashions, discoveries, styles or developments which appear almost simultaneously in the works of serious and popular writers may arise because they are both products of the same society. Hegel[1] said that all cultural and social phenomena, even if they spring from different sources and different aims, are inspired by a common psychology, ethos or outlook. An example of this is the appearance of alienation as a theme in contemporary fiction at all levels. J. Gindin[2] says of relativism that it "has become so deeply engrained in twentieth century culture that it permeates even the popular novel." It is often coincidence rather than direct imitation which explains the phenomenon of popular and serious writers tackling the same themes.

The popular novelist is less likely to be an innovator or originator than the serious novelist, but as a group they have originated a great deal. Although most of the popular kinds of fiction have had respectable literary ancestors, it is only in the hands of the twentieth-century popular novelist that these kinds have been explored and developed. What the serious novelist neglected became the concern of the popular novelist, and he is responsible for having developed at least ten recognisable kinds of novel and for bringing some of them to a very high standard.

The popular novelist has not only demonstrated some of the possibilities in such forms as the thriller and spy novel, he has also on occasion made discoveries which serious novelists have later adopted. The popular science fiction

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1 Quoted by Diana Spearman, The Novel and Society, 1964.
2 Postwar British Fiction, 1963.

novel is a case in point. L. Fiedler[1] points out that the "futurist revolution" was first noticeable on the periphery of literature, but that it is now moving to the centre as writers like William Golding, Anthony Burgess, William Burroughs, John Barth and others take it up. Graham Greene might not have written metaphysical thrillers if some of the possibilities of the form had not been suggested to him by his youthful reading of writers like Rider Haggard, John Buchan and Anthony Hope. Anthony Hope in The Dolly Dialogues was using a technique which Ivy Compton-Burnett later refined. The hack-writers who produced "Bloods" for the consumption of the Victorian young were writing in a style not dissimilar to Hemingway's. J.B. Priestley[2] puts forward a sound case for the recognition of Dashiel Hammett and Raymond Chandler as genuine literary originators. K. Allsop[3] points out that the James Dean type hero was common in popular fiction before he appeared in serious fiction.

The relationship between serious and popular writers is neatly summarised by A. Comfort[4]: "There is a continual exchange between the levels of achievement. The scribbler imitates the technique of the artist, and the artist is never entirely unaware of the fiddling underneath." In the next chapter it is hoped to show that serious writers are more aware than ever of "the fiddling underneath".

Perhaps one of the most serious, and oft-repeated, charges against the popular novelist is one made by Q.D. Leavis[5] in 1932: the popular novelist, by seducing readers away

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1 'The New Mutants', Innovations, ed. B. Bergonzi, 1968.
2 The Moments and other pieces, 1966.
3 The Angry Decade, 1958.
4 The Novel and our Time, 1948.
5 Fiction and the Reading Public, 1932.

from good books, damages the serious novelist. The damage is to his pride, his pocket and his art. Q.D. Leavis adduces evidence to prove that the best novelists were, until recently, amongst the most popular, but that the position was reversed in about 1828 when Lytton, "the first of the modern best sellers" achieved his first success. Most of the evidence for painting such a rosy picture of the past - and a grim one of the present - is drawn from a list of best sellers which she prints. The list does not indicate her sources, gives no actual readership figures, and - the most damaging fact - is selective. The best sellers she lists are "representative of the popular fiction of its time", which means that where a best seller such as E.M. Forster's A Passage to India does not fit her thesis, it is not included.

With no breakdown - or even indication - of readership figures there is no way of knowing whether the earlier books she cites were in fact the most popular at all levels of readership. The sales figures of a book are not an accurate guide to the number of readers per copy (or even whether the book is read at all[1]), and this is particularly true when books are expensive, as they were before the twentieth century. In the twentieth century the publication of cheap books, particularly paper-backs, meant that there were fewer readers per copy, for they were within the range of the pockets of most of them. The sales of a book became a better indication of its readership in this century, in

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1 The TLS of 13.3.69 quotes from an inquiry made by an American magazine, The Smith, into how much people read of the books they buy. A random sample of 1,000 book buyers were asked whether they had bought any of five books and, if so, how far they got with them. The results: Giles Goat-Boy by John Barth - bought by 81, read by 7, partially read by 21, not read at all by 53. The Confessions of Nat Turner by William Styron showed similar results. Herzog by Saul Bellow was bought by 59, read by 11. Couples by John Updike was bought by 66, read by 4, and not attempted at all by 59. Valley of the Dolls by Jacqueline Susann was read by all its 29 buyers.

the century that Q.D. Leavis, basing her deductions on book sales alone, detected a lowering of popular taste. Without comparable readership figures we do not know whether she is right.

Q.D. Leavis does not define what she means by "best seller", but she appears to be judging according to the number of sales of a book in its year of publication, rather than considering its overall sales since publication. Such an interpretation of "best seller" can be misleading. Some account should also be taken of other books read in that year. The Modern and popular novels were not to everyone's tastes in the 'twenties, and there must have been a large body of readers who read neither, turning instead to books of an earlier period, to the classics. It is credible that the most widely read book of 1928,was, say, Dickens's Oliver Twist and not Thornton Wilder's Bridge of San Luis Rey, as Mrs Leavis states.

Unless reprint figures are taken into account, the real tastes of readers cannot be gauged with accuracy. Joyce's Ulysses is an example of a book which had a small circulation when it was published in 1922. The circulation was only partly attributable to its censorship problems, for censorship usually gives a boost to sales. But it has since become a best seller, and Penguin Books were prepared to pay £75,000 in 1969 for its paper-back publishing rights. The eventual popularity of Ulysses could indicate either that the process of acceptance of highbrow literature is slow, or that the tastes of the reading public have improved in recent years. It does not indicate that only the worst twentieth century books become best sellers.

Part of Mrs Leavis's argument is that the standard of literary works was higher when the reading public was homogenous before the late eighteenth century than it was after the growth of circulating libraries and the commercialisation of fiction had fragmented it. From this she "proves" that the popular novel has been the cause of the deterioration in serious fiction over the last hundred and fifty years or so. She assumes that there was once a state of affairs in which there was widespread literacy and yet which did not produce trashy fiction, but this idyllic picture is based on the kind of wishful thinking which is astonishing in a writer who claims to be scientific. She offers no facts to support her theory, which is in direct contradiction to the conclusions reached by Robert Mayo[1] who wrote:

> There is nothing in the over-all picture from which the eighteenth-century apologist can take heart. With a few conspicuous exceptions, the original miscellany fiction published between 1740 and 1815 was trashy, affected, and egregiously sentimental. Judged as literary art, it was devoid of imagination and wretchedly written.
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> ....
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> We have sometimes been invited by the critics of mass culture to view the eighteenth century with special approval, as an age with a homogenous reading public, when popular and cultivated tastes were happily united, and when the common reader was blissfully content to take his standards from above, free from the pernicious effects of commercialism that mar the popular literature of our own age . . . . But /this picture/ is very seriously qualified by the 'original' fiction of the magazines . . . ./which reveal/ anything but a homogenous literary culture, dominated by the best poets, essayists, novelists and critics. Rather it exhibits in abundance those very qualities of daydream, poverty of feeling, and separation from life as known to its readers that are usually laid at the door of the modern novelist.

If Q.D. Leavis's judgements that the serious novel has itself deteriorated since the eighteenth century is acceptable - a judgement that can be disputed - it seems as if it is

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1 R. Mayo, The Novel in the Magazines 1740-1815, 1962.

not the popular novel which is to blame, but rather the spread of mass literacy. The 'homogenous' culture, such as it was, disappeared with literacy, not with the appearance of circulating libraries and the commercialisation of fiction.

The boom in paper-backs has considerably changed the picture of the book market since 1932. Mrs Leavis prophecied then that publishers would before very long cease to publish serious novels, on the grounds that they were unprofitable. Having injured the pride, the art and quality of the serious novelist, the popular novelist would then injure his pocket. J.W. Saunders[1] comes to an opposite conclusion:

> ... by and large the literary profession has gained in strength from the mass market . . . . the technical advances which were precipitated by the immediate and ephemeral needs of a mass public also helped publishers achieve mass sales for books of lasting quality.

Saunders also points out that the large rewards which come from reprints in paper-backs, film rights and reprints abroad are more often enjoyed by serious novelists than by popular novelists. Evelyn Waugh[2] said this of Hollywood: "Each book purchased for motion pictures has some individual quality, good or bad, that has made it remarkable. It is the work of a great array of highly paid and incompatible writers to distinguish this quality, separate it and obliterate it."
Not all serious novelists are offered lucrative contracts, and it is this group - the serious novelists who have little or no popular appeal - which is most in danger of being neglected or turned down by publishers. If such a novelist can attain the status of "a prestige author",

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1 The Profession of English Letters, 1964.
2 Quoted by D. Macdonald in Against the American Grain, 1952 .

the losses sustained in publishing his work will be willingly offset by the publisher from his profits on best sellers. It is not an ideal situation, depending as it does on the image of his firm that the publisher is trying to project. Fortunately book publishers are often men who have gone into the business because of their interest in books, and not for purely mercenary reasons - and it is on these men that the prestige writer will have to depend. There is of course always the gambler's hope of backing an outsider . . .

In Part III of her book, Q.D. Leavis offers another reason for her belief that serious novelists will soon be unable to find publishers. She writes: "It has already become practically impossible to get a book reviewed unless it is advertised, and highbrow novels, which return little or no profit, cannot stand the enormous cost of advertising." Without evidence to support her assertion that highbrow novels are not profitable, and without evidence to support her assertion about reviewing, it is difficult to know whether she is making an ill-informed guess, or a factual observation.

Books are usually advertised in literary periodicals or the review pages of newspapers, and the advertisements are placed either by the publisher or by a book-seller. I analysed the reviews and advertisements in one edition of a literary periodical (The Times Literary Supplement)[1] and one edition of a more avowedly commercial newspaper (The Observer)[2] to see if the position in 1969 was the same as Mrs Leavis believed it to be in 1932.

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1 TLS of 8.5.1969.
2 Observer of 26.4.1969

In The Times Literary Supplement, twenty five publishers advertised one hundred and one books. There were eighty two reviews and short notices. Of the twenty five publishers who advertised, only eight of them had any of their publications reviewed, and of these only three had their books both reviewed and advertised. On the other hand, publications from thirty five publishing houses who did not advertise in this edition, were reviewed.

In The Observer, five publishers advertised seventeen books. There were twenty three reviews and short notices. Of the five publishers, only one had any of its publications reviewed, and this was not one which had been advertised by its publisher. On the other hand, publications from twenty publishing houses who did not advertise in this edition, were reviewed.

From such a very small sample one cannot of course draw any firm conclusions but the figures do suggest that reputable papers will review a book even if the publisher does not advertise in that paper. The Times Literary Supplement in particular reviews books from small or foreign publishers who never advertise in it. It seems then that there is a reasonable chance that a book will recieve the best advertisement, a review, for the cost of the reviewing copy - which is not exorbitant. Because of the publishers' practice of advertising more than one book in each advertisement, the highbrow novel stands an excellent chance of being included in the advertisement alongside a more popular novel.

Mrs Leavis's criticism of the popular novel and her picture of the literary scene in the nineteen thirties and earlier has been discussed in some detail because her work has

been very influential. The recent (1966) re-issue of her study suggests that it will continue to be so. Later critics of the contemporary scene have accepted her thesis almost without question, and have continued to reiterate her gloomy predictions. In this chapter I have attempted to show how the split between popular and serious writing occurred and to suggest that the popular novel is not without critical worth. In the next chapter I hope to show that its contribution to fiction has been important, and that the split between popular and serious fiction is less marked now than it was before the Second World War. The truly homogenous literary society may yet emerge.

Chapter 7:

The Popular Novel

The popular novel is not a twentieth century phenomenon, but the degree of commercialisation of the popular novel in this century sets it apart from its predecessors. The typical popular novel is written to a formula, a product designed for mass consumption. Although a study of these formulas, their development and their changes, would make an interesting literary-sociological study, it is outside the scope of this thesis. Emphasis is placed here on the position of the popular novel *vis à vis* the the serious novel, for it is my contention that the division between popular and serious novels, so marked in the 1930s, shows signs of narrowing in the 1960s.

In this chapter there is therefore a brief discussion of the characteristics of the various types of popular fiction. Mention is made of the historical origins of each type to help clarify the definitions, but the emphasis is on the changes popular fiction has undergone in the past twenty years. It has not been considered necessary to discuss the works of the best known exponents of the forms except where their deviation from formula, or their high standard of literary excellence, makes them sufficiently outstanding or interesting to be considered alongside serious novels. The works of serious novelists who have borrowed materials, methods or forms from the popular novel are also discussed. Both these groups - the popular writers who write seriously, and the serious writers who on occasion use popular forms - are growing in number and importance and although it would

be unwise to predict that the division between popular and serious writers will eventually close, the evidence suggests that some narrowing of the gap has already occurred and that the literary scene in the 1960s is more homogeneous than it has been before in this century.

Some difficulty has been encountered in distinguishing the popular forms of fiction, for the terms are generally very loosely used by critics and reviewers alike. It has been found necessary to provide distinctions which, while they are arguably arbitrary, do provide a workable basis for discussion. Six major types of popular fiction have been discerned: the thriller, science fiction, gothic romance, historical romance, romance and western. Each section, numbered alphabetically, is discussed separately. The blanket label "thriller" covers the adventure story, the political thriller, the spy story, the war story and the detective story. The blanket label "gothic romance" covers gothic proper or neo-gothic, horror and ghost stories. These are discussed as sub-sections.

A. THRILLER

The thriller (or "shocker" as it is still sometimes called) is described in The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary [1] as: "a work of fiction of sensational character". Such a definition will admit the works of a number of serious writers as well, but it is given here because it illustrates one characteristic which many serious writers have in common with thriller writers - a taste for the sensational. It is not only the popular writers who exploit the public's taste for the sensational and the dictionary definition

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1 Third Edition, 1959.

is therefore not exclusive. There is a difference in the way sensationalism is used. The serious writer may find it necessary to be sensational because it is an integral part of his vision, but the popular writer supplies gratuitous thrills with the sole intention of "thrilling" his readers.

A good plot is the sine qua non of the thriller. It is not surprising therefore that the heyday of the thriller (and particularly of the detective story thriller) coincided with the attempts of the Moderns to relegate the plot to a minor position in the novel. Readers who did not see the need to jettison one of the traditional elements of the novel, turned to the thriller to satisfy their urge for "a good story". M. Kennedy[1] suggests that there are also a number of readers "of high intellectual calibre" who have been alienated by the didactic serious novel, preferring to read history, biography and so on undiluted for edification, and to read thrillers for their entertainment.

There are, broadly, two types of plot which are used by thriller writers. The first type, most commonly used by writers of adventure, spy, war and the sensational detective stories, is episodic and tends towards complexity in its search for originality. It depends heavily on coincidences for its complication and eventual resolution. Suspension of disbelief is therefore of immense importance, and this is accomplished in part by the judicious use of pace - the reader is hurried along without giving him time to pause and perhaps question the more unlikely episodes. Typically, the thriller is short - about two hundred pages -

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1 <u>The Outlaws on Parnassus</u>, 1958.

which enables the reader to finish it at a sitting. John Buchan found that the reader's suspension of disbelief could be encouraged by placing ordinary characters in an an ordinary setting, so at least part of the novel was recognisably "true to life". Other writers, such as Rider Haggard, give their stories exotic backgrounds, relying on the Englishman's belief that although "it couldn't happen here", anything could happen "over there". Whichever setting a thriller writer chooses, he must ensure that a suitably suspenseful atmosphere is built up and maintained.

The second type of plot is the one preferred by most writers of detective stories. It can best be compared to a jig-saw puzzle, where the excitement comes from finding the pieces and completing the picture, rather than from the thrill of the chase. Pace is of less importance to the detective story writer than it is to other thriller writers and an exotic background is rarely used, for sensationalism is reduced to the minimum. The plot may be complex, but it is more carefully articulated and motivated than the other type. The detective story poses the question of "who did it?", the other types of thriller ask "what happens next?".

Elizabeth Bowen[1] suggests that, typically, the thriller has no theme. It would be more correct to say that it has only one theme - the battle of good against evil. This theme appears even in the nineteenth century thriller with its basic plot of "the young and rightful heir deprived of his birthright by evil-scheming relatives and guardians."[2] The characteristic twentieth century

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1 Afterthoughts, 1962.
2 R.S. Turner, Boys Will be Boys, 1948.

thriller continues to show the defeat of evil forces, and it was perhaps the possibilities of such a theme which attracted writers like Graham Greene and Charles Williams to the thriller form.

A number of popular writers in the contemporary period have, like their serious colleagues, been affected by contemporary doubts as to whether good and evil, or right and wrong, are always easy to distinguish. "Thou shalt not kill", the commandment on which the thriller is based, was more easily accepted by a generation who had not experienced two world wars. On the international level writers can no longer depend on the prejudices of their readers, for few contemporary readers can believe that evil is confined to nationalities other than his own. As a result, more subtle themes have been explored by some of the better thriller writers. John le Carre shows his spy heroes as men caught up in something they do not understand, and they are manipulated and eventually discarded by the cynical and bureaucratic machine of their own side. Gwendoline Butler has explored another Kafka-esque situation where the borders between reality and illusion are indistinct. Political thriller writers have begun to consider seriously, as Maurice Edelman in The Fratricides (1963) has done, the rights and wrongs of international disputes. The development of theme in the thriller is a significant step towards closing the gap between the serious and popular novel.

Because exploration of character in depth could unbalance or detract from a novel whose plot is its raison d'être the thriller writer rarely does more than sketch in his characters in broad outline. It is not their job, as it is of the characters of serious novelists, to add to our

knowledge of ourselves as individuals: what they may teach us about human beings is general, not particular. Their characters must of course conform to the laws of psychological probability, and some eccentricities may be introduced to retain the character in the reader's mind and to create an affection for him, but there is rarely an attempt at full characterisation. Such heroes may become stereotypes, but they are not stock characters when they first appear. Richard Hannay, Hercule Poirot, Father Brown, James Bond and a string of others have become so well known as to be regarded almost as folk-heroes.

The best contemporary thriller writers have been affected by the growth of the study of psychology which has complicated our attitudes to both criminals and saints. M. Kennedy[1] quotes Agatha Christie's rueful complaint that "an honest man has been described as the noblest work of God, and that to turn one out, once a year, in time for the Autumn List, is to engage in august competition." The decline of the hero in fiction has also affected the thriller story writers. The courage, virtue and character of the thriller hero must be unquestionable if the usual pattern of thriller stories is to be followed - and such a hero is now an anachronism, difficult to make convincing. The metamorphosis of the hero into the anti-hero has been discussed in Chapter 5, but it is interesting to note that the popular thriller has also been affected by this trend. Contemporary thriller writers, especially those who write adventure, spy and war stories, and political thrillers, are faced with a paradox. "Theirs is a heroic genre, concerned

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1 The Outlaws on Parnassus, 1958.

with making out in the face of ordeals. The tests may be tests of intelligence or love or endurance or decency or ingenuity and, almost always, of courage."[1] But the heroic hero (the Richard Hannay type) has been replaced by the non- or anti-hero who must nonethelss achieve heroism if the genre is to be true to itself. This difficulty is often solved by placing the anti-hero in such a position that he is forced into heroic actions - he does not go into them either willingly or intentionally, for he has no choice. The logical extension of this situation has provided some writers with an excellent twist - because their heroes are not supermen, they fail and their heroism is to no purpose.

There is a close connection between the development of theme and the development of character in the novel, and writers who are dissatisfied with the good-versus-evil theme are also dissatisfied with the saint-hero versus devil-criminal characterisation. The straight-forward divisions have disappeared in the books of the better popular novelists which has brought them closer to the position of the serious contemporary novelist. If the trend towards more subtle psychology and more complex themes continues, a substantial contribution will be made to the acceptance of this branch of the popular novel as serious literature.

It seems appropriate here to discuss a group of serious novelists who have used various forms of the thriller for serious purposes.

Graham Greene has done more than any other English novelist to make the thriller respectable. Most of the thirty

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1 'The Conventions of Crime Fiction', TLS 19.6.1969.

novels and entertainments he has published since 1929 can be described as "metaphysical thrillers"[1] or "symbolic melodramas"[2]. They fall into various categories. Of his post-1949 novels, Our Man in Havana (1958) is a comic satire on spying; The Third Man (1950) (like the earlier Brighton Rock (1938)) is a gangster story; The Fallen Idol (1950) and The End of the Affair (1951) have the form of the detective story; The Quiet American (1955) and The Comedians (1966) are political thrillers. Only Loser Takes All (1955) a moral tale of the dangers of gambling, and A Burnt-Out Case (1961) which is set in an African leper colony, do not belong in any of the thriller categories. The settings of all except The End of the Affair and The Fallen Idol are exotic, a gratuitous bonne bouche, a frequent offering of the good crime novel.

"The Greene novel is stylised. It begins with a moment of maturing crisis and moves, through interconnecting scenes, to a resolution not far off in time. . . . With such a method the beginning is important."[3] The first page of a Graham Greene novel reads like the beginning of a thriller. The Quiet American, for example, begins like this:

> After dinner I sat and waited for Pyle in my room over the rue Catinat: he had said, 'I'll be with you at latest by ten', and when midnight had struck I couldn't stay quiet any longer and went down into the street.

A mystery is established in the first two lines, and his taut, swift-moving and cinematic style maintains the tension. His plots have plenty of action (often violent), contrivances and coincidences, and bizarrely thrilling

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1 A.J. Farmer, Les écrivains anglais d'aujourd'hui, 1966.
2 G.S. Fraser, The Modern Writer and his World, 1953 ed.
3 V.S. Naipaul in an interview with Graham Greene, printed in the South African Sunday Express, 14.4.1968.

incidents. In an interview with F. Kermode[1] Greene admitted to "a passionate liking for melodrama". Plotting is his indulgence, but he is aware that the mythic simplicity of character for which he aims is often damaged by plot-making: "I would like to ascend into myth, but find my boots so often muddy with plot." His plots - and some of his characters - are drawn directly from contemporary events[2], which gives them an up-to-dateness and relevance characteristic of the best thrillers. His political eye is acute. The Comedians, for example, is a thorough analysis not only of Haiti and of what life there is like, but also of America's involvement in a régime as evil as Castro's but which she supports because it is not a Communist one.

Love, both romantic as in The Confidential Agent (1939) and physical and adulterous as in The End of the Affair, adds a further frisson to his tales of adventure. Not that all readers appreciate it. Rose Macaulay wrote of The Heart of the Matter: [3]

> What a mess his mind must be - nothing in it, scarcely, but religion and sex, and these all mixed up together. Religious adultery; as someone said about it, he didn't mind either in a book alone, but didn't like the mixture.

If Graham Greene were simply a thriller writer he would not be accorded his present status as one of the most important novelists to have appeared between the wars. P. West[4] described Brighton Rock as "a psychologist's dossier, a thriller, a sociological study, a theological pamphlet and also a structural oxymoron" and pointed out that: "We can understand such a novel only if we read it

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1 'Myth, Reality and Fiction', The List., 30.8.1962.
2 A. Calder-Marshall discusses his sources in Living Writers, ed. G. Phelps, 1947.
3 Last Letters to a Friend, 1952-58, 1962.
4 The Modern Novel, 1965.

as a thriller - a 'gangster' story . . . . Violence not only simplifies the reader's entry; it also figures . . . as a despairing attempt to simplify the contorted world. Greene seems to have advanced from the thriller outline to the almost metaphysical one." G.S. Fraser[1] suggests that Greene uses the mechanism of the old-fashioned tale of crime and adventure to bring across a sense of the insecure, frightening, dangerous state of the contemporary world. Graham Greene deals in danger, but the danger is more than danger to the flesh - it is danger to the soul.[2] His novels show the Catholic soul working out its salvation and damnation, in isolation. The seedy characters in their seedy surroundings (the exotic is not treated any more glamourously than the English) strive to attain salvation in a world where evil reigns. F.R. Karl[3] sees Greene as attempting to recover the hero for a democratic age. "Greene has taken the 'fallen democrat' peculiar to our time and tried to raise him through suffering and pain to a more heroic stature." A. Calder-Marshall[4] remarked that "the theme of England Made Me[5], as of every book which Greene has written, is the relation of man to society; with the individual as the victim, and society as villain." Graham Greene's novels have become increasingly more metaphysical and less like thrillers. P. Hebblethwaite[6] quotes a critic who complained that The End of the Affair was the last novel of Graham Greene's which could be reviewed by someone who was not a professional moral theologian.

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1 The Modern Writer and his World, 1953.
2 A remark made by George Orwell seems apposite: "When people really believed in Hell, they were less fond of posturing on the brink. . . "
3 A Reader's Guide to the Contemporary English Novel, 1963.
4 Living Writers, ed. G. Phelps, 1947.
5 Published in 1935.
6 'How Catholic is the Catholic Novel?', TLS 27.7.67.

A.J. Farmer[1] suggests that F.L. Green, who died in 1953, could also be described as a writer of "metaphysical thrillers". He mentions Ambush for the Heart (1952), a flight-and-pursuit story which explores the moral and psychological problems which preoccupied F.L. Green in his fiction. François Mauriac has combined religious and philosophical themes with the action novel. Charles Williams wrote novels "in which theosophy gives the thriller a new twist but also deprives the thriller element of the claustrophobia we have to feel in order to be thrilled."[2] G.K. Chesterton, in his detective Father Brown stories, combined the relgious novel and the thriller. James Hanley who began writing sea stories in 1932 showed a revivalist tendency in his later novels. Say Nothing (1962), for example, shows courageous souls in seedy surroundings, vanquished by fate. James's brother Gerald "places Hemingway young men in Greene territory enveloped in a Conrad world of illusions."[3] Most of his novels have exotic settings - Africa or India - and are discussed under that heading, but in Without Love (1957) he wrote a religious thriller set in Spain which reads like a religious tract.

Each of the sub-species of the thriller has enjoyed a vogue, and the waning and waxing in popularity of these provides not only a commentary on public taste but also a social commentary. In the 1930s and 1940s the detective story was supreme; in the 1950s spy stories were the most popular and in the 1960s the adventure story and political thriller enjoyed a vogue. (Science fiction,

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1 Les écrivains anglais d'aujourd'hui, 1966.
2 P. West, The Modern Novel, 1965.
3 F.R. Karl, A Reader's Guide to the Contemporary English Novel, 1963.

which is not a sub-species of the thriller but is related to it, was particularly popular in the 1950s). L. Fiedler[1] believes that changes in public taste are indications of an altered attitude to time. "We have seen in recent years the purveyors of Pop Culture transfer their energies from the Western and the Dracula-type thriller (last heirs of the Romantic and Gothic concern with the past) to the Detective Story especially in its hard-boiled form (final vulgarization of the realists' dedication to the present) to Science Fiction (a new genre based on hints in E.A. Poe and committed to 'extrapolating' the future)." Although the types of popular thriller all share the characteristics discussed, they have developed into true sub-species, and not merely local variations, so each sub-species will be considered under a separate heading.

The Gothic romance of writers like Mrs Radcliffe (of which The Mysteries of Udolpho, 1794 is the best-known) was the progenitor of the modern thriller (it also fathered the ghost story and, according to Leslie Fiedler[2], the modern American novel as well). Sir Walter Scott borrowed from the Gothic romances and set a fashion for tales of dangerous adventure and taut suspense in a historical setting. Captain Marryat, using his naval experience for material, developed the adventurous sea story to which Conrad later gave an original slant. Writers who followed Scott and Marryat began to diversify the thriller and develop further possibilities, with the result that by 1950 the thriller had split into six clearly defined sub-species: adventure story, political thriller, spy story, war story and detective story. A brief history of the development

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1 'The New Mutants', Innovations, ed. B. Bergonzi, 1968.
2 Love and Death in the American Novel, 1960.

of each of these sub-species, together with a discussion of the contemporary situation, follows.

A(1) Adventure Story

The adventure story is the sub-species closest to its parent, the Gothic romance. R.L. Stevenson, Rider Haggard, Rudyard Kipling and Conan Doyle gave it a fresh impetus at the end of the nineteenth century. The first three writers used exotic settings for their stories, and L. Stevenson[1] draws attention to R.L. Stevenson's theory that the atmosphere of a particular place can be the determining element in fiction. The exotic adventure story has been popular ever since, and Graham Greene in particular has used such backgrounds to good effect. John Buchan's contribution in novels like The Thirty-Nine Steps (1915) made him, in Graham Greene's[2] opinion: "the first to realize the enormous dramatic value of adventure in familiar surroundings happening to unadventurous men . . . murder in the atmosphere of breeding and stability."

The adventure story in its original form reached its peak of achievement before the First World War, and its subsequent decline can be attributed partly to the decline of the hero in fiction. But even if the reader can be persuaded to believe in a superman-hero, he cannot always be persuaded to believe in his adventures. When the great Victorian explorers like Burton, Speke and Livingstone were alive, there were still parts of the earth marked "terra incognita" on maps, and it was to these areas that adventure story writers sent their heroes. They could count on the reader's

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1 The English Novel ,1960.
2 Collected Essays, 1969.

ignorance of the geography, history and politics of such areas, and could involve their heroes in adventures which were fantastic but, to the ignorant, credible. Since the Second World War there has been a boom in travel books, in books of scientific exploration, archaeology, anthropology and so on, and readers have become less ignorant of geographical and political conditions in countries overseas. Men like Thor Heyerdahl and David Attenborough are writing non-fiction adventure stories which, because they are factual, are more acceptable to the contemporary reader suspicious of imaginary countries.

If one accepts Ian Watt's thesis[1] that the history of the novel has been a history of the movement towards greater realism, it becomes apparent that the adventure story either had to adjust itself to the contemporary situation, or to be content with an exclusively adolescent readership. It has in fact done the former. It has found new heroes and a new terra incognita in astronauts and outer space. The astronaut has become the modern equivalent of Columbus or Darwin, and is perhaps the last of the real modern heroes. The average reader is as ignorant of outer space as his grandfather was of darkest Africa, and many writers of science fiction offer similar fare to the old adventure stories.

Contemporary adventure story writers who have not turned to science fiction have adapted in other ways. Their stories are firmly placed in a real geographical and historical setting (resembling political thrillers in this respect) but the adventures of their heroes are as improbable and

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1 The Rise of the Novel, 1963.

highly-coloured as any that appeared in the Boys' Own Paper before the First World War. By placing their stories in real settings these writers have got round the difficulty experienced by earlier writers of convincing the reader that the tales they tell are at least possible if not always probable. The contemporary adventure story is usually labelled "thriller" by critics and reviewers, but I have preferred to retain the older name because "thriller" can be applied to several other types of popular novel and because it shows the origins of the contemporary story more clearly.

The contemporary adventure story has a characteristic pattern. The hero gets caught up in an actual historical event, and although innocent of political motive himself (he is often a holiday-maker or journalist) he unavoidably becomes involved. Once involved he has his share of blondes, car chases and sudden deaths and, often to his own astonishment, emerges a hero. The locations most favoured for his adventures are trouble-spots like Algeria[1], the Middle East[2] and Africa[3]. Such locations are doubly useful to the writer - they provide ready-made conflicts and colourful exotic settings.

The new type of adventure story and the political thriller have become very popular in the 1960s, but there are no writers of the stature of John Buchan, for example. It is not easy to combine seriousness with the need for skilled plotting, pace and suspenseful atmosphere. Muriel Spark in The Mandelbaum Gate (1965) has unwittingly demonstrated

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1 Alan Williams, Barbouze: Norman Lewis, Darkness Visible
2 Muriel Spark, The Mandelbaum Gate: Simon Harvester, Treacherous Road
3 J.D. Scott, The Pretty Penny

that the adventure story is not as easy as it looks.

Nigel Balchin is one of the few contemporary novelists to have written distinctive adventure stories. His novels combine excitement and suspense with moral seriousness, which gives them a weight the more common type of adventure story lacks. The Small Back Room (1943) has a nerve-wracking sequence describing the de-fusing of a bomb, but although it is a thriller it is also a savage indictment of the in-fighting amonst the back-room boys, the scientists, during the war. P. West[1] said of this book that "it scores by presenting an adult, scientific theme in a manner readily assimilable to the fears of childhood and the relished thrills of boyhood adventure-reading. All this is deliberately and advantageously performed." Balchin's Kings of Infinite Space (1967) is an acute analysis of the aims and methods of space research, but can also be read as a straight-forward adventure story.

Christopher Hodder-Williams, a younger writer, has attempted the same mixture of suspense and seriousness, but in The Higher They Fly (1963) he fails to blend its ingredients of technological lectures, elementary psychology, a love story and an aeroplane crash.

Two of the most interesting attempts to use the adventure story form seriously have been Richard Hughes's A High Wind in Jamaica (1929) and William Golding's The Lord of the Flies (1954). Hughes's children live on the exotic island of Jamaica which is devastated by a hurricane. Their journey to England, unencumbered with parents, is enlivened by adventures with pirates and by bloody deeds. Golding's

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1 P. West, The Modern Novel, 1965.

novel is also a boy's adventure story, based on R.M. Ballantyne's Coral Island, a popular Victorian classic.[1] Both Golding and Hughes have taken the material of boys' adventure stories and turned them into an exploration of the nature of man and the nature of civilisation. Hughes's novel stressed that children are unknowable, a race apart. Both writers are concerned with the problem of good and evil and their novels gain considerable impact by being cast in a form where good and evil are traditionally allocated to "us" and "them" respectively.

Colin MacInnes's Westward to Laughter (1969) is a story of slavery and piracy in the West Indies told in the style of Defoe and including all the traditional elements of boys' adventure stories. Its hero, however, is a victim: a white boy sold into slavery whose troubles end on the gallows. A reviewer wrote: "this book attempts to give the underdog back a part of his stolen sensibility. Why should the exploiters have all the best tunes? There are hints of allegorical profundity here . . . ."[2]

Marshall Pugh's Last Place Left (1969) is "as good as Buchan, but tuned to the different emotional demands of modern readers."[3] A zoologist replaces the soldier, a tough willing girl the niched goddess. The destruction of nature replaces a worldwide conspiracy, and the enemy is not unlike some of Hannay's chosen allies.

Some of the materials and methods of the old adventure story have been used by serious contemporary writers who are not consciously up-dating the adventure story. John Wain in

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1 Golding discussess his indebtedness in The Hot Gates, 1965.
2 TLS 11.9.1969.
3 TLS 3.7.1969.

The Smaller Sky (1967) and John Broderick in The Fugitives (1962) have effectively used that adventure story standby, the man-hunt. P.H. Newby and Thomas Hinde write adventure stories with a nightmarish quality[1], using this form to explore the territory between illusion and reality. This new Kafkaesque slant on the adventure story could prove fruitful, but few writers have followed their example, finding perhaps that the nightmare vision is too personal to be imitated. Peter de Polnay and Robert Shaw have both written adventure stories[2], but de Polnay has not found the knack of developing suspense and excitement, and Shaw has turned to political thrillers (such as The Man in the Glass Booth, 1967).

The example of these and other writers suggests that the serious potential of the adventure story is being realised. By taking the traditional form and using it for new purposes these writers are showing that there need be no distinction between the serious and popular novel. The same material and the same methods can be used for either purpose.

A(2) Political thriller

The political thriller in contrast to the adventure story emphasises the political and reduces the thriller elements. It uses the science fiction writer's method of logical inference. The writer observes an actual event, or a certain political trend, and suggests what their logical conclusions could be. Although the book may be set in the near future it cannot be classified as science-fiction

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1 Newby's Something to Answer For (1968) and Hinde's The Day the Call Came (1964) are nightmare thrillers.
2 de Polnay's The Second Death of a Hero (1968) and Shaw's The Hiding Place (1959).

because it is not concerned with exploring the effects of scientific discoveries. Nor can it be classified as a straight-forward political novel because the thriller element, although it may be muted, is nonetheless important. The political novel is concerned with showing the workings of the political machine: the political thriller predicts the result of following a particular policy or trend. The political novel shows the themes or personalities of the process of normal government, the thriller of abnormal.

On this basis, George Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four is a political thriller, C.P. Snow's Corridors of Power is a political novel, and John Wyndham's The Chrysalids is science-fiction. Although Orwell's vision of the future includes such scientific inventions as the telescreen, they are only incidental to his main theme, his picture of the totalitarian state of the future, the seeds of which are already found in the present. The story of Winston Smith provides the thriller element. The Corridors of Power is an examination of the process of decision making in government. John Wyndham's novel is only indirectly concerned with politics, with the politics which brought about an atomic war. The consequences of the war are felt among the few survivors who are faced with the problem of mutations.

George Orwell's Nineteen Eight-Four set a high standard for political thrillers and it was not until Constantine Fitzgibbon published When the Kissing had to Stop in 1960 that its position of pre-eminence was seriously challenged. Fitzgibbon's highly topical novel suggests the dangers in an organisation like the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament gaining control of the British government, for its idealism

can be perverted by the cynical and politically ambitious. Like Orwell, Fitzgibbon is pessimistic. The value of such prophetic books is that they articulate and define dangers which are very real, if previously unnoticed. It has been said that because Orwell wrote Nineteen Eighty-Four, the world he foresaw might never happen.

The political thriller writer has an almost missionary zeal and the late 1960s have seen the publication of a number of novels which are inspired by the desire to inform and warn as well as to entertain. Send Him Victorious by Douglas Hurd and Andrew Osmond, published in 1968, is one of the best of these. It offers a possible answer to the question of what could happen if Britain were forced to take action against Rhodesia. Morris West's The Tower of Babel 1968) examines the explosive Middle East situation. John Harris's Right of Reply (1968) predicts some of the difficulties to which Britain's present policy of disarmament could lead. William Haggard's The Conspirators (1967) is based on the incident when America "lost" some atomic bombs over Spain, and denied having done so. Haggard shows the political capital that could be made of such an incident, and changes the site to Britain. Jim Hunter's The Flame (1966) was inspired by the Billy Graham type of revivalism which swept the country in that decade. Again, his theme is of idealism perverted. John Le Carre's A Small Town in Germany (1968) is set in Bonn. Nominally it is a thriller about the hunt for a man who disappears from the British Embassy, but it is also an analysis of post-war Germany and particularly of neo-Nazism. The world of diplomats and politicians is exposed as hypocritical and self-seeking.

All these novelists share a number of common assumptions. The masses are seen as naïve and easily swayed, indistinguishable from their fathers and grandfathers who fought two wars to end all wars. The real enemies are the weak, foolish or self-seeking politicians who unwittingly betray their countries, usually to the communists. The fear that a minor conflict may be aggravated and eventually embroil the world has inspired most of these novelists. Political bungling is seen as as great a danger as political chicanery.

A good political thriller is rare, for there are a number of difficulties in the way of its success. To be convincing it is usually necessary to have a large cast of characters, with each one sufficiently distinct to be memorable. The provision of entertainment must be reconciled with the desire to instruct or warn. There is the problem too of compression, for the thriller requires brevity, while the themes and materials of the political thriller are often such that a longer exposition seems called for. The political thriller has, not surprisingly, attracted a number of journalists-cum-novelists but they do not always have the knack of avoiding pampleteering. Political acuteness must be combined with a strong and probable story. Although the political thriller has the potential to bridge the gap between serious and popular fiction, it seldom, because of its topicality, has a long life expectancy. The themes and problems must be universal, and not local or temporal, for this to happen.
Political thriller writers are exploring territory which is largely neglected by serious novelists who exhort each other to tackle political themes but rarely do so themselves.

A(3) Spy story

The spy story has obvious affinities with the political thriller, for without political differences there are no spies (industrial espionage lacks the necessary glamour for this kind of fiction, although there are signs of it coming into fashion). But the spy story is only marginally concerned with real politics and the enemy is no more than the "journalistically-defined political opponent of the moment."[1] Our attitude to spies is deeply ambivalent. If we call them "secret agents" they are metamorphosed into figures around whom we are willing to let crystallise our fantasies of power, sexual adventure, solitary endeavour and god-like invulnerability. 'Ours' are secret agents; 'theirs' are spies; informers are too low even for "them."

The spy story is close to the old-fashioned adventure story, brought up to date and put in a contemporary setting. Heroism is expected of the spy where it is no longer expected of the ordinary man, and the spy is in a position to prove his heroism. As in the adventure story, the spy story writer may make use of exotic backgrounds to add glamour and colour and to justify the author's Bermudan holiday. Because there are no rules in the moral jungle of the spy's world, the author can give free play to his fantasies of sadism, violence, torture, perverted and normal sex.

The history of the spy story has been brief but lively. Dick Turpin, the "penny dreadful" hero of the Victorian masses was not a spy but he kept alive the tradition of the chivalrous Robin Hood-like criminal-hero. Robin Hood has since been transformed into a thug and wide-boy while

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1 L. Fiedler, 'The Middle Against both Ends', Encounters ed. S. Spender et al, 1953-63.

retaining the glamour of an adventurer. The transformation can be traced from Hornung's gentleman-burglar Raffles, who appeared in 1899, through to Leslie Charteris's the "Saint" and, in the 1950s to the most famous spy of the decade, Ian Fleming's James Bond. L. Stevenson[1] suggests that it was the First World War which shifted the emphasis of the thriller from "the overworked theme of crime detection to the newer one of international intrigue" and he names E. Phillips Oppenheim as one of the leaders of the movement. Oppenheim's The Mysterious Mr Sabin (1901) was the first in a long series about secret international documents, shifty diplomats and seductive adventuresses. Eric Ambler followed later with such novels as Journey into Fear, and he is still considered one of the finest exponents of the genre. The spy story has overtaken the detective story in the popularity stakes and at least one commentator[2] considers it to be leading the field today.

Ian Fleming's James Bond became something of a cult in the 1950s. Like the Saint, he was handsome and virile, interested in unusual cars and unusual women and lived in elegant luxury when not involved in an adventure. But whereas the Saint was still a gentleman, Bond had only the outward trappings of one. No old-fashioned code of honour curbed Bond's activities and the final scene in a Fleming novel can only be compared with the final scene of Kyd's The Spanish Tragedy with its plethora of corpses.

P.N. Furbank pointed out that the moral status of the hero has sunk:

> Novels of the Peter Cheyney, Ian Fleming school work on the assumption that violent and treacherous enemies can only be combated by violence and treachery; thus the

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1 The English Novel, 1960.
2 Leader writer, TLS 6.10.1966.

> reader can enjoy in fantasy the full criminal life, save that he remains theoretically on the side of law, virtue, and patriotism.. . . James Bond . . . an efficient and savage animal, with gleaming teeth, lean body, and narrow hips; an anonymous engine for detection, murder, and fornication, the driving of fast automobiles and the consumption of branded goods.[1]

James Leasor has offered the only serious challenge to Fleming with his series of novels about Dr Jason Love (such as Passport in Suspense, 1967). The adventures are similar, but the hero is a medical doctor, and not directly employed by the Secret Service. He is middle-aged and although appreciative of beautiful women, is not a casanova. Although James Leasor is a better writer than Fleming, and can be very amusing, he has not Fleming's popular touch.

After Fleming's death in 1964, Kingsley Amis attempted to keep the cult alive with Colonel Sun (1968) which he wrote under the pseudonym of Robert Markham. The enemies were Chinese instead of Russian and the violence and sadism were, unbelievably, increased. But Amis had miscalculated the fickle tastes of the public and his book was not a popular - or critical - success. In the four years between Fleming's death and the publication of Colonel Sun, five factors had changed the public taste in spy stories. The success of the Bond books had, inevitably, brought about a rash of imitation-Bonds which had satiated readers. Bond himself had been parodied in a series of films which made it impossible for him to be taken seriously (one does not identify with a caricature). The true spy stories of men like Nunn, May, Fuchs, Wynne, Burgess, Maclean, Philby and so on had been given a great deal of publicity, and readers became aware of how unreal, how fantastic, Bond's adventures were. (Some novelists, such as Nicholas Monsarrat

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1 'The Twentieth-Century Best-Seller', The Modern Age, ed. B. Ford, 1964.

in Smith and Jones (1964), a reconstruction of Burgess's and Maclean's stories, took advantage of the public's interest in "true" spy stories.) Fleming - and his readers - identified the creator with the creation, and when Fleming died, it was felt that Bond had died too. The most important factor from the literary point of view was that a new type of spy story was being written by men like John Le Carre and Len Deighton, and was achieving both critical and popular success.

Ian Fleming gave expression to the fantasies of his public, and a number of commentators have analysed his books to try to explain his immense popularity with readers from all sections of the population, and all nationalities (except perhaps the "enemies"). A criminologist, David Davies,[1] pointed out that: ". . . if, for instance, the James Bond books had been produced and published by the Russians, I feel sure they would have been taken by the West as final proof of the vileness of the Soviet system." He considers that he plays on the worst sides of people's fears and emotions about the Cold War, Communism and race prejudice. Kingsley Amis's study of Fleming, The Bond Dossier is the fullest examination of his work. Ann S. Boyd in The Devil with James Bond (1967) suggested that Fleming posed as a mercenary thriller-writer simply to capture a vast audience and then pass on to it, subliminally, a deep and essentially Christian message. She concludes that Bond was designed to be an image of St George and that the villains against whom he operates are the dragons of the twentieth century, the modern personification of the devil. But perhaps Paul Johnson in The New Statesman was nearer the mark with his

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1 quoted in Intellectuals Today, ed. T.R. Fyvel, 1968.

statement that Bond was just a "nasty symbol of Sex, Snobbery and Sadism".

In 1963 John Le Carre published The Spy Who Came in from the Cold, one of the first and most influential of the realistic spy stories. Le Carre's novel is set in contemporary Berlin, the Berlin of the Cold War, and its hero, Leamas is the antithesis of Bond, "anti-Hannay in excelsis" he has been called.[1] The glamour has been stripped away, although the excitement remains, and spying is shown to be a dirty and sordid business. In contrast to this is the touching love story of Liz, the young librarian who unwittingly gets involved, and Leamas, the embittered middle-aged man who knows how little a man's life is worth in the cynical world of spies.

Le Carre is a very visual writer, cinematic in the way Graham Greene is. The first and last pages are typical of his method. The book begins with an agent crossing Checkpoint Charlie on his bicycle at night, and being shot "in full view" of the reader. The final scene is of Leamas and Liz, tricked into believing they are free, climbing over the Wall. They do not know that the guards have been instructed to shoot her and to allow him to escape, and when Liz is killed, Leamas makes a single heroic gesture, a gesture which rejects the ruthless immorality of the spy game. He stays with her:

> They seemed to hesitate before firing again, someone shouted an order, and still no one fired. Finally they shot him, two or three shots. He stood glaring round him like a blinded bull in the streets . . . .

The Spy Who Came in from the Cold is an important book both in its own right and for the influence it has had on the spy novel. It has destroyed the old, simple, distinctions

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1 T.L.S. Leader, 6.10.1966½

between "them" (bad) and "us" (good). The enemy is not identified by his nationality, for "we" are no better than "they". The spies are all pawns in a chess game played by government agencies, and a pawn may be sacrificed to help win the game. The spy is no longer seen as a glamorous superman, but as an ordinary man doing a job rarely out of loyalty, patriotism or political conviction but because the pay is good or because he has been blackmailed by his own side. The theme of Le Carre's novel is essentially tragic, for the hero is at the mercy of forces he cannot control and his heroic efforts to escape his fate are futile. The spy story of this type is the nearest we have come to finding a fictional form which has the potential to be a modern tragedy.

Le Carre followed his success with The Looking-Glass War (1965) before turning to the political thriller with A Small Town in Germany (1968). Le Carre's chief rival in the field of the spy novel is his contemporary, Len Deighton. Although Le Carre worked for the Foreign Office, and Deighton did not, it was Deighton's first novel, The Ipcress File (1962) which had to be passed by the War Office before publication. The appendices and extracts from official documents - as well as the convincing details about the security services - gave his novel an air of authenticity and realism. Expertise coupled with extraordinarily complicated plots have since become Deighton's hallmark. In quick succession he published Horse under Water (1963), which is concerned with narcotics and neo-Nazis, Funeral in Berlin (1964) whose title is self-explanatory, An Expensive Place to Die (1967) and similar titles. His latest novel, Only When I Larf (1968) is a light-hearted story of three confidence tricksters. Len Deighton writes with a gusto and wit which

are rare attributes in a thriller writer. His stories are told in the first person by a cynical working-class ex-burglar who has been blackmailed into becoming a spy, told in the racy vernacular characteristic of contemporary working-class heroes in serious fiction.

Three quotations, the first two from The Ipcress File, the second from Funeral in Berlin, suggest that Deighton has no illusions about the spy's world:

> "It's a confusing story," I told him. "I'm in a very confusing business."
>
> "And," he paused, "don't contact me if anything goes wrong, because I won't know what the hell you are talking about."
>
> "Stok and I are in the same business - we understand each other." (Stok is the head of the Russian Secret Service).

Although Deighton's and Le Carre's spies are professionals, they have an amateurish air. They do not, unlike James Bond, try out the latest technological inventions and they have no false illusions about their work - it is a business. This amateurishness has been taken a step further by writers who, perhaps inspired by the case of Greville Wynne, have written spy novels in which the hero is not a spy at all. He has usually been blackmailed or gulled into acting as a courier - and inevitably things go wrong. Francis Clifford in The Naked Runner (1966), Lionel Davidson in The Night of Wenceslas (1964), Alan Williams in Barbouze (1964) and Bruce Marshall in The Month of the Falling Leaves (1963) have all used this idea. It is, of course, a potentially humorous one - the innocent abroad - and Michael Frayn in The Russian Interpreter (1966) and Anthony Burgess in Honey for the Bears (1963) have written farces which, like Graham Greene's Our Man in Havana (1958), satirise the whole myth of spies.

Anthony Firth in Tall, Balding, Thirty-Five and Robert Sheckley in The Game of X [1] have parodied the Fleming-type novel, but it is questionable whether one can mock nonsense. Anthony Burgess in Tremor of Intent (1966) has taken the disillusioned-spy story to its logical conclusion - his hero is betrayed by his own side.

One of the few serious writers to have turned his hand to the spy novel since Rebecca West in the 'thirties, is Kingsley Amis. In The Anti-Death League (1966) the chief characters are army officers training for a top secret task. Their security officer is unable to catch the spy who is leaking information, but at the end of the novel it becomes clear that this was exactly what the Secret Service hoped would happen. The spy's information acted as a deterrent to the Chinese and the operation itself was never intended to be mounted. The pawns were, yet again, being used in a diplomatic chess match of which they knew nothing. They are also pawns in a game played by God. A. Burgess[2] suggests that Amis:

> essays a masque of ultimate bitterness - not against human institutions but against God . . . . God is death, the eternal butcher, the Great Gangster - can one really wage war against Him? One can make certain existential gestures, totally impotent, but that, apparently, is better than doing nothing.

The theme is a powerful one, arising naturally from the plot but the novel is not wholly successful.

Amis's failings in this novel are common to other serious writers who have used popular forms of the thriller. He has written neither a convincing spy story nor a thought-provoking serious novel. The serious novelist using a popular form must be aware, as Graham Greene is, of the conventions of the form, even if he chooses to ignore some and use others.

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1 Mentioned by a TLS leader writer, 6.10.1966.
2 The Novel Now, 1967.

A(4) War story

A clear dividing line can be drawn between serious and popular war novelists, and their attitudes to their subject matter are basically so different that it would be difficult for a popular war novel to achieve critical success. The popular novelist celebrates war, although he may pay lip-service to the notion that it is regrettable. The serious novelist - no exceptions come to mind - is both anti-war and anti-military. Arising from this basic difference there are others which indicate the great gulf that separates popular and serious war novelists.

To the popular novelist, war is the great adventure, an opportunity for displaying heroism and jingoism. The trappings of the adventure story were taken over with a few modifications, the chief one being that the number of heroes is multiplied. The popular war novelist is even less concerned with moral issues than is the adventure story writer, for the enemy is clearly recognisable (he speaks a funny English) and the code of war does not admit of doubts as to the morality of killing and violence. These are given official sanction, while sadism and torture shelter under the artistic umbrella of Realism. Because World War Two was fought on several fronts, the story can take place against an exotic background. True to its adventure story origins, the popular war novel depends heavily on the standby of escape and subsequent pursuit. The factual basis for this was provided by the many true escape stories written by former Prisoners of War which were popular in the 1950s. One of the attractions of the popular war novel for its readers is the picture it paints of a male community with women on the outside as dreams or enemies.

J. McCormick[1] suggests that "the writer of integrity uses war for its test of mind and character in extreme situations" which is, of course, in contrast to the popular novelist's view of war as the provider of thrills. The number of serious novels written about the Second World War is negligible, and the majority of these are concerned less with the actual fighting than with the effect of war on ordinary people. The hero of a serious war novel is sometimes a non-combatant, but rarely a professional fighter. If he is a fighter he is more aware of the boredom and discomfort, the confusion and sense of waste, than of the glory and thrills of war. His real enemy is at his own headquarters or in Whitehall.

G. Steiner[2] wrote that the: "Major works of World War Two are reportage and immediate witness . . . . Fiction falls silent before the enormity of the fact , and before the vivid authority with which that fact can be rendered by unadorned report." This quotation is given here not because of the light it throws on the question of why so few serious war novels have been written, for the question is irrelevant here, but because of the emphasis Steiner places on the importance of factual reportage. The most popular books about the war were those which were based on fact, and the most successful example of the semi-factual novel was Nicholas Monsarrat's The Cruel Sea (1951). Monsarrat based this, his fifth novel, on his experiences on corvettes during the war, and although in his Author's Note he makes the customary statement that "all the characters in this book are wholly fictitious", he does not suggest that the

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1 Catastrophe and Imagination, 1957.
2 Language and Silence, 1967.

events are imaginary. In "Before the Curtain," the Preface, he writes: "This is the story - the long and true story - of one ocean, two ships, and about a hundred and fifty men . . . . Above all, it is a true story because that is the only kind worth telling." The novel is at its most successful when it is most factual, for the characterisation is somewhat perfunctory. As the title suggests, the real enemy is the sea, not the Germans or Japanese, and in this the book is not typical of its genre. A.J. Farmer[1] described it as a best-seller about "men at grips with the Atlantic fury while menaced by submarine enemies". Monsarrat's later novels have firmly established him as one of the most popular[2] writers in contemporary fiction, but he has not reverted to war themes.

Monsarrat's chief rival in this field was Nevil Shute, who died in 1960 after publishing about twenty novels. His greatest successes came after the war with No Highway (1948) A Town like Alice (1949) and On the Beach (1957). A Town like Alice is an escape-and-pursuit story, with a romance added for good measure. On the Beach is superficially a a science-fiction novel, but as L. Lerner[3] points out, the nuclear war which triggers the adventure "is simply there as a more lurid background for the conventional middle-class tear-jerking story he tells."

Gerrard Tickell was another popular war novelist whose easy charm won him many adolescent admirers in the 1950s. He was less pretentious than Monsarrat or Shute and in novels like Appointment with Venus showed himself to be basically a "teller of tales".

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1 Les ecrivains anglais d'aujourd'hui, 1966. (my translation)
2 Richer than all his tribe sold 40,894 copies in its first month of publication. Information from Times Sat.R.14.9.68.
3 'Novels about the future', The List., 26.7.62.

The future of the popular war novel is uncertain. It is rapidly becoming an anachronism, for the new generation of readers and writers has no memory of the glory of fighting, but only of growing up in a grey England. Such childhoods provide material for semi-autobiographical serious novels, but they do not provide material for adventurous war stories. The cynicism of the younger generation also acts against their acceptance of the popular novelist's view of war. They are more likely to applaud the kind of expose which Rolf Hochuth's plays and the musicals _Oh, What a Lovely War_ and _US_ have performed on the London stage. The cinema continues to churn out popular war films, which indicates that the taste for the subject has not disappeared, and it it most probable that the film will become the principal medium for popular war stories, as it has become for the Western. The loss to fiction is not to be deplored, for the popular war novel has done much to feed prejudices and to foster hatred between nations. It may also have discouraged serious novelists from writing of the war, for fear of being lumped with the popular writers.

A(5) _Detective story_

A discussion of the history of the detective story is not within the scope of this thesis but an observation made by Dorothy Sayers in 1928[1] sums up the trend of detective fiction since Edgar Allan Poe's time. From Poe ". . . go the two great lines of development - the Romantic and the Classic, or . . . the purely Sensational and the purely Intellectual." Edgar Wallace is cited as an example of a Sensational writer,

1 'Detective Fiction', reprinted in _Writing Detective and Mystery Fiction_, ed. A.S. Burack, 1945.

and Freeman Wills Croft as an example of an Intellectual writer. Since 1928 the history of the detective novel has been a history of the ascendancy of the Intellectual over the Sensational up until about 1950 when the trend began slowly to reverse. A discussion of the two types and a resume of their development justifies this generalisation.

The 'Sensational', the 'Romantic', 'gangster' or 'hard-boiled' detective novel, as it is variously called ". . . is concerned with the people, crooks, gamblers, thieves, blackmailers, corrupt policemen, dishonest politicians, who commit crimes. . . . In the novels of this school actual detection takes a relatively minor place. No great secret is made of the murderer's identity and the interest of the story depends on the detective's efforts to fasten the guilt on him and the dangers he incurs while doing so."[1]
R. Warshow[2] writing of the gangster film, characterises it as ". . . a story of enterprise and success ending in precipitate failure. Success is conceived as an increasing power to work injury, it belongs to the city, and it is, of course, a form of evil . . . .the story of his career is a nightmare inversion of the values of ambition and opportunity." Warshow sees a parallel between the "lonely and melancholy" gangster hero and the modern American hero of serious novelists.

Maugham considers Dashiell Hammett's The Maltese Falcon (1932) to have created the vogue for stories of this type, and quotes Raymond Chandler as saying of Hammett that he "gave murder back to the kind of people who commit it for reasons,

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1 'The Decline and Fall of the Detective Story', reprinted in On Literature, 1967.
2 'The Gentleman with a Gun', Encounters, ed. S. Spender et al., 1953-1963.

not just to provide a corpse, and with the means at hand, not with hand-wrought duelling pistols, curare and tropical fish. He put these people down on paper as they are, and he made them talk and think in the language they customarily used for their purposes." J.B. Priestley[1] considers that Hammett "was a powerful originator" and of Chandler he writes: ". . . he accepted a mediocre form - it is his own phrase - and made something like literature out of it." Another commentator[2] credits Chandler with the invention of the "golden-hearted private eye".

Sax Rohmer, whose first book in a series of novels built around the villain Fu Manchu was published in 1913, and Edgar Wallace, who wrote 170-odd books before he died in 1932, were the best-known English writers in this genre.

A later, notorious, novel of this type was James Hadley Chase's No Orchids for Miss Blandish, first published in 1939. According to the publishers "the book was the most read by the men and women of the Armed Forces", selling over two million copies within a few years. George Orwell in his celebrated attack on it in 1944[3] called it a "daydream appropriate to a totalitarian age". He points out that the plot was borrowed from Faulkner's Sanctuary, but that "ultimately only one motive is at work throughout the whole story: the pursuit of power . . . . It is implied throughout No Orchids that being a criminal is only reprehensible in the sense that it does not pay." Although Chase is an Englishman, the book is American in its attitudes, setting and language. Orwell suggests that the glorification of crime was new in the English novel, and he saw it as a

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1 The Moments and other pieces, 1966.
2 Leader writer, TLS 6.10.66.
3 'Raffles and Miss Blandish', reprinted in Decline of the English Murder, 1965.

dangerous importation. It is an imitation rather than an importation, for the glorification of criminals is not new in England (Jonathan Wild was one such gangster hero). L. Stevenson[1] mentions two novels published by Bulwer in the mid-nineteenth century which were attacked on the grounds that he was "portraying criminals sympathetically and encouraging crime."

Somerset Maugham considered that the enormous success of Chandler and Hammett killed the genre, although they had many imitators who "have been so outrageous that they have become preposterous", but the decline of the hard-boiled novel could also be attributed to another cause. A feature which clearly distinguished the Sensational from the Intellectual detective story was its concern with realism, and it was not fortuitous that the heyday of the gangsters in the United States coincided with the heyday of the hard-boiled novel. When gangsterism was reduced, if not eliminated, the factual basis for these stories was destroyed. After the war the talents of the better Sensational writers were transferred to the spy story which gave them similar scope for realistic violence.

The hard-boiled novel has had, in the opinion of at least two critics, a profound influence on some later serious novelists. Mary McCarthy[2] writes: "The masculine novel of sensation . . . seems to have arrived at the Beat Generation via Caldwell, Dashiell Hammett, James M. Cain, Raymond Chandler. . . ." T. Parkinson[3] goes even further with the remark that: "It is from Chandler and Hammett and Hemingway

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1 The English Novel, 1960.
2 On the Contrary, 1961.
3 A Casebook on the Beat, 1961.

that the best modern fiction derives." The connection between the Sensational detective novelists and Hemingway was noted too by L. Fielder[1]: "The one line of fiction which demonstrably descends from Hemingway is not quite literature: a special sort of vulgar, pseudo-realistic detective story, that grows progressively more debased . . . ."

The Intellectual or the Classic detective story is, in contrast to the Sensational detective story, very English in its insistence on using reason and logic to uphold law and order, although the ex-patriate American E.A. Poe is usually credited with its invention in 1841 with Murders in the Rue Morgue. His invention of Dupin "the eccentric and brilliant private detective whose doings are chronicled by an admiring thick-headed friend"[2] paved the way for Conan Doyle whose Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson appeared first in 1882 in A Study in Scarlet. (Their popular equivalents were Sexton Blake and Tinker, whom Dorothy Sayers considers "represent the nearest approach to a national folk-lore"[2]). In her opinion the detective story proper could not flourish "until public sympathy had veered round to the side of law and order." Charles Dickens in Inspector Bucket (Bleak House 1853) created the first fictional police detective; Wilkie Collins in The Moonstone (1868) wrote what T.S. Eliot once termed "the finest, the longest, and the best of detective novels."

The form of the detective story is one of its most striking, even definitive, characteristics. D. Sayers[2] points out that: "It possesses an Aristotelian perfection of beginning, middle and end. A definite and single problem is set, worked out, and solved; its conclusion is not arbitrarily conditioned

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1 Waiting for the End, 1964.
2 'Detective Fiction', reprinted in Writing Detective and Mystery Fiction, ed. A.S. Burack, 1945.

by marriage or death." Somerset Maugham[1] wrote: "Someone is murdered, there is an investigation, suspicion falls on a number of persons, the culprit is discovered and pays the penalty of his crime. This is the classic formula and it contains in itself all the elements of a good story, for it has a beginning, a middle and an end." F. O'Connor[2] said: "There you get a real form - you don't get this fake form imposed. At least it's a . . . logical structure." A. Burgess[3] sees the detective story pattern in three stages - a man dies, a plausible explanation is given for his death, and the real explanation is given later still.

Undoubtedly this formal, logical structure is an important part of the appeal of the detective novel to readers and writers, and it does in part explain why the detective novel reached its peak in the Modern period. A crime reviewer[4] said of <u>Hard Times</u>, <u>Middlemarch</u> and <u>The Portrait of a Lady</u> that they had other qualities than purely "art" qualities, "qualities shared with other enjoyable but not excellent novels of their own times, qualities such as mystery, morality, right pace and shapeliness, and these, discarded by the serious novelist, are now the working tools of the crime writer." In 1932 Q.D. Leavis[5] wrote that: ". . . a not unpleasureable way of relaxing is to exercise the ratiocinative faculties on a minor non-personal problem. It is chiefly this use of fiction that has commercialised novel-writing." Certainly it attracted the sort of readers

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1 <u>On Literature</u>, 1967.
2 <u>Writers at Work</u>, The <u>Paris Review</u> Interviews, 1958.
3 <u>The Novel Now</u>, 1967.
4 <u>TLS</u> 19.6.1969.
5 <u>Fiction and the Reading Public</u>, 1932.

and writers whom one might have expected to prefer the serious novel, but to charge the detective novel with having been the chief cause of the commercialisation of novel-writing is an exaggeration, as the trend had been marked for more years than Q.D. Leavis cares to admit. Neither is the good detective story simply exercising "the ratiocinative faculties"; if it were it would be indistinguishable from a puzzle. A more knowledgeable critic, whose job is reviewing crime fiction wrote of this argument:[1]

> Certainly the novel can be an art form, even if it is suspiciously seldom that it achieves the status of art. But to accept this possibility need not be to deny that (in spite of E.M. Forster's strictures) to be told a shapely, mysterious moral story is a healthful and not a contemptible satisfaction, and that in fulfilling this particular one of perhaps many satisfactions that can be sought of novels, the crime writers are today our best novelists.

Many of the detective story writers who established themselves in the period before the war are still writing successfully, but younger writers are breaking into new territory with this genre. In 1928 Dorothy Sayers[2] warned writers that they must advance into new territory if the form was not to atrophy. There are signs that her words are being heeded.

The formal, logical structure of the classic detective story, while being one of its chief attractions, was limiting for the writer. It imposed psychological limits, for it could not "show the inner workings of the murderer's mind - it must not; for the identity of the murderer is hidden."[2] The character of the investigator could not be developed either, for fear of unbalancing the novel and detracting from the plot which was the writer's chief consideration.

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1 TLS 19.6.1969.
2 'Detective Fiction', reprinted in Writing Detective and Mystery Fiction, ed. A.S. Burack, 1945.

Although its subject matter "deals with the most desperate effects of rage, jealousy, and revenge, it rarely rouches the heights and depths of human passion. It presents us only with a fait accompli, and looks upon death and mutilation with a dispassionate eye."[1] However, once the detective story writer resolved to break away from the rigid patterning of the Classic story, these limitations also fell away and a new kind of detective story was possible, one where the emphasis was on people rather than puzzles.

The impetus to make this break was possibly two-fold. The Classic detective novel had run to seed because, as Somerset Maugham[2] put it: "Every method of murder, every finesse of detection, every guile to throw the reader off the scent, every scene of action in every class of life, has been used again and again." It had also lagged behind other forms of fiction in its failure to acknowledge the growth of psychology. Dorothy Sayers[1] suggests that it was this second factor that encouraged a number of novelists to "recast, under the guise of fiction, actual murder cases drawn from real life." Aldous Huxley's The Gioconda Smile (1922) was one of these, and R.C. Hutchinson's Elephant and Castle (1949), Marguerite Duras's The Viaduct (1967) and more recently, Truman Capote's In Cold Blood have used evidence from trials, interviews with the murderers and evidnnce from witnesses to imaginatively reconstruct the events.

The movement is away from the Classic towards the Romantic type of detective story, and the detective story of the

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1 D. Sayers, 'Detective Fiction', reprinted in Writing Detective and Mystery Fiction, ed. A.S. Burack, 1945.
2 On Literature, 1967.

1960s contains some of the elements of both. The puzzle or story element of the Intellectual type has not been wholly abandoned, but the emphasis has shifted to fuller characterisation and creation of atmosphere. The move towards realism, giving the crime back to the people who commit crimes, has given the novel some of the qualities of the Sensational or Romantic story of Hammett and Chandler. Patricia Highsmith, an American writer, has taken the lead in developing the detective story along these new lines, and in doing so "has achieved for the crime novel what Dorothy Sayers almost achieved for it thirty years ago – the recognition that at its best it can rank with the most serious contemporary 'straight' fiction."[1] Maurice Richardson, The Observer crime reviewer and H.R.F. Keating of the Times Saturday Review have expressed similar opinions.[2] Of her novel Those Who Walk Away (1967) Richardson wrote:

> The characters of the two men emerge very distinctly. And behind them you get a strong feeling of the personality of the dead girl who is the cause of it all . . . . She likes to take male characters and put them in intolerable circumstances, then show you how they react until some critical breaking-point is reached."

The skullduggery is minimal in her novels, but suspense is skilfully maintained. Miss Highsmith is a very accomplished, economical writer, but it is for her exploration of character that she is most remarkable. In The Cry of the Owl (1963), for example, it seems unlikely that the innocent, but not wholly sympathetic hero, will escape the death sentence with so much circumstantial evidence against him. Although it is a beautifully constructed, wholly credible tale, it is the character of the hero which intrigues.

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1 Peter Harris, Cape Times, 19.2.1969.
2 Ob R., 12.2.1967 and TSR 1.2.1969.

Emma Lathen, also an American, has received enthusiastic notices for her novels which open up a new and fruitful territory - the world of big business, a territory which is rarely explored even by serious writers.

It is difficult to discuss the present position of the detective story in England without being reduced to listing names and giving plot summaries, so only a few writers have been selected who, whilst they may not be the best writers in their field, are either representative of a group of similar writers, or are interesting as innovators.

Gwendoline Butler has written a series of novels around the investigations of an Inspector Coffin, and in this she is following a well-established tradition, but the resemblance to the Classic detective story ends there. Coffin himself is an enigmatic character, and the cases he investigates reach no simple, tidy conclusions. In <u>Coffin Waiting</u> (1964) it is not even certain that justice has been done. In <u>Coffin Following</u> (1968) Gwendoline Butler wrote: "No act of violence ever truly dies away, the effects of it go on for ever", a remark which explains the inconclusiveness of her tales, and the attention she pays to atmosphere rather than plotting. A reviewer[1] described this book as "a kind of Grimm's nightmare for grown-ups" and it is this confusion of real and imagined events and people that is her trade-mark. In this she resembles writers like Thomas Hinde and P.H. Newby, although her knack of bringing a particular geographical area to life invites comparison with Simenon.

Jennie Melville is one of a number of women writers who specialise in suburban horror. Her detective, policewoman

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1 <u>TLS</u> 16.5.1968.

Charmian Daniels, does not appear in all her novels and in Nell Alone (1966) the puzzle element is reduced to the minimum. In its place there is atmosphere and tension (rather than suspense). A murderer, who is suffering from hysterical paralysis, is kept a prisoner in the home of his crippled mother by Nell, a psychiatrist and sister of the murdered woman. Nell's motive is revenge and most of the story takes place in the sinister and claustrophobic house. Jennie Melville, like several other writers of her type, excel at the creation of sinister atmospheres in ordinary suburban surroundings.

Mary Stewart can be cited as an example of the romantic thriller writer, a species which Dorothy Sayers rightly deplored. Her My Brother Michael (1959) is set in Greece, for writers of her type specialise in exotic settings within the travelling possibilities of their readers, but the romance and the thriller combine poorly.

An unkind blow was dealt to this type of detective story by Alan Diment whose hero in The Bang Bang Birds (1968) cavorts among "the lushest imaginable sex that can be bought." [1] The detective novel has lagged behind the spy story in offering this kind of fare, but perhaps now that the breakthrough has been made, more novels of this type can be expected.

Nicholas Freeling is one of the most successful thriller writers today, and he is also one of the most concerned to show that there is no distinction between the novel proper and the thriller. He has written both types successfully

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1 TLS 31.10.1968.

and in This is the Castle (1968) he combined the techniques in an amusing novel. A best-selling and vaguely mediocre novelist finds his teenage daughter a problem, and when he interrupts her and her boyfriend meeting clandestinely in the summerhouse, he has the opportunity to shoot him. Here Mr Freeling offers two alternative endings: one where he kills the boy but his action is considered justifiable by the court, in spite of his protestations of guilt; the other where he does not pull the trigger. Freeling is offering a choice between the likely reality or the make-believe thriller-style ending. The novel is really about the writer's choice between facile invention and hard seriousness - the choice between writing a popular novel and a serious one.

The tendency, then, among the better contemporary novelists is to attempt to close the gap between the detective and the serious novel by reducing the puzzle element and encouraging the development of characterisation, of story, of atmosphere and so on. In a move towards realism they have abandoned the amateur investigator in favour of the professional, and there are fewer murders in country houses. However there are only a few novelists who are capable of elevating the detective story from a craft to an art (Joan Fleming, Julian Symons, Peter Dickinson and Dick Francis should be included here). The trend is apparent, but it has not as yet affected all the detective novelists, most of whom tend conservatively to stick to tried and tested formulae. It is still possible for Graham Greene[1] to call detective stories "the modern fairy tales" and for

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1 Collected Essays, 1969.

a criminologist[1] to complain that he feels ". . . an irritation with the crime novel or thriller in its conventional form. With the exception of Raymond Chandler, John le Carré and at times Simenon, I can think of no writer who has used the form intelligently as a vehicle for social insights and social criticism, or as an art-form." Perhaps the majority of detective story writers believe the field of social criticism to be already overcrowded. There are however three continental writers who can be fairly considered to have used the detective novel in the way he suggests it could be used - Georges Simenon, Friedrich Durrenmatt and Marguerite Duras. They are all well-known in England in translation and the influence of their writing is apparent in some English novels.

Georges Simenon, who was described by André Gide as "perhaps the greatest novelist of contemporary France" is better known in England for his series of novels about Inspector Maigret than he is for his serious writing. Simenon, a remarkably prolific writer, is the author of over 600 novels and 1,200 stories which have appeared under twenty-five pseudonyms.[2] He said in an interview[3] that he began writing commercial novels with the intention of training himself for more serious works, and then went on to "transitional fiction" (the Maigret novels), followed by tense psychological novels. Simenon is weak on plot but as A. Koestler[4] remarks: ". . . his works become works of art precisely at the point where character and atmosphere become more important than plot, where imagination triumphs over invention." A reviewer[5]

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1 D. Davies in Intellectuals Today, ed. T.R. Fyvel, 1968.
2 Information from Pooter, TSR 15.2.1969.
3 Writers at Work, The Paris Review Interviews, 1957-8.
4 The Trail of the Dinosaur, 1955.
5 TLS 12.12.1968.

suggests that: "Simenon's endless attraction . . . is his sensitive rendering of atmosphere, of the feelig of a locality, and the acuity of his social observations. He has the eye both of a detective and of a popular historian." Simenon has realised Dorothy Sayers's prediction that if the detective novel was not to die it would have to link itself more closely to the novel of manners while separating itself more widely from the novel of adventure.

Friedrich Durrenmatt, a Swiss, has developed the detective novel in another direction. He is a master of atmosphere and in The Pledge and The Quarry (1962) in particular he also shows great skill in plot construction. Although he is an excellent detective story writer, his chief concern is with the moral problems that crime raises. In A Dangerous Game (1960), which is not a story of detection, he considers the concepts of guilt and justice. A man who is not, according to the law, guilty of murder, may be morally culpable. In The Pledge and The Quarry he questions the motives of those who demand to see justice done and in the latter he also discusses the position of the willing victim. In effect Durrenmatt uses the form of the detective story to enquire into the nature of justice, into the justice of legal justice. By doing so he is questioning the very basis of the detective novel, the belief that a man must be punished for his crime.

Marguerite Duras, a Frenchwoman, is only incidentally a detective story writer. She is an existentialist writer and the effect of this on 10.30 on a Summer Night (1962), for example, is that she gives the hunted murderer no real objective existence except in the eyes of the woman whose

failure to save him parallels her own failure to save her marriage. Marguerite Duras is a spare, economical writer with "a talent to retain and disturb her readers without ever defining her 'somethings'".[1] Her play, The Viaduct (1967) is based on an actual murder, but she is interested in studying the motives of the murderers, rather than in the deed itself.

A number of serious novelists writing in English have seen some of the possibilities in a form which "deals with the most desperate effects of rage, jealousy and revenge"[2], but none has achieved a novel of the stature of Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment. They have usually contented themselves with adopting some of the methods of the detective novelist rather than with exploring the possibilities of the material.

The first chapter of Iris Murdoch's The Nice and the Good (1966) suggests that she might be opening up, for her, new territory. A government official has apparently committed suicide and lawyer John Ducane is asked to investigate. The plot, once introduced, is soon neglected and revived only to provide an excuse for an excursion into black magic and, in the end, to force Ducane into the moral position of having to judge himself before he delivers judgement on others. This last never emerges as the central them, however, for the chief function of the plot "is to provide narrative justification or at least narrative occasion for a series of amorous encounters and confrontations."[3] It is the mixture as before, minus incest on this occasion.

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1 TLS 20.3.1969.
2 D. Sayers, 'Detective Fiction', Writing Detective and Mystery Fiction, ed. A.S. Burack, 1945.
3 TLS 25.1.1968.

C.P. Snow's first published novel was a detective story, Death under Sail (1932) and for some of his later novels he has taken his model from the Classic detective story of the 1930s. As Angus Wilson pointed out[1], Snow's The Masters (1951), The New Men (1954) and The Affair (1960) have clearly used this form. In The Affair, for example, an unappealing young don is dismissed on the grounds of scientific fraud, but doubts as to the justice of his dismissal arise and the College finds itself divided into two camps on the matter. The "crime" precipitates an examination of personalities and motives, and although the detective story element is never lost, it takes second place to Snow's more serious purposes, an illustration of the conflict between the individual conscience and expediency. J. Gindin[2] considers that many of Snow's novels are melodramatic thrillers and he notes the parallel between The Affair and the Dreyfus Case where Dreyfus was finally vindicated "after a long struggle with the forces of reaction." A later novel by Snow, The Sleep of Reason (1968) is also based on an actual crime, in this case the Moors Murders. The title of his novel comes from Goya: "The sleep of reason brings forth monsters" and in this novel he tries to analyse why reason sleeps and where the monsters come from. The sadistic violence of the 1960s is the subject of his enquiry.

Where Snow tries to understand the source of violence from a rational viewpoint, Colin Wilson uses an emotional approach. He is more successful at getting into the minds or mindlessness of his criminal heroes but he can only portray and not explain.

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1 'The Dilemma of the Contemporary Novelist', Approaches to the Novel, ed. J. Colmer, 1966.
2 Postwar British Fiction, 1963.

His attempts at psychological explanations are trite - for example, in The Glass Cage (1966) the murderer feared that his father was insane, his mother a nymphomaniac, an explanation which does not account for either his character or his actions. Both this novel and Ritual in the Dark (1960) are based on the exploits of Jack the Ripper and his theme in both is violence, more specifically the sexually sadistic multiple murder. The detection element is there - in The Glass Cage the murderer's chalked-up quotations from Blake lead to his identification - but Wilson is fascinated with the irrational, the demonic and the perverted, and he achieves no distance between himself and his heroes. He offers no moral judgements but goes to the other extreme in portraying his heroes with overt admiration.

Evan S. Connell in The Diary of a Rapist (1967) takes a similar subject to Wilson's, but his hero is a young man in a monotonous office job. His diary reveals his clinical history, and there is little about the rape itself.

J.B. Priestley who has written a number of novels which use the form of popular novels, has also attempted - not very successfully - to use the detective story form in Salt is Leaving (1966).

Peter de Polnay has written detective stories in The Run of Night (1963) and In Raymond's Wake (1965) but has failed to produce either good detective stories or good serious novels from his material.

Bruce Marshall in The Divided Lady (1960) has the original idea of making his investigator a chartered accountant,

but the tale soon degenerates into a novel of passion in Italy.

Daphne du Maurier achieved a best-seller blend of historical romance and thriller in My Cousin Rachel (1951), but her book would have had little appeal to connoisseurs of the detective story.

John le Carré has written a conventional murder story (resembling those of Michael Innes) in A Murder of Quality (1962) and Mary Charles has tried her hand at the form with Several Deaths in the Suburbs (1962).

Roy Fuller's crime stories, With My Little Eye (1948), The Second Curtain (1953) and Fantasy and Fugue(1954) showed him to be interested in the relevance of violence to our violent society. His novels explore the theme of individual guilt.

This list of serious writers who have been attracted to the detective story form is by no means comprehensive, but it serves to illustrate the frequency with which serious writers are turning to popular forms such as this one. The detective story, because of its subject matter, seems particularly well suited to serious treatment.

B. SCIENCE FICTION

The historians of science fiction can construct a respectable genealogy for the genre, including in its ancestors such writers as Lucian, Swift, Samuel Butler, Jules Verne, H.G. Wells, Aldous Huxley, Wyndham Lewis and George Orwell, but this ingenious exercise only obscures

the fact that science fiction is, in A. Koestler's words[1], "a typical product of the atomic age".

Tales of invention were popular in late Victorian boys' magazines[2], but they bear little resemblance to modern science fiction for the inventions, such as the steam horse, were fanciful rather than plausible. H.G. Wells and Jules Verne are usually regarded as the pioneers of science fiction, but there is an important difference between their visions of the future and those of later writers. L. Lerner[3] suggests this distinction could be made: ". . . the Utopias belong to the nineteenth century, the anti-Utopias to the twentieth." Wells and Verne were excited by the possibilties of new technological developments and their optimistic view of the world of the future, their belief in progress, was characteristic of the pre-World War I intellectuals.

By the time Aldous Huxley and George Orwell began writing science fiction, the climate of optimism had changed to one of pessimism. A. Burgess[4] goes so far as to suggest that Huxley's <u>Brave New World</u> (1932) is a counterblast to Wells, an illustration of what could happen if Wells's scientific world took over. Although <u>Brave New World</u> and Orwell's <u>Nineteen Eighty-Four</u> (1949) are usually held to be fine examples of science fiction, they are, in my opinion, not strictly science fiction at all. They are concerned with showing where certain political trends which were apparent at the time of writing could lead. The totalitarian states of the future which they visualised are realised

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1 <u>The Trail of the Dinosaur</u>, 1955.
2 R.S. Turner in <u>Boys Will Be Boys</u>, 1948 discusses some.
3 'Novels of the Future', <u>List.</u>, 26.7.1962.
4 <u>The Novel Now</u>, 1967.

with the help of science and technology, but they are only instruments of the politicians. Their disillusion is with man, rather than with his machines. G. Woodcock [1] said of Nineteen Eighty-Four that it ". . . is, admittedly, a novel about the future, but the future conceived as a degenerated present, extending along the lines of absurd logic the experiences of a contemporary Everyman." It would be more accurate to call these two novels "visions of the future" or, as I have done, "political thrillers". A recent example of this type is Angus Wilson's The Old Men at the Zoo (1961). It is set in the future ". . . in order to objectify, more easily, tendencies and attitudes clearly manifest within contemporary society."[2]

True science fiction is only accidentally concerned with politics. Its chief concern is with the development of modern technology, and very often with specific developments, such as rockets, satellites, atomic bombs and chemical and biological discoveries. It was not surprising therefore that science fiction developed more quickly in America after the war than it did in England, where technology advanced more slowly. In the opinion of P. Mayersberg[3] the best exponents of the genre today are still Americans (Ray Bradbury, Frederick Pohl and Alfred Bester among them). A. Koestler[4] saw the founding of the British Science-Fiction Club in the early 1950s as a sign that "the new craze, a kind of cosmic jitterbug, has crossed the Atlantic . . . ." (the jitterbug crossed much earlier - the founding of the Club was an indication of its new seriousness). The early science fiction writers

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1 The Crystal Spirit, 1967.
2 J. Gindin, Postwar British Fiction, 1963.
3 'The Corridors of the Mind', List., 9.12.1965.
4 The Trail of the Dinosaur, 1955.

were fascinated by the actual technological details, and many of their novels read like a Do-it-Yourself book on Rocketry. The emphasis was on science, not on fiction. By 1946 the science fiction boom had begun.[1] In the twenty-odd years since then science fiction has developed along a number of different lines.

The science fiction novel which shares affinities with the horror stories of Poe and Bierce has undergone a metamorphosis. Bug-eyed Monsters and Six-headed Martians have fallen into disrepute. The horrors conjured up by the imaginations of science fiction writers today are less tangible or physical, and very much more horrifying than those that entertained the young earlier in this century. "The idea of another race somewhere in existence, perhaps on another planet, always on the point of materialising on Earth" which was an idea developed by H.P. Lovecraft[2] has continued to be popular. Harry Harrison's An Alien Agony[3] is a recent example. The adventure stories which depended on time machines (a Wells invention) are now rightly regarded as romances, which have little to do with science fiction. The time machine, or a variation of it, is still popular, but it is not used for adventure story purposes.

Some of the most admired science fiction writers are scientists, like O.R. Frisch, Leo Szilard, Norbert Wiener, Fred Hoyle and R.S. Richardson, and their stories are, consequently, based on real scientific problems, problems whose implications they explore. To the aficianados of science fiction, it is this group which contains the real science fiction writers, but to the less technically minded

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1 Goff Conklin in an editorial introduction to The Best of Sci-Fi (1961) gives this date.
2 According to P. Mayersberg, 'The Corridors of the Mind,' List., 9.12.1965.
3 Published in More Penguin Science Fiction, ed. B.W. Aldiss, 1963.

they have little appeal. The novels and short stories of this group are technical manuals, and those readers who do not find the intricate workings of the Anti-Gravitational Overdrive of absorbing interest, are likely to dimiss science-fiction as literature. Fred Hoyle's story 'The Black Cloud'[1] has this passage in its first paragraph:

> But the short wave transmitters failed to work, and for a reason that was soon discovered. The ionization of the atmospheric gases at a height of about fifty miles turned out to be abnormally high. This was giving rise to an excessive amount of collional damping, as the radio engineers called it.

It continues in this vein for the rest of the story. The writers of this group, the scientific science fiction writers, are more successful with the short story form than they are with the novel which requires more than a single idea to sustain it. The short story does not require depth of characterisation and it is here, in their preference for phenomena, that the scientific writers show their skill - and their weakness. The technical details are told clearly and well, although they often require a certain amount of prior knowledge from the reader, and they have an appeal to such readers. To those in search of human interest - except in its widest application - these novels are a disappointment. The argument between the scientific science fiction admirers, and those who find in it so little of what they believe the novel should contain, still rages. A brief discussion of the argument is outlined later.

To the less technically minded the most interesting science fiction produced today is that in which the mechanics are reduced to the bare minimum. The source of inspiration

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1 From his collection, The Black Cloud, 1957.

is still the discoveries of scientists, but the desire to inform has been ~~subsumed~~ subordinated to the need to explore the implications of these discoveries. An excellent example of this type is the short story by Daniel Keyes entitled Flowers for Algernon.[1] A drug is discovered which can temporarily increase intelligence. Keyes does not, as the scientific science fiction writer would, tell of the discovery or the probable chemistry of the drug. Instead he writes the diary of the man on whom it was tested - it is both a moving and disturbing document.

There is another type of science fiction which could more properly be called "possibility fiction" or "context manipulation fiction", a term K. Amis and R. Conquest used in their Introduction to Spectrum. In this type of science fiction the writers use the methods of the scientist, but their work is not necessarily inspired by the discoveries of science. In order to examine certain phenomena, the scientist isolates his experimental material to eliminate certain factors and introduce others. In fiction this is done by placing the material - usually human beings - in the future or on an unknown planet or country. Kingsley Amis[2] wrote: "Obviously when one deals with isolated planets or isolated islands one does this for a certain purpose. A setting in contemporary London or a London of the future couldn't provide one with the same isolation and the heightening of consciousness it engenders."

John Wyndham in The Day of the Triffids (1951) is writing this type of science fiction novel. The question he poses is: what would happen if the human race were suddenly

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1 Published in The Best from Fantasy and Science Fiction, 9, ed. R.P. Mills.
2 In an article in Encounter, 1965.

afflicted with the loss of one of its senses, in this case the sense of sight? Wyndham sets his book in the future to make the tale more credible, and the loss of sight is brought about by "the greatest free firework display ever" when the Earth's orbit passed through a cloud of comet debris. The Triffids, who are not strictly necessary, provide an additional source of horror. Wyndham shows organized society breaking up under the pressures of the disaster, but he reaches a conclusion unusual for a science fiction writer - he suggests that man can recover, fight back and rebuild a society.

William Golding's Lord of the Flies (1954) is similarly concerned with an investigation into the nature of men and the societies they build and he too uses a scientific disaster to produce the situation he wishes to study. He relies on an atomic war to place his characters in a special situation. The war is enacted off-stage and as far as the plot is concerned its only function is to explain how a group of boys came to be stranded on a tropical island. The war is important to the theme for such wars are caused by men, but the scientific details of the war do not interest him.

A combination of science fiction and the fable has been tried by George Orwell in Animal Farm (1945) and Michael Frayn in A Very Private Life (1968). Frayn begins his novel: "Once upon a time there will be a girl called Uncumber. Uncumber will have a younger brother called Sulpice, and they will live with their parents in a house in the middle of the woods." Uncumber lives at a time when the upper-classes have satisfied their desire for privacy by living

in houses with no physical contact with the outside world. "Holovision" brings them everything, including visitors if they wish. "A Very Private Life is about things which now or in the near future seem likely to concern us more closely: drugs both medical and hallucinogenic, longevity, the treatment of personality, penology . . . mass communications, dropping-out, the reduction of so many aspects of life to numbers or to strips of magnetic tape, the problems of food and waste, and ultimately of perception and of life itself."[1]

In the 1950s science-fiction was the most popular form of popular fiction in England. Its very popularity told against it in the eyes of many critics and it was not until such writers as William Golding, Anthony Burgess[2] and Angus Wilson began to use the form for some of their serious novels that the general air of disapproval changed to one of grudging acceptance. There are still some vocal opponents of the science fiction novel, but they are outnumbered by critics who see science fiction as the possible saviour of the novel.

Quotations from only three supporters of the science fiction novel will be given here as they put forward the most common reasons for giving it their support. Angus Wilson[3] believes that the only form of popular novel which will readily respond to being adopted by serious novelists is science fiction, ". . . because the one thing that the novelist needs at the moment is the liberation of fancy, the liberation of imagination, the liberation from the

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1 A review in TLS 3.10.1968.
2 The Wanting Seed, 1962 has a stronger scientific basis than A Clockwork Orange, 1962.
3 'The Dilemma of the Contemporary Novelist', Approaches to the Novel, ed. J. Colmer, 1966.

real world around us; and science fiction, with the enormous paradoxes that it proposes, can often liberate you in exactly that way." David Downes[1] sees the possibilities differently: ". . . it almost always carries a central theme of social comment. Throughout the McCarthy era, American science fiction writers were pumping out work of pure anti-McCarthyism." Frederick Pohl in his Introduction to a collection of science fiction stories[2] values the form for its contribution to our understanding of the increasingly scientific world, and for posing the questions which are so often unasked because we have not understood the implications of new discoveries. Science fiction, then, is variously regarded as a liberator of the imagination, a tool for social comment and an educational instrument.

The opponents of Angus Wilson's viewpoint are critics whose definitions of the novel are rather more rigid. In particular they are deeply suspicious of anything verging on fantasy, an element they discover in science fiction. Mary McCarthy[3] contends that the distinctive mark of the novel is its concern with the actual world, the world of fact, of verifiable figures and statistics, and on this basis she separates novels from fables and romances. Works of the future, like historical novels, are outside the order of nature so do not belong with the novel. Miss McCarthy's criticism of some of the wilder flights of fancy to which some science fiction writers are prone is valid, but in science fiction as in every other form of writing there is a high proportion of what Frederick Pohl[4] calls "trash".

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1 Intellectuals Today, ed. T.R. Fyvel, 1968.
2 The Expert Dreamers, 1963.
3 On the Contrary, 1961.
4 op cit.

He puts the figure as high as ninety per cent, and it is this ninety per cent that Mary McCarthy is really attacking. The other ten per cent is based on fact, whether it be scientific, political, social or psychological fact.

G. Steiner[1] wrote: "Science fiction alters at will the co-ordinators of space and time; it can set effect before cause; it works within a logic of total potentiality - 'all that can be imagined can happen.'" Unlike Angus Wilson who expressed a similar view, Steiner sees this as harmful to the novel, for " . . . By its very nature and vision, the art of the novel is realistic . . . . The strident absurdities of science fiction . . . are an attempt, ultimately self-negating, to 'outbid' reality . . . ." To this science fiction admirers could reply that the "strident absurdities" of today are often the facts of tomorrow and are no more absurd than some real scientific discoveries. Moreover, the moral and ethical problems these writers pose are real problems.

A. Koestler[2] quotes a remark by Gerald Heard in which he expressed his opinion that science fiction is "the mark of the dawn of a new vision, and the rise of a new art", an opinion with which Mr Koestler disagrees.:

> I believe that science-fiction is good entertainment, and that it will never become good art . .... . At first sight one would of course expect that imaginative descriptions of non-human societies on alien planets would open new vistas for the somewhat stagnant novel of our time. But most disappointingly this is not the case, and for a simple reason. Our imagination is limited; we cannot project ourselves into the distant future any more than into the distant past . . . . For every culture is an island. It communicates with other islands but it is only familiar with itself. And art means . . . in the last resort broadening and

1 Language and Silence, 1967.
2 The Trail of the Dinosaur, 1955.

page sep. needed.

> deepening our understanding of ourselves. Swift's Gulliver's Travels, Huxley's Brave New World, Orwell's Ninteen Eighty-Four. . . are literature precisely to the extent to which they are not science-fiction, to which they are works of disciplined imagination and not to unlimited fantasy.

In this quotation Koestler has raised two important objections to science fiction. He accuses it firstly of attempting the impossible, and secondly of indulging in unlimited fantasy in its attempt to imagine the unimaginable. The first point is more serious, for it places strictures on the scope of the novel, demanding in effect that the novelist should recognise his limitations. The danger of such a point of view is that the novelist who accepts it will aim too low, contenting himself with producing work well within his powers - which is one of the major faults of contemporary English novelists. Rather than risking a failure, they limit themselves to endlessly reworking the same material. To say that the science fiction novel has so far been disappointing and that it will never become good art (and to base this on apparently limited reading) seems a particularly short-sighted view. Koestler's second objection, that we cannot project ourselves into the distant future any more than into the distant past, raises doubts as to whether it is worth trying to project ourselves into any alien situation - such as the mind of another person. If the novel is not to be straightforward autobiography, such projections must be made. John Wain[1] accuses science fiction of being inimical to both art and humanity. :

> Modern science fiction . . . projects its human characters into a universe which permits of no emotional response, no self-awareness or insight into others, at anything above the novelette level. The characters in a science

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1 Essays on Literature and Ideas (1963).

> fiction story cannot engage with emotional and moral problems because their attention is incessantly directed towards phenomena. Wells and Jules Verne placed the human reaction at the centre; the conquistadores of Astounding Science Fiction place it at the periphery just because their main object is to astound.

John Wain's criticism of the "inhumanity" of science fiction has some validity if it is directed against scientific science fiction (although the desire to Astound is very old-fashioned), but it has little validity where the other types of science fiction are concerned, the type written by Daniel Keyes or the type written by William Golding. John Wain's criticism of science fiction is based on his view that the function or purpose of the novel is to record, explain and examine society. Its chief concern should be social. A review of the novel's history would indicate that the social has predominated, but to formulate a rule from this observation can only harm the novel. A review of the novel's history would also indicate that the growth and vitality of the novel owes much to the fact that it has not followed any rules. If the post-atomic age produces a type of novel which is unlike its predecessors, it does so because of the special needs and conditions of the age. Such novels should not be deplored because they contradict some hypothetical "law".

In spite of the criticisms of these and other opponents of science fiction it has established itself as one of the most successful forms of popular fiction and it is increasingly accepted as a valid form for serious writing In Britain the Arts Council recently awarded a substantial grant to New Worlds, an English science fiction magazine which has been published for twenty years. (The short story which now has so few publishing outlets is very

dependent on such magazines for its survival). Science fiction now has a regular reviewing section in most literary and national newspapers. Laurence Lerner [1] wrote: "No one, of course, writes a novel about the future. What interests a novelist is always the present; and choosing a future setting is simply a way of pointing to the tendencies that interest or alarm him . . . . We can go further. Unless the prophetic novelist is extrapolating from the present, his work will have no interest." If Lerner's observation is accepted, the objections to science fiction fall away and the road lies open for novels of the future to be judged on their merits, to be judged on the same standards as are novels of the present or past.

C. WESTERN

The cachet of respectability now accorded to science fiction has not been accorded to the Western which is also a twentieth century invention. Westerns are loosely based on the adventures of the American frontiersmen during the 1870s. They are so loosely based that they cannot be described as historical novels. They are thoroughly conservative, true to their forms, repeating established patterns with slight variations. As A. Mizener[2] has pointed out, the Western is "something like the old pastoral." It also has affinities with the Romance, particularly in its adherence to a rigid code of honour. R. Warshow[3] calls the Westerner "the last gentleman". To the Westerner, he says, ". . . Honour . . . is a style, concerned with

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1 'Novels about the Future', List., 26.7. 1962.
2 The Sense of Life in the Modern Novel, 1965.
3 'The Gentleman with a Gun', Encounters, ed. S. Spender et al, 1963.

harmonious appearance as much as with desirable consequences and tending towards the denial of life in favour of art." He is a descendant of the Knights of the Round Table,[1] the Three Musketeers, the French Foreign Legion and the heroes of the stage melodramas popular in the 1880's, and he appeals to the same sort of audience. The Western also provides " a complete and self-contained drama . . . in a time where other more consciously serious art forms are increasingly complex, uncertain, and ill-defined." (Warshow).

There is no intrinsic reason why the Western should not rise to the level of art, but it rarely does so except in the cinema. Warshow suggests that "the Westerner comes into the field of serious art only when his moral code, without ceasing to be compelling is also seen to be imperfect. The Westerner at his best exhibits a moral ambiguity; this arises from the fact that, whatever his justification, he is a killer of men." The Western also offers "a serious orientation to the problem of violence . . . . One of the well-known peculiarities of modern civilized opinion is its refusal to acknowledge the value of violence . . . . our concept of heroism tends to be a passive one . . . .The celebration of acts of violence is left more and more to the irresponsible." In spite of the possibilities outlined here, the Western has not attracted serious English novelists. William Burroughs[2] has announced his intention of writing a book on the American West and a gunfighter, using the cut-up method of his earlier works in its preparation, and straight narration in its final version. Perhaps his novel will attract other serious writers to the form. In the meantime the Western provides an example of a literary form which has proved more successful in another medium - the cinema.

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1 The Hollywood version rather than Mallory's.
2 <u>Writers at Work</u> 3, The <u>Paris Review</u> Interviews, 1968.

D. GOTHIC ROMANCE

"Popular fiction of the early nineteenth century was steeped in darkness and diablerie: spectres gliding in a green phosphorescence, hags picking over the bones . . . these were the stock-in-trade of the Gothic, or bogus Gothic, novelist. The vogue for these romantic horrors had been set by Horace Walpole (The Castle of Otranto), Ann Radcliffe (The Mysteries of Udolpho) and Matthew Gregory Lewis (The Monk)."[1] The Gothic romance was an instant success and Mrs Radcliffe was the most popular novelist in England between 1775 and 1800.[2] The Gothic novel has since fathered a number of offspring, among them the horror, ghost and thriller stories.

It might have been expected that the Gothic romance would have disappeared from the literary scene by the 1960s for it presents a number of difficulties to the contemporay novelist. The horror story has demonstrated that fears which come from the interior psychological world are paradoxically more real than the external fears offered by the Gothic romance. The dark inside is more terrifying than the dark outside to the sceptical modern reader. Gothic romances were traditionally set in deserted manors on lonely moors or in cobwebby castles, buildings which could support a population of vampires more easily than a ranch-style house can. The basic plot of the Gothic novel, that of the young and rightful heir deprived of his birthright by evil-scheming relatives or guardians, is not one which is immediately apposite to the contemporary scene. Nonetheless, in spite of these difficulties, the

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1 R.S. Turner, Boys Will be Boys, 1948.
2 L. Stevenson, The English Novel, 1960.

Gothic romance is still very much alive.

Two characteristics of the Gothic romance have contributed to its survival - it adapts happily to costume drama, and its territory is the irrational and supernatural. Daphne du Maurier, who has been made a Dame of the British Empire for her services to literature, is one of the most popular contemporary novelists with an avid, primarily female, readership. She specialises in Gothic romances, of which My Cousin Rachel (1951) can be taken as typical. It adheres fairly closely to the Gothic model, with its young heir cheated out of his inheritance by a beautiful but evil woman. He lives almost alone in a large country house (plenty of atmospheric writing here) and the action takes place in some unspecified historical past. His love for Rachel (part-Italian, beautiful, passionate) is a kind of madness, a fever, which almost destroys him. He tells his tale at some length, padding it out with passages of "fine writing", which always seems to go down well with the middle-class female reader. The hero is, in the nick of time, saved from his mad passion, and even his inheritance is restored. Daphne du Maurier has written fourteen best-sellers - the secret of her success possibly lies in a remark she made when goaded by a critic: "I do, at least, believe in my own nonsense."[1] Her readers apparently believe too.

Pastiche is rapidly becoming a popular technique among contemporary novelists - a number of books have appeared in the 'sixties which suggest this. Two of them, Evelyn Berckman's The Heir of Starvelings (1968) and Celia Dale's Act of Love (1969) are successful pastiches of the ~~Gothic~~

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1 Quoted in 'Daphne du Maurier', The Cape Argus, 4.6.1969.

Gothic romance. Of Evelyn Berckman's book a reviewer wrote:[1] ". . . a really horrid novel with fleshcreeping touches of Gothick . . . . the brave bereaved daughter of a personage who applies herself to the task of redeeming the starveling waif who is the heir to an evil, rotting, peer."

Because the territory of the Gothic romance is the irrational and supernatural, it lends itself easily to symbolism and to allegorical treatment. Traditionally it purveys sexual and sadistic titillation (Matthew Lewis's The Monk, with its tale of the seduction of the monk Ambrosio by the devil in the form of a woman, and his subsequent torture at the hands of the Spanish Inquisition was, not surprisingly, banned as immoral). To three post-war writers, Iris Murdoch, Mervyn Peake and John Fowles, the Gothic romance has had an especial appeal, and they have used this form for serious novels which investigate the irrational in man.

> When I became quite certain that it was locked, I stepped back into the moonlight and looked up at the house. Although it was barely midnight, there was not a light showing. . . . I moved through a soft tide of groundsel and small thistles to try the two front casements, but they were both firm and a greater blackness breathed at me from within. . . . I walked a little, with dewy steps, and my shadow, thin and darkest blue, detached itself from the bulk of the house and stealthily followed. At the side it was all dark too and protected by such a dense jungle of ash saplings and young elder trees that it would have been impossible to reach a window, even had there been one unlatched. . . . The clouded moon had spread a luminous transparent limb across the sky, and showed me the silhouettes of the great trees which surrounded the house. . . . An owl hooted, slowly, deliberately, casting out one inside the other his expanding rings of sound. . . . I must have been standing there for some time in a sad reverie when I saw what for a weird second looked like a reflection of myself. . . . I have always been afraid of the dark and of things that happen in the dark: and this night illumination was worse than darkness. . . . The moonlight

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1 TLS 15.8.1968.

> fell in streaks through the overgrown lattice of the porch, weighed down with honeysuckle, and revealed the fumbling hand and the key. Then the door gave softly to show the thick waiting blackness of the house. . . . I went to my mother's door. . . . I had not expected her face to be uncovered. . . . Her face was a yellowish white and narrowed, shrunk already away from life, altogether smaller. But her long hair . . . seemed vital still, as if the terrible news had not yet come to it. It seemed even to move a little at my entrance. . . . I looked at what lay before me with a horror which was not love or pity or sadness, but was more like fear. . . . I reached my own door and opened it wide, and then stopped in my tracks. The moon shone clearly on to my bed and revealed the form of a young girl with long glistening hair.

This quotation would be readily recognisable to the regular reader of Gothic romance or horror stories, for it displays many of the trappings common to these forms. The setting is archetypal. It is midnight, the house with its casements (not windows) is mysteriously dark and its garden is a jungle. The moon is clouded and even the owl, the bird of ill-omen is there. Inanimate things like shadows are given life. The action too follows a familiar pattern with the hallucinatory appearance of the young man (who is also a foreigner) and the visit to the dead mother with the unnaturally alive hair. Romance appears with the vision of the lovely young girl with long glistening hair.

The passage quoted is in fact from the first chapter of Iris Murdoch's The Italian Girl (1964). This book, A Severed Head (1961), The Unicorn (1963) and The Time of the Angels (1966) are the novels in which Miss Murdoch comes closest to writing a twentieth century Gothic romance. The quotation from The Italian Girl was given at some length because, in showing how much Iris Murdoch owes to the classic Gothic romances, it introduces a doubt as to the success of her attempt to revive the form for serious purposes.

Angus Wilson [1] warns that: ". . . the form of a novel does matter enormously, and however serious your intentions . . . the chosen form does to some extent determine the nature of the novel." The question to be considered here is whether Iris Murdoch has been defeated by the form, whether the four novels mentioned are no more than Gothic romances, or whether she has been able to use the form for more serious purposes than did her popular predecessors.

It has already been demonstrated that her style of writing exhibits the cliches common to the form ("I looked . . . with a horror which was not love or pity or sadness, but was more like fear. (?) Her characterisation is similarly affected. A comparison between the characters in Emily Bronte's Wuthering Heights and the characters in, say, The Time of the Angels reveals the flatness, the lack of complexity of the latter. Heathcliff and Carel Fisher are comparable characters. Both are mysterious and ultimately unknowable, but Heathcliff is alive in a way that Carel is not. Carel has no life outside the pages of the book, and very little within. The difference between the two arises partly from Miss Murdoch's obsession with only one side of her characters: the irrational, unreasoning side, and particularly the area where he is most irrational, his sexual behaviour. The variety of characters she assembles under one roof - an Anglican priest who has lost his faith, a coloured housekeeper who is his mistress, an invalid niece, an aspiring poetess and twenty-four year old virgin, a Russian emigré porter and his conscienceless son - are assembled only to take part in a stylised dance which has

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1 'The Dilemma of the Contemporary Novelist', Approaches to the Novel, ed. J. Colmer, 1966.

the fantastic quality of the tortured imaginings of a frustrated spinster, but not a genuinely passionate one. The sexual permutations dictate the pattern of the plot, and the characters themselves are only marionettes. Iris Murdoch's only interest in her characters is to display - for the reader's titillation rather than his edification - their unusual matings. They have no life outside this dance which makes them one-dimensional. Even their sexual behaviour is unconvincing for they are not victims of irresistible passions - their couplings and uncouplings are dictated by the writer. As a fantasy, as a gothic romance, the book has some appeal, but Iris Murdoch has not achieved a harmonious synthesis of the Gothic romance and the serious novel.

There are a number of reasons why Iris Murdoch was attracted to the form. She gives one herself in an interview:[1]

> The supernatural - this is partly an obsession of my own. Partly also, I think - this is something I don't remain clear about - that in an age such as ours, where the world of religion and God and gods has become completely problematic, there are more psychological forces working loose, as it were, as if they were demons and spirits. I think it's true that the patterns which keep up the structure in my work . . . are sexual, mythological, psychological patterns . . . .

In the same interview she described The Italian Girl as having "this strong, close-knit Freudian theme". The Gothic romance is particularly suited to a psychological approach. Lewis's The Monk demonstrated this for ". . . Psychologically, we know that his being a monk is an escape from his true nature, and that the women who appears in the story to be outside him, a separate person, is in reality an expression of his personality and inner desires."[2]

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1 Interviewed by Ronald Bryden, The List., 4.4.1963.
2 P. Mayersberg, 'The Corridors of the Mind', The List., 9.12.1965.

The Gothic romance calls for atmospheric writing, at which Miss Murdoch often shows an unusual skill. The characters of a Gothic romance live under one roof, virtually prisoners of the house. Iris Murdoch achieves this state in The Time of the Angels by sealing off the house with fog and snow (only twice does the fog lift). A variety of characters can be assembled under one roof by using such devices as a death in the family, as in The Italian Girl, or by other circumstances.

The attractions of the Gothic romance to a writer like Iris Murdoch are understandable, but it is doubtful whether she has succeeded in adding anything new to the form. The "sexual, mythological, psychological patterns" which "keep up the structure" look remarkably like the normal patterns of the Gothic romance.

Iris Murdoch's use of symbolism and allegory has drawn many commentators eager to expound its intricacies, but there have been fewer eager to offer the same treatment to Mervyn Peake's gothic trilogy, Titus Groan (1946), Gormenghast (1950) and Titus Alone (1959). At first sight it would appear to be a fertile field for symbol-spotters to explore, for it is apparently an allegory. Peake described a closed society dedicated to the retention of the status quo. A young revolutionary from the lower classes attempts to overthrow the rulers, but is defeated, and the first book in the trilogy ends with the proclamation of the seventy-seventh Earl of Gormenghast. The parallels are easily drawn, but difficulties arise when more detailed explication of the symbols is sought. Neither the characters nor the setting fit comfortably into any allegorical pattern,

but it is tempting to seek such patterns, for it is almost inconceivable that Peake should have imagined a world so complete in itself that it has no parallels or links with any world we know. There are no obvious moral lessons to be learnt from his books, but they are far from being merely frivolous entertainment or idle fantasies.

Although the world Mervyn Peake imagines is even further from reality than any imagined by Iris Murdoch, his world is, paradoxically, more real. It is imagined in minute, exact detail and the inventions which, in the hands of another writer could fairly be described as fantastic, are given the same matter-of-fact treatment as the less extraordinary ones. It is as easy to believe in the existence of Fuschia, a teenager who would be at home in a realistic contemporary novel, as it is to believe in her mother, a woman who enjoys a mystical communion with birds and white cats. The author himself expresses no surprise at the oddities of his characters or their actions, and the reader is forced to take them equally seriously. In this he is helped by the dialogue which is unexpectedly naturalistic and contemporary. Many of the characters have an unusual facility with words but they do not use them for vague philosophical pronouncements.

> 'Irma!' he shouted into her ear, 'my humiliating and entirely unfortunate old string of whitewash, sit where you are! Alfred will do the rest. Can you hear me? Be good now! blood of my blood, be good now, damn you!'

Thus Prunesquallor during the catastrophic fire in the library.

Mervyn Peake's descriptive powers are considerable. Like Wyndham Lewis, he is also a fine artist and his descriptions of settings and of people have a strongly visual quality.

The two mad sisters, Lady Cora and Lady Clarice are described: "Their faces, identical to the point of indecency, were quite expressionless, as though they were the preliminary lay-outs for faces and were waiting for sentience to be injected."[1] Of the Tower of the Flints he writes: "This tower, patched unevenly with black ivy, arose like a mutilated finger from among the fists of knuckled masonry and pointed blasphemously at heaven. At night the owls made of it an echoing throat; by day it stood voiceless and cast its long shadow."[2]

Anthony Burgess in his Introduction to the Penguin edition of Titus Groan (1968)offers this description of the book:

> It is a complex book in that it evokes many layers of response: the sophisticated pleasure in consummate artifice, the more naive enjoyment proper to a rather archaic romance, horror which is qualified by disbelief, a kind of 'camp' titillation, self-indulgence in 'Gothic' atmosphere, a genuine aesthetic elation induced by language finely used. It is an intellectual book, in which wit - in the old sense of cerebral play - operates at times when we expect only the nerves to be engaged. . . . One is always aware of the cool control of the author's intelligence, even in the most romantic flights, maintaining, like an estate generator, the imagined world and excluding the real one.

Anthony Burgess goes on to point out that the book appeared just after the end of the Second World War and that the many sinister and horrifying episodes ". . . are not gratuitous Gothicisms so much as reflections out of an era of horrors." The Gothicisms are there, but they do not dictate to the novelist as they do to Iris Murdoch. Mervyn Peake is unlikely to find many imitators, for although he demonstrates that the serious gothic novel is possible, his achievement depends on his own very original genius.

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1 Page 109, Penguin edition.
2 Page 15, Penguin edition.

John Fowles in his second novel, The Magus (1966) has also written an extraordinary work of fiction which has some resemblances to the Gothic romance. These are very much less clearly marked than they are in Peake's trilogy, but they have some influence on the total effect of the book. M. Ratcliffe[1] offers this analysis:

> This cornucopia of received cross-references and mysterious adventures, peopled with nymphs and monsters . . . . it is most nearly a kind of multiple-Murdoch. Its hero, a guilty son of Oxbridge, is a metaphysical castaway on the Aegean island of Phraxos; subtly aware that certain forces are trying to slip between him and reality, he is plunged into a series of tests . . . whose permutations are endless and which, in fact, need never end. (They merely stop). Fowles adds hypnotism, schizophrenia, Parnassus, diabolism and a Tarot pack to his pot. Morality is a fiendish Northern lie; emotional dishonesty the unforgiveable sin. . . .

From these examples of contemporary Gothic romances it would appear that not only is the form more hardy than one would expect, but that it is having something of a revival.[2] The currently fashionable search for modern allegory has directed attention to the form.

D(2) HORROR STORY

The horror story is a descendant of the eighteenth century Gothic romance. It differs from its parent in one important respect: "What was a fear of the outside world in the gothic novel becomes . . . a fear of the interior psychological world".[3] From this it follows that the horror story does not depend on its setting for its effectiveness, although a suitable setting may contribute to the overall picture. Edgar Allan Poe's story The Tell-Tale Heart, the confession of a mad murderer, relies heavily on the successful build-up

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1 The Novel Today, 1968.
2 Catherine Gaskin is a popular writer of Gothic romances, and most of the followers of Iris Murdoch - who are discussed in Chapter 3D - also have a Gothic touch.
3 P. Mayersberg, 'The Corridors of the Mind', List., 9.12.1965.

of atmosphere, but the actual setting is unimportant. In another story by Poe, The Fall of the House of Usher, the last descendants of an ancient family come to an end at the same time as their ancestral home. Of this story P. Mayersberg wrote:[1] "The external world was seen in terms of an interior state. In the gothic novel the exterior world is circumstantial." Dorothy Sayers [2] suggests that the horror story developed out of folk-tales, but:

> . . . The study of psychology has produced a new kind of terror - the nightmare country between sanity and madness; the pressure of mind upon living mind, and the lonely horror of the dark places of the soul. In the purely human sphere or horror, spiritual cruelty now holds its place alongside with bodily cruelty . . . .

Before psychology became a subject for study, Poe, who is usually regarded as the literary inventor of the horror story, revealed a profound knowledge of human nature and an understanding of the mysterious and irrational processes of the subconscious. He provided the model for a number of later writers, most of whom were American. Mayersberg suggests that Poe belongs to "the dark tradition" in American writing. What distinguished him from the European romantics was his concreteness of imagery, his use of "the solid, real and living symbol." Mayersberg continues: ". . . And because concreteness is what finally distinguishes the horror story from the ghost story, it is hardly surprising that horror stories have thrived in America in this century, whereas ghosts have thrived in Britain, a country embedded in a European tradition." The horror story has also thrived in America in the cinema, and a strange by-product of the horror story was the appearance of Charles Addams-type of sick-joke after the War.

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1 'The Corridors of the Mind', List., 9.12.1965.
2 'Detective Fiction', Writing Detective and Mystery Fiction, ed. A.S. Burack, 19 .

Roald Dahl is an English writer who has written a number of successful horror stories. Like most of the practitioners in this field, he is a short story writer, for horror is difficult to sustain with the greater length of the novel and is liable to produce either boredom or disbelief. Dahl has published two collections of short stories, Someone Like You (1954) and Kiss, Kiss (1960). He chooses suburban settings for most of his stories but, unlike Poe, is not concerned primarily with death. It is his insight into the minds of his characters, who may be on the surface nothing more horrifying than children or small-time gamblers, that provides the spine-chilling element.

The true horror story, or rather the horror story written only with the intention of arousing horror, has not attracted many novelists to attempt the form, but the techniques and the subject matter or material of the horror story have been utilised by a number of serious contemporary writers. It is not surprising that horror should have become a fairly common element in contemporary fiction, for the Second World War gave adequate proof, if it were needed, of man's inhumanity to man. Horror, produced by both physical and spiritual cruelty, plays a large part in novels set in war-time, but it is far from uncommon in novels with a contemporary setting.

One technique of the horror story writer, that of revealing evil in the apparently innocent has been used successfully by a number of writers. Henry James's The Turn of the Screw (although it has two ghosts, it is a horror rather than a ghost story) paved the way for such novels as William Golding's Lord of the Flies (1954) and Richard Hughes's A High Wind in Jamaica (1929). The young are traditionally

regarded as innocent - particularly by novelists - and the disclosure of the evil of which they are capable is more horrifying than the equivalent disclosures about adults would be. These writers are not only destroying a literary convention, they are also destroying the comfortable assumption that man is born good and becomes evil only as a result of his increasing contact with the adult world. The children in these novels are seen from the outside, their minds are unknowable, and their actions are not explained in the sort of psychological terms which would serve to reassure the reader that these children are, to say the least, abnormal. Golding and Hughes in particular are at pains to show that their children are not carefully selected monsters in the guise of children; the children are representative of others of their age and times. In Golding's novel some are even choir-boys, symbols to the adult world of purity and innocence. In both novels the children commit murder, so the reader cannot even dismiss their actions as childish pranks. Nor can he excuse their behaviour on the grounds that they were too young to know what they were doing, for the children act deliberately and they have no conscience or feelings of guilt afterwards. They remain inscrutable - and horrifying.

The very young are traditionally regarded as innocent, and a similar belief is extended to the adolescent. The semi-autobiographical novels about the sadism of adolescent school-boys produces a similar sense of shock in the reader. Here again, these writers are using a horror-story technique. The ability to arouse horror is a potent weapon in the hands of the writer, for with it he can jolt the reader out of his complacency and force him to re-examine some of his too

readily accepted notions. It can also be used, of course, to express the sadistic fantasies of the reader, a fact of which both war novelists and erotic writers are fully aware.

The "nightmare country between sanity and madness" is how Dorothy Sayers described the provenance of the horror story. This territory has been taken over by a number of serious writers, not with the purpose of arousing horror or revulsion in the reader, but in order to explore and describe the mind of a person trapped between sanity and madness. Gillian Tindall's The Edge of the Paper (1963), Jennifer Dawson's The Ha-Ha (1961) and The Cold Country (1965), Thomas Hinde's The Day the Call Came (1964) and Mr Nicholas (1952) are among the very many novels which explore this theme. None if these can be described as a horror story, but they all use material which was formerly the preserve of the horror story writer.

The step from horror story to serious novel is a short one, but it is rare for a serious horror story, such as Kafka's Metamorphosis to succeed in both directions. The horror story proper has moved a long way from marble halls where "each damp thing that creeps and crawls went wobble-wobble on the walls"[1], but its future probably lies with the cinema which, with its technical aids, is well-equipped for arousing the maximum horror from jaded viewers.

D(3) GHOST STORY

"I would define a horror story as one which is designed to create a feeling of physical revulsion in the reader. This clearly distinguishes it from a ghost story where there can

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1 Lewis Carroll, 'The Palace of Humbug'.

be fear, but seldom physical revulsion, principally because ghosts by definition are non-physical. A ghost story is psychical in its preoccupations and appeal to the reader."[1] Elizabeth Bowen[2] suggests a similar distinction: ". . . And that austere other world, the world of the ghost, should inspire, when it impacts on our own, not so much revulsion or shock as a sort of awe."

Ghosts might be expected only to flourish in a gothic setting, but they have in fact proved remarkably adaptable to changing world conditions. Elizabeth Bowen wrote:

> The universal battiness of our century looks like providing them with a propitious climate . . . . They do well in flats, and are villa-dwellers. They know how to curdle electric light, chill off heating, or de-condition air . . . . telephones, motors, planes and radio wave-lengths offer them self-expression. The advance of psycholoyy has gone their way; the guilt-complex is their especial friend.

The ghost with clanking chains who haunted ancient castles has disappeared - killed perhaps by Oscar Wilde's story The Canterville Ghost. They now prefer prosaic scenes, abjuring "the over-fantastic and the grotesque, operating, instead, through series of happenings whose horror lies in their being just, just out of the true." (E. Bowen). The ghost, then, has been modernised, but he is still confined principally to the short story.

Muriel Spark is one of the few contemporary novelists to have included ghosts in her cast of characters. In The Comforters (1957), her first novel, the chief character, Caroline, becomes aware through hearing voices and a ghostly typewriter that she is a character in a novel by an unseen writer, and does her best to resist manipulation by the

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1 P. Mayersberg, 'The Corridors of the Mind' List., 9.12.1965
2 Introduction to The Second Ghost Book, ed. C. Asquith, 1952

the mind of the novelist. In Memento Mori (1959) a group of elderly people recieve telephone calls in which a mysterious voice says: "Remember you must die". Inspector Mortimer suggests that it is Death himself calling. The hero of The Ballad of Peckham Rye (1960), Dougal Douglas, is perhaps a wizard or a devil. The plot of The Bachelors (1960) "concerns ripples stirred in a set of unmarried London men and women by the legal prosecution of a villainous, but genuine, spiritualist medium."[1] Bachelordom is considered as a "territory of damnation". In Voices at Play (1961) there are a number of ghost stories, such as 'The Party Through the Wall' and horror stories such as 'The Dry River Bed'. By The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie (1961) "the fantasy, the invisible talking typewriters and the 'creatures of darkness' have gone."[2] In her four succeeding books there was no sign of their return.

Miss Spark herself makes little of the supernatural element in her novels (she is quoted by M. Ratcliffe[3] as saying: "It doesn't occur to me that I'm writing fantasy. I have that sort of mental squint.") but it is an aspect of her work which has intrigued a number of commentators. Anthony Burgess[4] offers this explanation of "the mental squint": ". . . she writes from a Catholic point of view, and the elements of the uncanny or . . . the diabolic seem less fairy-tale whimsy than a return to a mode of thought which could accept God and the Devil as powers always ready to alter the texture of everyday life." In support of this there is the fact that Miss Spark treats the supernatural in exactly the same way as she treats the natural, and neither

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1 J. Updike, Assorted Prose, 1965.
2 TLS 27.7.67.
3 The Novel Today, 1968.
4 The Novel Now, 1967.

seems out of place in the world she imagines. The supernatural and the natural are, to Muriel Spark, equally natural. The supernatural in The Comforters and Memento Mori is a trigger for the action - a rather artificial device - but in The Ballad of Peckham Rye and The Bachelors the supernatural world is shown living alongside the natural. Miss Spark's use of the supernatural would not be easy to imitate successfully, for it requires the construction of a world where a ghost is no more extraordinary than anything else in the novel. Nevertheless, she does show that ghost stories can, when properly handled, have a place in serious fiction.

E. THE HISTORICAL ROMANCE

The historical novel has, like science-fiction, attracted both vehement supporters and detractors. Their objections to the historical novel are much the same as the objections to science fiction, and there seems little point in repeating them here, except to add a typically quirky one from Q.D. Leavis [1] which requires no comment: "To reject the rhythms of contemporary idiom by returning to the language of the past is to sacrifice everything. That is why historical novels cannot be taken seriously by the critic."

If a distinction is made between the historical romance and the historical novel, instead of lumping, say, War and Peace and Gone With the Wind into one category, the objections to the historical novel have little validity.

The historical romance is a romance in a period setting. The characters, their way of thinking, and the action of the novel are basically contemporary, but they are placed in

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1 Fiction and the Reading Public, 1932.

an earlier, more colourful period to give a different slant on the love story which is the chief point of interest. A romantic story in a historical setting is more credible than one in a contemporary setting, and it also gives the writer's fancy free range. Historical romances may be factually accurate as far as events, customs, manners, speech and historical figures are concerned, but this does not alter their classification as historical romances. [1]

One example of this type of writer is Jean Plaidy. The Thistle and the Rose(1963) - one of many she has written - is a fictionalised account of the life - and inevitably the loves - of Margaret, the sister of Henry VIII who married James IV of Scotland. The story is fraught with misunder-standings and reconciliations (very passionate, these are). There is adventure, pageentry and colour - but very little life in the characters themselves. Although the bibliography indicates that she has conscientiously done her homework, the imaginative effort required to give her characters more than one dimension is missing.

Georgette Heyer is one of the most popular writers of historical romances. Her books are usually set in the Regency period and although some of them are successful pastiches, for the most part they are women's romances given spice and colour by their setting. But the true historical novel is not romance in fancy dress.

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1 Surprisingly, many historical romance writers are very concerned with historical accuracy. The twentieth century love of fact, its "mania for information" as Dwight Macdonald in Against the American Grain (1952) calls it, has affected the contemporary romancer. Macdonald cites the case of Samuel Shellaberger who had no success as a historical novelist until he had spent three years "'getting up' the background for a heavily documented piece of nonsense called Captain from Castile."

E.E. Leisy [1] considers and rejects a number of possible definitions of the historical novel, finally offering this one: "A historical novel is a novel the action of which is laid in an earlier time - how much earlier, remains an open question, but it must be a readily identifiable past time." If this definition is accepted, objections to the historical novel must fall away, for most novels, except those set in the future, are "laid in an earlier time". M. Ratcliffe [2] suggests that all novelists derive their subject matter from three sources: contemporary life, the imagination, or history, "history which lies inside the writer's own memory and that which does not." Obviously the question of time distance is crucial to distinguishing between the historical novel and the non-historical novel.

Tolstoy, Scott and Pasternak wrote their historical novels (or in Scott's case, romances), approximately fifty years after the events they describe. Robert Graves set several historical novels in Imperial Rome. William Golding set one in pre-recorded history. Tho choice of period indicates what kind of historical novelists they are. Tolstoy could be described as a novelist first, an historian after. His chief interest is in the people, not in the events in which they were involved. Robert Graves is a historian-novelist for

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1 The American Historical Novel, 1950.
2 The Novel Today, 1968.

he relies less on imaginative projection than on interpretation and extension of verifiable historical fact. Golding's choice of pre-recorded history suggests that he is not so much interested in history for its own sake, but for the perspective it gives on contemporary man. [1]

Of these three types - the novelist-historian, the historian-novelist and the novelist-who-is-not-a-historian - only the first type can be regarded as a true historical novelist of the sort E.E. Leisy spoke of.

Margaret Kennedy is an example of a contemporary novelist-historian. Troy Chimneys (1968) was inspired by references she had found in contemporary Regency memoirs to a man whose nick-name was Pronto. Very little else is known of him, except that he was on the fringes, but not quite the centre, of Society. Troy Chimneys purports to be his diary and memoirs which were discovered by one of his descendants. By including the correspondence about the papers between his descendants, Miss Kennedy gives a spurious - but convincing - impression of authenticity. The memoirs themselves are a successful pastiche without having recourse to "period" writing or archaicisms. The character of Pronto, the themes which emerge, the action, the other characters - they are all of their period. And as a novel it is a success.

Pastiche seems to be becoming popular among historical novelists - at least three were published within a few months of each other in 1969,[2] and all received enthusiastic reviews which suggests that the climate of critical opinion is in their favour.

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1 Although Golding's The Spire (1964) is set in mediaeval England, it is even less "historical" than The Inheritors (1955) which is set in pre-recorded history.

2 John Fowles The French Lieutenant's Woman, George MacDonald Fraser's Flashman and Celia Dale's Act of Love.

The historian-novelist, of which Robert Graves is a fine example, is competing with historians and biographers, offering similar material imaginatively reconstructed. (The best historians do the same, but their reconstructions are limited to wholly verifiable fact - they cannot, for example, put words into the mouth of a character unless they know he said them). I, Claudius and its sequel Claudius the God (both published in 1934) are reconstructions of early Imperial Rome told through what purports to be the autobiography of Tiberius Claudius. The style of writing is modelled on the few extant speeches of Claudius, a touch which is typical of this writer's passion for historical accuracy, but as a literary style it has its drawbacks. It is often clumsy and stilted, with little variation in tone and pace. The historian in Graves does not always reside happily with the novelist.

Henry Treece, like Graves, is better known as a poet than a novelist but, again like Graves, his concentration on historical accuracy reduces the interest of his works as creative fiction. The Dark Island (1952) is set in Britain soon after the arrival of the Romans under Claudius. The dialogue is stilted and the personal relationships unconvincing, but as a picture of barbaric Britain it is very successful. There is nothing romantic about this picture, for although his subject is the death of a way of life and of a people, he is at pains to show that they were savages, and there is enough blood, gore, sadism and violence for one to wonder whether he is not perhaps aiming at a popular audience.

William Golding is an example of a growing group of novelists who have turned to the form of the historical novel

in order to illuminate the contemporary scene. Their "myths about the past are largely a way of talking about the present."[1] The Inheritors (1955) is placed in a prehistoric time of which the only records are found in bones and artifacts. His Neanderthalers, gentle, simple creatures, are the last of their race. They are victims of evolutionary progress for they die at the hands of the better-equipped and more advanced True Men. The novel can be read as an allegory of the Fall, for the difference between the two races is the difference between innocence and knowledge. It can also be read as an analysis of the nature of man, a discussion of the origins of language, or as an anthropological document. Golding's title is ironical, for it is not the meek who inherit the earth. In the name of "progress" primitive societies are forced to either change or die, under pressure from more sophisticated ones.

The success of the book lies principally in its method of presentation, for however serious the themes, they are not sufficient in themselves to give reality to what is in effect an imaginary world, a fantasy world. The reader becomes a Neanderthal man, seeing with his eyes. The eyes can see but cannot understand, the brain can perceive but not deduce. The tongue can make primitive sounds, but the only real communication is through telepathic pictures. Golding's achievement is to overcome these extraordinary difficulties in a sustained piece of imaginative writing. Incredibly, the reader identifies with Neanderthal man. Only at the end when Golding changes his viewpoint and presents them from the outside, in the manner of H.G. Wells

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1 L. Lerner, 'Novels about the Future', List.,26.7.1962.

in A Short History of the World does the reader appreciate the extent of his involvement with a creature so unlike himself - and realise that he is one of the True Men. A. Koestler [1] wrote: ". . . the life of an Egyptian civil servant in the eighteenth Dynasty . . . is only imaginable to us in dim outline; we are unable to identify ourselves with the strange figure moving through such a strange world." Golding achieves what Koestler suggests is impossible, and in doing so he shows the power of the imagination to bridge the gap between our times and those in the remote past.

The historical novel - and the historical romance - are very vigorous branches of the novel, and it is only possible to give an indication here of the immense variety of novels which have been published under the general title. There is no doubt that the historical novelists, like the science fiction novelists, will remain undeterred by any strictures of critics whose definitions of the novel are narrow.

F. THE ROMANCE

> Every time I write about love . . . I feel it as something new and fresh and absolutely wonderful. . . . And I just wish that every woman in the world could experience what I'm writing about. . . . I feel sad that I have had to bring a bit more realism into my books lately . . . .
>
> (Denise Robins)

> I work to a formula of pursuit, surrender, misunderstanding and ultimate happiness together again. I always preserve my heroine's innocence for at least 360 pages - one must have suspense. And I keep up my own stamina with daily doses of vitamins.
>
> (Barbara Cartland)

> When I thought of writing romantic novels, I chose the name Victoria because I thought it was terribly romantic, and Holt because that was the name of my bankers.
>
> (Victoria Holt)

> The stories I write are not the sort that I would read myself.
>
> (Joan Rees)

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1 The Trail of the Dinosaur, 1955.

These quotations [1] from interviews with four of the most popular romantic novelists are given here because they reveal so clearly the mixture of sentimentality and cynicism which inspires these writers. There are an estimated twenty-five million readers of "light romantic" fiction in Britain, and the profits for a popular writer are enormous. It is the most thoroughly commercialised type of popular fiction and the one which is furthest removed from life or literature.

The romantic novel prefers stereotypes to archetypes. It is remarkable for its sexual prudery, sentimentaltiy, gentility, and its sustaining belief that love is a woman's whole existence. "Such literature circles mindlessly inside the trap of its two themes: unconsummated adultery and the consummated pure romance."[2] Margaret Kennedy [3] points out that in true romance "he gets her", whereas in today's version "she gets him - which excludes Romance". The writer is faced with the difficulty of making the hero worth the heroine's suffering, but this is solved by making both hero and heroine into idealised types.

The romantic novel is interesting not for itself, but for its effect on other women novelists. In the minds of most readers - and non-readers - "woman novelist" is synonomous with "romantic novelist", with the result that contemporary serious women novelists have the same difficulty as some of their predecessors in getting their work accepted and judged on the same standards as those applied to male writers. They have reacted to this problem in a number of different ways. Some have become almost aggressively masculine and cerebral, replacing tender romantic scenes with graphic

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1 From interviews printed in The Cape Argus, 18.3.1969.
2 L. Fiedler, 'The Middle against both Ends', Encounters ed. S. Spender et al, 1953-63.
3 The Outlaws on Parnassus, 1958.

descriptions of sexual encounters. Few serious women novelists challenge the romantic novelist's monopoly of courtship; they concentrate instead on post-marital affairs. Their heroines are not innocent typists or girls-next-door, but academics, middle-aged housewives, spinsters, teachers, professional women - all of them the equal if not the superior, to the men they sleep with. Love is often the principal theme of these novelists, but romantic love is abjured except by such writers as Elizabeth Jane Howard, Penelope Mortimer, Margaret Lane and, in one novel (The Sandcastle) Iris Murdoch. It is a tragedy that romance has, in the main, been left to such writers as Barbara Cartland ("Inside every woman there is a romantic virgin who wants to be either swept off her feet or rescued by a knight in shining armour.")[1] The serious women novelists do not recognise the existence of this romantic virgin. Romantic love, surely a fitting subject for the novel, is unfairly neglected.

In this survey of the main branches of contemporary popular fiction I have attempted to show that most forms are very much alive and as susceptible to changes in literary taste and fashion as the serious novel. A number of excellent popular novels have been written within the conventions of the chosen form; a number of serious writers have been attracted by the potential of some of the popular forms. The presence of these two groups indicates that the distinction between "popular" and "serious" fiction is not always clear, and that the gulf between them is less marked than it was before the Second World War. In the next chapter some reasons are sought to explain why this trend is so apparent today.

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1 Briefing, Ob.R. 14.5.1967.

Chapter 8:

The Popular Serious Novelist

In the previous chapter evidence was offered that the serious contemporary novelist is turning increasingly to popular forms in his fiction. In this chapter an attempt is made to find the reasons for this trend, which is rapidly becoming one of the most marked characteristics of contemporary English fiction.

The adoption of popular forms by serious writers is, in some cases, an expression of their dissatisfaction with the traditional form of the novel. It is a way of experimenting. Novelists such as Angus Wilson, P.H. Newby and William Golding have shown in their experiments with popular forms that they can be used for serious purposes. It is not necessarily the form of the popular novel which prevents it from being accepted as literature; it is more usually the treatment which denies it this status. The commercialisation of the popular novel in this century frightened off serious novelists from using the forms, but earlier writers, such as Scott and Dickens, were able to use them without fear of condemnation. Three of Golding's six novels have used popular forms, but it would be a bold critic who would describe him as a popular novelist. Golding did not simply adopt the popular forms as they stood: he has experimented with them and shown their potential for serious writers. Golding, Newby, Wilson, and others, have all experimented with the novel in other directions, so it is conceiveable that

their reason for writing in popular forms arises from the same desire to extend the boundaries of the serious novel.

The desire to experiment is not the motive of all the serious writers who have used popular forms for some of their novels. Dorothy Parker [1] was once asked: "What, then, would you say is the source of most of your work?" She replied: "Need of money, dear." Few writers are so frank, but if the euphemistic phrase "desire for recognition" is substituted, the motives of most contemporary serious writers becomes clear. It would be cynical to suggest that by "recognition" a writer would mean anything other than "critical recognition", but it is a feature of the contemporary literary scene that critical and popular recognition tend to go hand in hand.

P.N. Furbank [2] in an article on the twentieth century best-seller, wrote: ". . . the real formula for success . . . is publication as a paper-back immediately after a successful film version." Many of the serious writers who have been accorded critical recognition have had popular success as well, their success following Furbank's formula. A selective list of those who have had their novels filmed includes: Kingsley Amis, Stan Barstow, Margaret Drabble, John Fowles, William Golding, Graham Greene, Robin Maugham, Penelope Mortimer Edna O'Brien, Alan Sillitoe, Muriel Spark, Frank Tuohy and Keith Waterhouse. Nigel Dennis, Jennifer Dawson, Iris Murdoch and C.P. Snow have had stage-adaptations of their works performed.

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1 Writers at Work, The Partisan Review Anthology, 1958.
2 'The Twentieth-Century Best-Seller', The Modern Age, ed. B. Ford, 1964.

A comparative list of films made during the period between the wars would not include adaptations from the novels of the greatest writers of the period. This is not because their novels were too difficult to adapt, for novels by Joyce, Lawrence and Waugh have been filmed since the war, but because it was considered that they would not have had popular appeal. Judging by the lists of best-sellers today, and by the lists of novels adapted from the screen, a large number of contemporary writers have both critical and popular appeal. This suggests that either the tastes of the reading public have improved since the war - and evidence can be adduced to the contrary - or that novelists have left their towers for the market-place.

The financial rewards for best-sellers are considerable, but the writer of an article called 'Pop goes the Artist'[1] estimated that two-thirds or three-quarters of professional writers earn less than the wages of a typist, and that those who live entirely on their earnings from books are few. If this figure is correct, there can be few writers, other than purveyors of trash, who can have entered the field with the desire to make money, but it would be unnatural if they did not hope that their books would survive.

There are two ways in which survival can be, not ensured, but at least aided: the achievement of either popular or critical acclaim; or both. In contemporary fiction, the two frequently coincide. In 1968, 2,094 novels were published in England, It is not surprising, therefore, that the public and critics should so often agree, for the judgement of the reviewers is often the only guide the reader has as to what is best in contemporary

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1 TLS 3, 1964.

fiction. Future critics of the post-war period will be in a similar position: their selection for posterity will almost certainly be among the best-known writers of the period. In order to become well-known, and to give their works a chance of survival, writers must please as many reviewers as possible - and the recommendation of reviewers will help to make their books best-sellers.

Somerset Maugham [1] wrote: "The elect sneer at popularity: they are inclined to assert that it is a proof of mediocrity; but they forget that posterity makes its choice not from among the unknown writers of a period, but from among the known. . . . It may be that posterity will scrap all the best-sellers of our day, but it is among them that it must choose." In 1930 this was an aggressive challenge, although Maugham is perhaps confusing books which attain instant popularity with those that remain in print.
Few critics of contemporary literature today would dispute his statement, although they might not go as far as George Orwell [2] who wrote: Ultimately there is no test of literary merit except survival, which is in itself an index to majority opinion." Commenting on this remark, George Woodcock [3] pointed out that " . . . Very often a completely extraneous circumstance can change the nature of a writer's reputation . . . . does this mean they have ceased to be 'good writers'?". It is on the whole true, however, that posterity will choose among the best-known writers of this period . The unprecedented number of novels will ensure this.

There will always be writers who remain unaffected by such a consideration as popular success, but it appears that there are fewer of these today. Serious writers are very prolific; their books come out in time for the Autumn list; they appear on television and radio programmes;

1 Cakes and Ale, 1930.
2 'Lear, Tolstoi and the Fool', quoted by George Woodcock in
3 The Crystal Spirit, 1967.

they give interviews to newspapers and periodicals. They are obviously aware of the value of publicity, and even of the necessity for keeping their names in the public eye, but their books will not sell unless they also have public appeal. It is not surprising, then, to find that many serious writers have adopted popular forms and popular material, and it is natural that the suspicion should arise that they are not always doing so because they find these forms most suitable for their work, but because by doing so they will help the book to sell.

Another reason for the adoption of popular forms lies in the changing attitude to fiction. The chief purpose of popular fiction is to entertain. Bryn Davies [1] points out that the earliest novels were written with at least some kind of moral purpose, but that ". . . by the end of the eighteenth century, the novel was written and read very largely for pleasure, whatever the disclaimers of the author." The Victorians emphasised the moral purpose of the novel and in the nineteenth century a clear distinction was made between what was considered to be serious art, and what was considered to be popular fiction. The "pleasure" element was consigned to popular novels, and "moral seriousness" consigned to serious novels. The Bloomsbury group did nothing to dispel the notion that moral seriousness and entertainment were uneasy bed-fellows. The reaction against the Moderns, which was partly the natural reaction of a younger generation of writers to an older one, was coupled with the desire to return the novel to its former comparatively homogenous state. Contemporary novelists have accepted that entertainment and moral seriousness are not only compatible; they

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1 'Reading for Pleasure', Approaches to the Novel, ed. J. Colmer, 1966.

are also desirable. Serious contemporary writers, like their popular counterparts, are not afraid to entertain the reader. Some of the techniques of the professional entertainers, such as their use of forms which have been proved to have popular appeal, have therefore been adopted by serious writers.

In this chapter it was been suggested that there are a number of factors which have influenced serious writers to imitate some of the techniques of the popular novelist, particularly the forms he uses. Although this tendency to make the literary scene more homogenous is a hopeful one for the future of the novel, the effect on the quality of some individual writers has been damaging. J.W. Saunders discussed this problem: [1]

> The professional novelist as a result runs the hazards of his own particular Scylla and Charybdis: if he writes to a formula, he earns a living but loses his professional values; if he deserts the formula, he satisfies his own values but antagonizes his readers and imperils his income.

Serious writers have often shown an arrogance towards their popular materials, assuming that popular novels are easy to write add that no effort need be made to learn the techniques. These novels are unsatisfactory on any level. The popular novelist who writes seriously is more likely to bridge the gap between serious and popular fiction.

Chapter 9:

Conclusion

The death of the novel, so confidently predicted a few years ago, has been delayed, at least for the time being. Whether, as prophets like Marshall McLuhan and George Steiner predict, its death has simply been postponed, it is impossible to say. But the liveliness, vitality and vigour of contemporary English fiction suggest that the novel may yet survive.

This is not a great age of the novel, a period which will be remembered for the many fine writers it produced: it could be characterised as an age of general excellence Although in this study an attempt was made to "group" novelists in order to discuss them more easily, it is not the sameness, but the variety, of contemporary fiction which is immediately striking. There is hard competition to have a book accepted for publication, and this has encouraged writers to raise their standard. It has also encouraged them to aim at originality, whether in material, style, themes or treatment. There have been vogues for several types of novel in these twenty years, but the majority of writers has continued to plough its solitary furrow.

It is tempting to try to predict the probable future of the novel, particularly as it is a much-discussed topic, but David Daiches's warning seems salutary:

> [1] No historian of literature should attempt to predict the future. . . . He is wisest to lay down his pen *in media res*. Literature goes on.

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4.4.1963
19.9.1963
4.11.1965
9.12.1965
2.6.1966
23.3.1967
3.8.1967
18.1.1968
4.4.1968
28.4.1968
22.5.1968
6.6.1968
27.6.1968
4.7.1968
1.8.1968
12.9.1968
26.9.1968
10.10.1968
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5.2.1967
12.2.1967
14.5.1967
21.5.1967
1.10.1967
26.5.1968
1.9.1968
27.10.1968
15.12.1968
26.4.1969
29.6.1969

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25.5.1967
15.6.1967
27.7.1967
17.8.1967
21.9.1967
28.9.1967
8.10.1967
18.1.1968
25.1.1968
16.5.1968
4.7.1968
1.8.1968
8.8.1968
15.8.1968
24.10.1968
31.10.1968
21.11.1968
12.12.1968
23.1.1969
20.2.1969
13.3.1969
20.3.1969
6.5.1969
12.6.1969
19.6.1969
26.6.1969
3.7.1969
11.9.1969

The Times Saturday Review

14.9.1968
19.9.1968
28.9.1968
12.10.1968
1.2.1969
15.2.1969
15.3.1969
7.6.1969

INDEX OF AUTHORS

Ableman, Paul 3A.21, 3A.22, 3A.23
Achebe, Chinua 4D.12, 4D.13
Adamov, Isaac 5A.04
Allen, Walker 4C.06, 4C.07, 5A.16
Ambler, Eric 4D.01, 7.23
Amis, Kingsley 2.02, 2.13, 3B.01, 3C.31, 4A.45, 4B.05, 4B.07, 4C.02, 4C.08, 4D.05, 5A.06, 5A.10, 5A.11, 5A.12, 5A.13, 5A.14, 5A.15, 5A.16, 5A.18, 5A.19, 5A.26, 5A.39, 5A.41, 7.24, 7.29, 8.02
Anthony, Michael 4D.15
Austen, Jane 2.09, 5B.01, 5B.03, 5B.05, 5B.11, 6.07, 6.11
Balchin, Nigel 1.03, 7.16
Ballantyne, R.M. 7.17
Balzac, Honoré de 6.02
Banks, Lynne Reid 5B.11
Barstow, Stan 4C.02, 4C.08, 4C.09, 4C.14, 4C.15, 5A.40, 8.02
Barth, John 6.13, 6.14
Becker, Jillian 3B.12, 4A.20, 4A.45, 4A.46
Beckett, Samuel 3A.24, 3C.22, 5A.04
Bedford, Sybille 4A.35, 4A.36, 4A.37
Beerbohm, Max 5A.11
Bellow, Saul 6.14
Bennett, Arnold 2.02, 2.05, 4C.14, 5A.17
Berckman, Evelyn 7.65, 7.66
Berger, John 3A.01, 3A.09, 3A.10, 5A.40
Bester, Alfred 7.52
Bierce, Ambrose 7.53
Blakemore, Michael 5A.40
Bosman, H.C. 4D.06
Bostock, Trevor 4C.10
Bowen, Elizabeth 1.02, 2.04, 2.07
Bowen, John 3C.03, 3C.32, 3C.33, 5A.18, 5A.22

Bradbury, Malcolm 5A.16
Bradbury, Ray 7.52
Braine, John 4C.02, 4C.08, 4C.11, 5A.11, 5A.16, 5A.17, 5A.18, 5A.19, 5A.21, 5A.24, 5A.25, 5A.26
Broderick, John 4C.16, 4C.17, 7.18
Brönte, Emily 7.68
Brooke-Rose, Christine 3A.01, 3A.02, 3A.04, 3A.25
Brophy, John 1.03, 5A.35, 5A.36
Buchan, John 6.13, 7.04, 7.06, 7.07, 7.13, 7.15, 7.17
Bulwer, W.H.L.E. 7.36
Burgess, Anthony 2.14, 3B.01, 3B.06, 3B.07, 3B.08, 4D.05, 4D.09, 5A.06, 5A.27, 5A.28, 5A.39, 5A.40, 5A.41, 5A.43, 6.13, 7.28, 7.29, 7.57
Burns, Alan 3A.21, 3A.22
Burroughs, Edgar Rice 6.04
Burroughs, William 3A.22, 3C.32, 6.13, 7.63
Butler, Gwendoline 7.05, 7.42
Butler, Samuel 7.50

Byatt, A.S. 3C.03, 3C.18, 3C.19, 5A.40
Cain, James 7.36
Caldwell, Frank 7.36
Callow, Philip 4C.11
Capote, Truman 3A.32, 7.40
Carroll, Lewis 3A.28, 3B.11
Carter, Angela 3B.01, 3B.10, 3B.11, 3B.12
Cartland, Barbara 7.86, 7.88
Cary, Joyce 1.03, 2.13, 3A.09, 3B.06, 4A.20, 4B.02, 4D.01, 5A.44
Casey, Kevin 4C.16
Catling, Patrick Skene 5A.20
Chandler, Raymond 6.13, 7.35, 7.36, 7.41, 7.45
Chaplin, Sid 4C.08, 4C.09, 4C.10, 5A.10, 5A.21, 5A.22
Charles, Mary 7.50
Charteris, Leslie 7.23
Chase, James Hadley 7.35
Chekov, Anton 4D.16
Chesterton, G.K. 7.06, 7.11
Cheyney, Peter 7.23
Christie, Agatha 2.12, 7.06
Clark, J.P. 4D.13
Clayton, Sylvia 5A.40, 5B.14
Clifford, Francis 7.28
Colegate, Isobel 4A.20, 4A.46
Collins, 1.03
Collins, Wilkie 7.37
Compton-Burnett, Ivy 3A.01, 3A.19, 3A.20, 3A.32, 3B.12, 6.13
Comyn, Barbara 5B.10
Connell, Evan S. 7.49
Conrad, Joseph 3C.23, 5A.02, 7.11, 7.12
Coombes, B.L. 4C.06
Cooper, William 2.05, 2.12, 5A.12
Coxhead, David 3A.21, 3A.22
Croft, Freeman Wills 7.34
Croft-Cooke, Rupert 5A.31, 5A.32
Cronin, A.J. 1.02
Dahl, Roald 7.75
Dale, Celia 7.65, 7.83
Davidson, Lionel 7.28
Dawson, Jennifer 3A.25, 3A.28, 3A.29, 3A.30, 3A.31, 7.77, 8.02
de Beauvoir, Simone 5B.14
Defoe, Daniel 7.17
Deighton, Len 7.25, 7.27, 7.28
Delaney, Shelagh 4C.02
Dell, Ethel M. 6.02, 6.04
Del-Rivio, Laura 5B.10
Dennis, Nigel 3C.03, 3C.23, 3C.24, 3C.25, 4D.12, 8.02
De Polnay, Peter 7.18, 7.49
Dickens, Charles 2.11, 4A.05, 4A.27, 4A.29, 5A.01 5A.46, 6.02, 6.07, 6.15, 7.37, 7.38, 8.01
Dickens, Monica 1.03
Dickinson, Peter 7.44
Diment, Alan 7.43
Dostoevsky, Fyodor 3C.22, 7.47
Douglas, Norman 1.01
Doyle, Sir Arthur Conan 7.13, 7.37

Drabble, Margaret 3C.18, 5A.40, 5B.07, 5B.11, 5B.12, 5B.13, 5B.14, 8.02
Duffy, Maureen 3A.01, 3A.16, 3A.17, 5A.40
du Maurier, Daphne 7.50, 7.65
Dunn, Nell 5B.10, 5B.11
Duras, Marguerite 7.40, 7.45, 7.46, 7.47
Durrell, Laurence 1.02, 3B.01, 3B.02, 3B.03, 3B.04, 3B.05, 4A.20, 4A.21, 4D.06, 5A.15
Durrenmatt, Friedrich 7.45, 7.46
Edelman, Maurice 7.05
Ekwensi, Cyprian 4D.14
Eliot, George 5A.01, 5B.04, 5B.05, 5B.11, 7.38
Elliott, Janice 3C.03, 3C.04, 3C.15, 3C.16, 3C.17, 3C.22
Enright, D.J. 3B.01, 4D.02, 5A.15
Everett, Peter 5A.04
Farnoll, Jeffrey 6.04
Faulkner, William 7.35
Fielding, Gabriel 4A.20, 4A.36, 4D.09, 4D.10
Firth, Anthony 7.29
Fitzgibbon, Constantine 7.19, 7.20
Flaubert, Gustave 5A.01, 6.02
Fleming, Ian 7.06, 7.23, 7.24, 7.25, 7.26, 7.28, 7.29
Fleming, Joan 7.44
Forester, C.S. 1.02
Forster, E.M. 1.01, 4A.25, 4A.45, 4D.01, 5A.02, 5A.46, 5B.04, 6.14
Fowles, John 3A.01, 3A.13, 3A.14, 3A.15, 7.66, 7.73, 7.83, 8.02
Frame, 3C.03, 3C.20, 3C.21, 3C.22
Francis, Dick 7.44
Frankau, Pamela 1.03
Fraser, George MacDonald 7.83
Frayn, Michael 4D.05, 5A.22, 7.28, 7.56, 7.57
Freeling, Nicholas 7.43, 7.44
Frisch, O.R. 7.53
Fuller, Roy 3B.01, 7.50
Gaddess, Peter 5B.14
Gainham, Sarah 4A.25
Galsworthy, John 2.05, 4A.01
Garnett, David 1.02
Gaskell, Jane 5A.31, 5B.11
Gaskin, Catherine 7.73
Gellhorn, Martha 5A.36
Genet, Jean 5A.04
Gibbons, Stella 1.02
Gillespie, Jane 3A.25, 3A.33, 3A.34
Glanville, Brian 4D.04, 4D.05
Gloag, Julian 3A.21, 3A.24
Glyn, Anthony 3A.25, 3A.27, 3A.28
Golding, William 3B.12, 3C.03, 3C.04, 3C.05, 3C.06, 3C.07, 3C.08, 4A.28, 4A.45, 5A.04, 5A.22, 5A.23, 5A.24, 5A.32, 6.13, 7.16, 7.17, 7.56, 7.57, 7.61, 7.75, 7.76, 7.82, 7.83, 7.84, 7.85, 7.86, 8.01, 8.02
Gordimer, Nadine 4A.45
Graves, Robert 1.02, 7.82, 7.83, 7.84
Green, F.L. 7.11
Green, Gerald 7.11
Green, Henry 1.02

Greene, Graham 1.03, 2.04, 2.12, 2.13, 3B.08, 3C.22, 4D.01, 5A.04, 6.13, 7.05, 7.07, 7.08, 7.09, 7.10, 7.11, 7.13, 7.26, 7.28, 7.29, 8.02
Guerrier, Dennis and Richards, Joan 3A.01, 3A.12
Haggard, Rider 6.13, 7.04, 7.13
Haggard, William 7.20
Halward, Leslie 4C.06
Hamilton, Alex, 5A.31, 5A.32
Hammett, Dashiell 6.13, 7.34, 7.35, 7.36, 7.41
Hampson, John 4C.06
Hanley, Gerald 4D.07, 4D.08, 4D.09, 7.11
Hanley, James 1.03, 7.11
Harris, John 7.20
Harris, Wilson 4D.15
Harrison, Harry 7.53
Hartley, L.P. 1.02, 5B.04
Harvester, Simon 4D.01, 7.15
Hastings, Michael 4C.03, 4C.04
Hazzard, Shirley 5A.22
Hemingway, Ernest 6.11, 6.13, 7.11, 7.36, 7.37
Heppenstall, Rayner 3A.01, 3A.03, 3A.04, 3A.24, 3A.25
Herne, John 4D.15
Heyer, Georgette 7.81
Highsmith, Patricia 7.41
Hinde, Thomas 3C.03, 3C.29, 3C.30, 3C.31, 4D.09, 7.18, 7.42, 7.77
Hodder-Williams, Christopher 7.16
Holles, Robert 4C.10, 4C.11
Holt, Victoria 7.86
Hope, Anthony 6.13
Hornung, E.W. 7.23
Howard, Elizabeth Jane 5A.40, 5B.06, 7.88
Hoyle, Fred 7.53, 7.54
Hughes, Richard 1.02, 2.15, 4A.20, 4A.25, 4A.26, 4A.27, 4A.36, 4A.45, 7.16, 7.17, 7.75, 7.76
Hugo, Victor 6.02
Humphreys, Emyr 4C.17, 4C.18
Hunter, Jim 7.20
Hurd, Douglas and Osmond, Andrew 7.20
Hutchinson, R.C. 7.40
Huxley, Aldous 3A.15, 7.40, 7.50, 7.51, 7.52, 7.60
Innes, Michael 7.50
Ionesco, Eugène 3A.27, 5A.04
Isherwood, Christopher 1.02, 2.04, 2.05, 2.15, 3B.06, 4A.25
Jacob, Naomi 1.02
Jacobson, Dan 4A.45
James, Henry 2.05, 3B.12, 4A.31, 4A.45, 5A.04, 5B.04, 7.38, 7.75
Jameson, Storm 1.03, 5A.20, 5A.40
Jeffries, Richard 4A.16
Jhabvala, R. Prawer 4D.07, 4D.08, 4D.09
Johnson, B.S. 2.16, 3A.01, 3A.04, 3A.05, 3A.06, 3A.07, 3A.08
Johnson, Pamela Hansford 1.03, 2.05. 2.12, 2.15, 4A.38, 4A.39, 4A.40, 4A.42, 5A.36
Joyce, James 2.01, 2.03, 2.04, 2.05, 2.07, 2.09, 2.10, 2.13, 2.15, 2.17, 3A.04, 3A.08, 3B.06, 3C.02, 3C.23, 3C.32, 5A.02, 5A.39, 6.02, 6.03, 6.04, 6.15, 8.03

Kafka, Franz 3A.28, 3A.31, 3C.23, 4A.47, 4C.13, 7.77
Kaye-Smith, Sheila 1.02
Kayira, Legson 4D.14
Kennedy, Margaret 1.02, 7.83
Kerouac, Jack 3C.31
Keyes, Daniel 7.55, 7.61
King, Francis 4D.02, 4D.03
Kipling, Rudyard 4D.01, 4D.05, 4D.06, 7.13
Kops, Bernard 4C.02, 5A.9, 5A.10
la Guma, Alex, 4D.14
Lamming, George 4D.15
Lane, Margaret 5B.06, 7.88
Larkin, Philip 3B.01, 5A.12
Lathen, Emma 7.42
Lawrence, D.H. 2.01, 2.05, 3C.23, 4A.47, 4C.02, 4C.12, 4C.14, 4D.01, 6.03, 6.04, 8.03
Laye, Camara 4D.14
Leasor, James 7.24
Le Carré J.3B.07, 7.05, 7.20, 7.25, 7.26, 7.27, 7.28, 7.45, 7.50
Lehmann, Rosamond 1.02, 2.04
Lessing, Doris 4A.03, 4A.13, 4A.14, 4A.15, 4A.18, 4A.45, 4C.06, 4C.07, 4D.12
Lewis, C.Day 1.01
Lewis, Matthew Gregory 7.64, 7.66, 7.69
Lewis, Norman 7.15
Lewis, Wyndham 7.50, 7.71
Linklater, Eric 1.01, 2.15
Llewellyn, Richard 1.01
Lodge, David 5A.16
Lovecraft, H.P. 7.53
Lovelace, Earl 4D.15
Lowry, Malcolm 3B.01, 3B.02, 4D.06
Lytton, B. 6.14
McGahern, John 4C.16
MacInnes, Colin 5A.29, 5A.30, 5A.31, 7.17
Mackay, Shena 3A.25, 3A.32, 3A.33
Mackenzie, Compton 1.03
MacLeod, Sheila 3A.25, 3A.31
McMahon, Bryan 4C.17
McMinnies, Mary 4D.09
Macaulay, Rose 1.02
Mann, Thomas 3C.02, 3C.23
Manning, Olivia 2.14, 4A.20, 4A.22, 4A.23, 4A.24, 4A.25, 4D.01, 4D.06, 5B.06
Marryat, Captain 7.12
Marsh, Ngaio 1.02
Marshall, Bruce 7.28, 7.49, 7.50
Maugham, Robin 5A.36, 8.02
Maugham, Somerset 1.03, 8.03
Maupassant, Guy de 5A.01, 6.02
Mauriac, François 5A.04, 7.11
Melville, Jennie 7.42, 7.43
Meredith, George 5A.01
Middleton, Stanley 4C.02, 4C.13, 4C.14, 4C.17, 5A.36
Mitchell, Julian 3A.25, 3A.26, 3A.27
Mitchell, Margaret 6.04, 7.80
Mitford, Nancy 1.03, 4A.37, 4A.38
Mittelholzer, Edgar 3A.24, 4D.14, 4D.15
Monsarrat, Nicholas 1.03, 7.24, 7.25, 7.31, 7.32
Montagu, Elizabeth 5B.06

Moore, Brian 4C.16
Morgan, Charles 1.01
Morrow, Charlotte 5B.06
Mortimer, Penelope 5A.37, 5B.07, 5B.14, 5B.15, 7.88, 8.02
Mosley, Nicholas 3A.21, 3A.23, 3A.24
Mottram, R.H. 1.02
Mphalele, Ezekiel 4D.14
Mulholland, Brendan 5A.37, 5A.38
Murdoch, Iris 3B.05, 3B.10, 3C.03, 3C.04, 3C.09, 3C.10, 3C.11, 3C.12, 3C.13, 3C.14, 3C.15, 3C.16, 3C.17, 3C.18, 3C.19, 3C.20, 3C.22, 5A.36, 5A.37, 5A.41, 5A.42, 5A.43, 7.47, 7.66, 7.67, 7.68, 7.69, 7.70, 7.71, 7.72, 7.73, 7.88, 8.02
Nabokov, Vladimir 3C.31
Naipaul, V.S. 4D.14, 4D.15, 5A.44, 5A.45, 5A.46
Narayan, R.K. 4D.16
Neville, Jill 5B.11
Newby, P.H. 3C.03, 3C.25, 3C.26, 3C.27, 3C.28, 3C.31, 7.18, 7.42, 8.01, 8.02
Ngugi, James 4D.14
Nott, Kathleen 5A.36
O'Brien, Edna 5B.07, 5B.08, 5B.09, 5B.10, 8.02
O'Brien, Flynn 2.10
Okara, Gabriel 4D.13, 4D.14
Olivia
Oppenheim, E. Phillips 7.23
Orwell, George 1.01, 2.05, 2.15, 7.19, 7.20, 7.50, 7.51, 7.52, 7.56, 7.60
Osborne, John 2.02, 4B.05, 4C.02, 4C.05, 4C.08, 4C.11, 5A.06, 5A.07, 5A.08, 5A.09, 5A.10, 5A.11, 5A.16, 5A.20, 5A.21, 5A.26
Pasternak, Boris 7.82
Peake, Mervyn 3A.13, 4A.20, 7.66, 7.70, 7.71, 7.72, 7.73
Pinter, Harold 5A.04
Plaidy, Jean 7.81
Plomer, William 4A.19, 4A.24, 4A.34, 4A.35, 4A.37, 4D.12
Poe, Edgar Allan 7.12, 7.33, 7.37, 7.53, 7.73, 7.74, 7.75
Pohl, Frederick 7.52
Poole, Josephine 3B.01, 3B.12
Powell, Anthony 1.02, 2.05, 4A.01, 4A.03, 4A.09, 4A.10, 4A.11, 4A.12, 4A.13, 4A.18, 4A.27, 4A.34, 4A.35, 4A.38, 5A.24, 5A.25
Powys, John Cowper 3C.32
Priestley, J.B. 1.03, 4B.02, 5A.40, 7.49
Pritchett, V.S. 2.15
Proust, 2.07, 3C.13, 4A.01, 4A.11, 4A.25, 4A.27
Pugh, Marshall 7.17
Purdy, James 3A.20, 3A.21
Radcliffe, Mrs. Ann 7.12, 7.64
Raphael, Frederic 4A.20, 4D.04
Raven, Simon 4A.03, 4A.08, 4A.09, 4A.19
Read, Piers Paul 3A.25, 3A.31, 3A.32, 4A.36
Rees, Joan 7.86
Reynolds, George 6.02
Richardson, R.S. 7.53
Riley, Madeleine 5B.10
Rhys, Jean 1.02

Robbe-Grillet, A. 2.09, 3A.03, 3A.04, 3A.08, 3A.15
Robins, Denise 7.86
Rohmer, Sax 7.35
Roland, Nicholas 4D.14
Ross, Maggie 3A.01, 3A.08, 3A.09
Roth, Philip 4A.41
Runyon, Damon 5A.30
Sackville-West, Victoria 1.02
Salinger, J.D. 5A.10, 5A.29
Sansom, William 2.04, 5A.36, 5B.04
Sarraute, Nathalie 3A.03
Sartre, Jean-Paul 3C.13
Sayers, Dorothy 1.01, 7.41
Scott, J.D. 5A.36, 7.15
Scott, Paul 4A.43, 4A.44, 4A.45, 4D.07, 4D.08
Scott, Sir Walter 2.09, 6.07, 7.12, 7.82, 8.01
Selvon, Samuel 4D.14, 4D.15
Sharp, Margery 1.03, 4A.40, 4A.41
Shaw, Robert 3C.03, 3C.22, 3C.23, 7.18
Sheckley, Robert 7.29
Sheed, Wilfred 5A.22, 5A.40
Shellaburger, Samuel 7.81
Shute, Nevil 1.03, 7.32
Sillitoe, Alan, 4C.02, 4C.07, 4C.08, 4C.09, 4C.11, 4C.12, 4C.13, 4C.14, 4C.15, 4D.05, 5A.26, 5A.27, 5A.40, 8.02
Sim, Katherine 4D.09
Simenon, Georges 7.42, 7.45, 7.46
Simon, Roger 3A.21, 3A.23
Simpson, N.F. 5A.04
Sinclair, Andrew 3C.03, 3C.31, 3C.32, 4D.02
Snow, C.P. 1.02, 2.02, 2.05, 2.06, 2.11, 2.12, 2.14, 2.15, 4A.01, 4A.03, 4A.04, 4A.05, 4A.06, 4A.06, 4A.07, 4A.08, 4A.09, 4A.18, 4A.27, 4A.28, 4A.32, 6.03, 7.19, 7.48, 8.02
Soyinka, Wole 4D.14
Spark, Muriel 3A.01, 3A.14, 3A.18, 3A.19, 3A.20, 3B.06, 4A.45, 5A.40, 7.15, 7.78, 7.79, 7.80, 8.02
Spencer, Colin 4A.20, 4A.47
Stead, Christina 4C.13, 4C.14
Stein, Gertrude 2.11, 2.16
Stendahl, 5A.01
Stern, G.B. 1.02
Sterne, Laurence 2.10, 2.16, 3A.04, 3A.08, 3A.22
Stevenson, Robert Louis 7.13
Stewart, Desmond 4A.42, 4A.43
Stewart, Mary 7.43
St. Omer, Garth 4D.15
Storey, Anthony 4C.02
Storey, David 4C.13
Story, Jack Trevor 5A.20
Stow, Randolph 3B.01, 3B.13
Strachey, Julian 1.01
Strong, L.A.G. 1.02
Styron, William 6.14
Susann, Jacqueline 6.14
Swift, Jonathan 7.50, 7.60
Swinnerton, Frank 1.02
Symonds, John 3C.03, 3C.19, 3C.20
Symons, Julian 7.44
Szilard, Leo 7.53
Taylor, Edward 5A.15
Taylor, Elizabeth 5B.06

Thacker, A. and Earnshaw, A. 3A.01, 3A.12, 3A.13
Thackeray, W.M. 3A.14, 5A.01
Thirkell, Angela 1.02
Thomas, Dylan 3A.32
Tickell, Gerrard 7.32
Tindall, Gillian 7.77
Tolkien, J.R.R. 3C.32
Tolstoy, Leo 6.04, 7.80, 7.82
Tonks, Rosemary 3B.01, 3B.08, 3B.09, 3B.10, 3B.12
Townsend-Warner, Sylvia 1.02
Toynbee, Philip 1.02, 2.15, 3A.01, 3A.10, 3A.11, 4A.20
Tracy, Honor 5A.36, 5A.40
Treece, Henry 1.02, 7.84
Trevor, William 3A.01, 3A.20, 3A.21
Trollope, Anthony 4A.01, 4A.27
Tuohy, Frank 4D.10, 4D.11, 8.02
Turgeniev, Ivan 6.02
Tutuola, Amos 4D.13
Updike, John 6.14
Upward, Edward 4A.20, 4A.47, 5A.16
Verne, Jules 7.50, 7.51, 7.61
Waddell, Helen 1.01
Wain, John 2.05, 3B.01, 4B.02, 4B.03, 4B.04, 4B.05, 4B.06, 4B.07, 4C.02, 5A.16, 5A.38, 5A.41, 7.17, 7.18
Wallace, Edgar 7.33, 7.35
Walpole, Horace 7.64
Ward, Edmund 4B.07
Warner, Rex 2.05
Warnke, Janet 3C.03, 3C.19
Waterhouse, Keith 4C.02, 4C.08, 4C.09, 4C.10, 4C.14, 4C.16, 5A.10, 8.02
Waugh, Alec 1.03
Waugh, Evelyn 1.03, 2.05, 4A.11, 4A.20, 4A.25, 4A.34, 4A.37, 8.03
Wells, H.G. 2.02, 2.03, 5A.12, 5A.17, 7.50, 7.51, 7.53, 7.61, 7.85
Welty, Eudora 2.07
Wesker, Arnold 4C.02, 4C.05, 4C.13, 4C.14
West, Morris 7.20
West, Rebecca 1.02, 7.29
Wheatley, Denis 3A.16
White, Antonia 1.01
White, Jane 3B.12
White, Patrick 4D.12
Wiener, Norbert 7.53
Wilde, Oscar 7.78
Wilder, Thornton 6.15
Williams, Alan 7.15, 7.28
Williams, Charles 7.05, 7.11
Williams, Gordon M. 4C.17
Williams, John 5A.36
Williamson, Henry 1.03, 4A.02, 4A.03, 4A.16, 4A.17, 4A.18
Wilson, Angus 2.10, 2.14, 4A.01, 4A.19, 4A.27, 4A.28, 4A.29, 4A.30, 4A.31, 4A.32, 4A.33, 4A.34, 4D.03, 5A.40, 7.52, 7.57, 8.01, 8.02
Wilson, Colin 3A.01, 3A.15, 3A.16, 4C.02, 5A.04, 7.48, 7.49
Wodehouse, P.G. 1.02

Woolf, Virginia   2.01, 2.04, 2.05, 2.07, 2.09, 2.14, 3B.09, 6.03, 6.04
Wyndham, John   7.19, 7.55, 7.56
Yarrow, Arnold   5A.40
Yorke, Susan   4D.09
Zola, Emile   4A.01, 4A.27, 4C.14, 5A.01, 6.02