JOHN BERGER'S FICTIONAL ACTS OF FAITH

By

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ABSTRACT

John Berger is well known to a certain segment of the general public, especially in England and Europe, for his critical art essays and reviews, and is thought of as a populist of aesthetics.

This thesis constitutes the first comprehensive examination of Berger's fiction. It treats Berger as a thinker and a writer-- not simply as a populist of aesthetics-- and therefore broadens the context in which he is usually considered. Chapter One provides an overview of Berger's methodology and aesthetic. Chapter Two examines his first three novels in terms of his empathetic response to the class of people with which these novels are concerned, the nature of the dream as manifest in these novels, and Berger's concept of the heroic. Chapter Three is a close reading of G. and the theories of time it sets forth. Chapter Four considers the views of memory and experience in Berger's last two works of fiction, and the reasons for his turning to traditional narrative form. The work as a whole traces Berger's struggle to get "close to the face of experience".

By examining each of Berger's works of fiction to determine both how each is informed by his critical perspective and ideology and how each manifests a stage in his evolution as a writer and thinker, this thesis

makes the claim that Berger deserves as much recognition for his creative writing as he has received for his (distinctly creative) criticism. This work maintains that though his fiction moves increasingly in the direction of philosophical speculation, it loses none of its political impact.

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ABBREVIATIONS USED WITHIN THE TEXT

AL: About Looking. New York: Pantheon Books, 1980.

AOF: And Our Faces, My Heart, Brief as Photos. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984.

AWT: Another Way of Telling with Jean Mohr. New York: Pantheon Books, 1982.

AR: Art and Revolution: Ernst Neizvestny and the Role of the Artist in the USSR. New York: Pantheon Books, 1969.

CF: Corker's Freedom. London: Writers and Readers, 1964.

FC: The Foot of Clive. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1962.

FM: A Fortunate Man with Jean Mohr. New York: Pantheon Books Ltd., 1967.

LT: The Look of Things: Selected Essays and Articles. edited with an introduction by Nikos Stangos. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1972.

OE: Once in Europa. New York: Pantheon Books, 1987.

PT: A Painter of Our Time. London: Writers and Readers, 1958.

PE: Pig Earth. London: Chatto and Windus; The Hogarth Press, 1979.

SS: The Sense of Sight. New York: Pantheon Books, 1985.

SM: A Seventh Man with Jean Mohr. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1975.

SFP: The Success and Failure of Picasso. New York: Pantheon Books, 1965.

PR: Permanent Red. London: Writers and Readers, 1960.

WS: Ways of Seeing. with Sven Blomberg, Chris Fox, Michael Dibb, Richard Hollis. London: British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books, 1972.

Introduction

Berger's long career--he has published works spanning over thirty years--has involved a combining of the roles of critic and creative writer. He was born in 1926, and was, in his early twenties, a student of both art and communism. He worked, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, with both the Communist Party (of which he was not a member) and the Artists International Association. By the time Berger became a public figure, he was propounding a non-orthodox Marxism. He first gained wide public attention as a critic of art and culture when he was the regular art critic for New Statesman during the years 1952 to 1962. The Observer, The Tribune, New Society, and The Labour Monthly were among the other journals and newspapers for which he wrote and reviewed throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

In 1956, Berger identified himself as a political propagandist, and was gaining notoriety for his abrasive journalism. He often denounced what he encountered all around him as "self-willed ignorance", a period of which, he claimed in 1966, British society was "officially entering" ("Greetings" The Labour Monthly, July 1966: 342). His strident and direct prose style and his often hostile reviews of exhibitions during these years ensured

responses from others in the art world and initiated important debates with them, one of which prompted him to publish a declaration of his aims:

> All my life I have been passionately concerned with painting. Besides practising as a painter, I have tried to think about and for art. But I have tried to think beyond the painter's brush; and, as a consequence, it has been my concern for art which has largely led to my general political and social convictions. Far from my dragging politics into art, art has dragged me into politics. (New Statesman 4 April, 1953: 399-400)

Berger always maintained that his perspective was informed by his primary loyalty to painting. He wrote in 1956: "... my heart and eye have remained those of a painter" (as quoted, Ways of Telling, unidentified source). He exhibited his own paintings briefly, once in the Artists International August 1950 exhibit. Berger's articles during the 1950s and 1960s, and his first books of art criticism-- Permanent Red (a 1960 collection of articles), The Success and Failure of Picasso (1965), The Moment of Cubism (a 1969 collection of articles), Art and Revolution (1969)-- made such an impression on the public and broke such new ground, that Peter Levi declared, in 1969: "John Berger practically alone has made [art criticism] in English a life-giving and humanly serious subject" (Times Literary Supplement, 8 May 1969: 490).

Though Berger's articles and reviews were concerned mainly with the context of the production and exhibition of art, the relationship between the public and art, and the ways in which particular periods and pieces of art

should be viewed, he also reflected on--and still reflects on-- such diverse topics as war, buildings, cities, and "motorcycle scrambling... [in an article] provoked by the death of the racer Brian Stonebridge" (McMahon's unpublished bibliographical entry on "The Hero" New Statesman 14 Nov. 1959: 658).

In the 1950s, Berger could be heard on British radio, and throughout the 1960s and 1970s, he could be seen on British television. His most widely known book, Ways of Seeing, which broadened the context in which art was considered, began as a series of four programmes, televised in 1972. Ways of Seeing materialized Berger's consistent argument that art should be considered in broader terms than simply art (New Statesman 14 March 1953: 297). It was a collaborative effort, as were several of his subsequent publications, television programmes, and exhibitions. The most sustained of his collaborative relationships have been with his friend, photographer Jean Mohr--in Another Way of Telling, A Fortunate Man, A Seventh Man-- and with Swiss filmmaker Alain Tanner. He describes his work with Mohr as an effort to "un-isolate particular experiences or experiences of one class... to un-isolate learning and teaching; to un-isolate the experience of specialists, that is to say a photographer, or a writer, or the viewer of an exhibition" (Willis 29). With Tanner he has written the scripts for the documentary A City at

Chandigarh (1968), and for the feature films The Salamander (1971), The Middle of the World (1974), and Jonah Who Will Be 25 in the Year 2000 (1976), which Berger describes as about the "counterpoint of hope and realism" ("The Screenwriter as Collaborator" 16). The idea of collaborative publishing was at the heart of the founding, in 1974, of the Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative. Concerned to 'un-isolate' control over the publication of books, Berger helped to found this cooperative, along with Arnold Wesker, Chris Searle, Sian Williams, Glen Thompson, and Richard and Lisa Appignanesi.

Over the last thirty years, Berger has written six novels, which he prefers not be categorized as fiction. Berger consistently pronounced that art should have the qualities of clarity, rationality, affirmativeness, anti-formalism, and particularly realism. He has striven for these same qualities in his fiction, just as he has carried over into his fiction from his criticism his fundamental assertion that nothing be considered in isolation. Most of his novels are grounded in works of non-fiction published at roughly the same time as the novels to which they relate.

His first novel, A Painter of Our Time, published in 1958, arose out of Berger's art critical essays of the 1950s and out of his experiences with people he knew in the art world, particularly emigré artists Peter Peri

(see LT 61) and Frederick Antal. In 1951, Berger wrote: "The problem of the redundant artist... is not merely an economic one. A painter needs a social context in which to work, as a spider needs a structure from which to spin its web" (Tribune 22 March 1951: 26). A Painter of Our Time sets Hungarian painter Janos Lavin's ideals--both artistic and political-- against modern London's cynical and opportunist art business, with which he must deal, and explores his isolation --even from those he is closest to-- as an exile with no suitable social context in which to work. Berger seems to have created Lavin as the true lover of art-- every aspect of whose life is tied up with his work as a painter-- that he claimed, in 1967, he had failed to find: "For 20 years I have searched like Diogenes for a true lover of art... I never found one" (New Society 26 Oct. 1967: 558).

With his next novel, The Foot of Clive, published in 1962, Berger departs permanently from the world of art in his fiction. In a more disjointed and fantastic style than he had ever employed before, he dramatizes the minutia of the daily actions and the subcorscious impulses of six men from across the class strata who, for various reasons, are in the hospital ward of Clive, cut off from society. The ward, a microcosm of British society, comes alive with the fears and hopes of these men as they weigh each other, the presence in their midst of a murderer who needs medical attention, and their

prospects in the lives they lead outside of the ward.

Corker's Freedom, published in 1964, foreshadows A Fortunate Man, Berger's most moving work of non-fiction, which examines the context for the relationship between a rural community's doctor and his patients. The tragic irony of Dr. Sassall's 'privilege' over his culturally disadvantaged patients becomes clear through Berger's examination of his utter "sense of inadequacy" (132) in the face of physical and psychological suffering. And through an examination of the rural people's cultural limitations and their great need for the intimate caring that Sassall offers, the book posits the tragedy that is modern society's devaluation of human life. In A Fortunate Man, Berger describes the situation of "wholesale cultural deprivation" (98); in Corker's Freedom, as he says in A Fortunate Man, he illuminates the situation. He does this mainly by examining the consequences of this deprivation for one particular individual, Corker, the owner of an employment agency and a self-proclaimed 'traveller'. Corker's Freedom traces several days in Corker's awakening to what he feels to be his true potential-- to become knowledgeable and to educate people in the ways of 'the good life'-- and his struggle to liberate himself from his sister and from his society's expectations of him. The novel traces this primarily through a depiction of the contours of Corker's self-consciousness.

Considered by many as "a highpoint in Berger's personal development" (Ways of Telling 80), his next novel, G., which won the 1972 Booker prize, is his boldest experiment with technique and form. G. took him five years to write, and is grounded in Ways of Seeing--published in the same year-- particularly in its consideration of sexual appetite and social roles as determined by political, historical, and cultural contexts. Berger's novels reveal him as someone who, as he says of Victor Serge, identifies himself imaginatively with everyone he encounters (LT 76); the global resonance of G. is brought about by his imaginative identification with not only particular individuals, but with a historical period of a continent, with a revolutionary class, and with women. The mysterious cosmopolitan G. has brushes with all that is vital about his period in history, but is interested in engaging with nothing but moments of liberation through sexual passion.

Berger described his "thinking about narrative" as "having become tighter and more traditional" ("Screenwriter as Collaborator" 19) after G. Up to this point he had changed narrative styles from one novel to the next, and often mixed narrative styles within the novels, as if restlessly searching for the appropriate one. No one voice or style seemed to him consistently appropriate to the various subjects of the novels. But he does this no longer: he has sustained a distinct voice

and narrative style, throughout the three-part project entitled Into Their Labours, which examines the disintegration of traditional French peasant work, perspective, and experience. Each volume of the trilogy addresses a different stage of this process. The first book, Pig Earth (1980), is described as "a book of stories set against the traditional life of a mountain village", and the second, Once in Europa (1987), is "a collection of love stories set against the disappearance or 'modernisation' of such village life". The third volume, An Old Wives' Tale of a City, which has yet to be published, "will tell the story of peasants who leave their villages to settle permanently in a metropolis" (note to Once in Europa). The impetus for Into Their Labours came from the time Berger spent with migrant workers, preparing A Seventh Man.

Despite Berger's importance as a writer of fiction and poetry --he has also co-translated Brecht, and co-written a play-- most people think of him as a critic of art and culture. He is most adept at determining the 'social equivalent' of works of art, idiosyncrasies of artistic style, and artistic modes of production, in the sense of Plekhanov's definition of criticism: "the first task of a critic is to translate the idea of a given work of art from the language of art into the language of sociology, to find what may be termed the social equivalent of the given literary [or artistic]

phenomenon" (translator's note, The Historical Novel 7).

It is not a question of simple, direct translation, as Berger outlines in an explanation of his own critical procedure (Introduction, PR). He designates two types of critical approaches: the long-term historical view and the limited, short-term view. Each view, used exclusively, is flawed; a combination of the two "would equip the ideal critic". But since, he believes this is impossible, and since the short-term limited view is 'excessively subjective' and leaves little room for just assessments of the worth and validity of works of art, the long-term historical approach to criticism is the most effective and important. In using this approach, there are two main questions to answer, the first to establish a general context, the second to weigh the particular work: "what can art serve here and now?" and "does this work help or encourage men to know and claim their social rights?". This seeking for connection between a work and its social value, this attempt to equate languages, is not simple and direct because "you are not simply demanding propaganda", nor does it mean that the artist "should be primarily concerned with a social cause".

Berger believes any kind of expression is potentially relevant to society as a whole. The long-term historical approach entails determining the "artist's way of looking at the world", and in the

process of determining this and relating it to our own way of looking at the world, "our awareness of our own potentiality" increases: "the important point is that a work of art promises in some way or another the possibility of an increase, an improvement". In the particular "relationship with the world" expressed in the work of art, we can determine a kind of action which, in theory, can prompt action. But, as Berger notes elsewhere of all artistic and creative works not overtly didactic or socially relevant: "The purpose of such art is... to contain and define the totality in which [the ambiguities of its nature] exist. In this way art becomes an aid to increasing self-consciousness instead of an immediate guide to direct action" (as quoted by Caute, Collisions 65). Therefore, implied in the long-term historical approach is an acknowledgement of the potential any type of expression has to, in its own way, 'help or encourage men to know and claim their social rights'.

Though Berger here states his preference for the exclusively long-term historical critical approach, he does combine it with the subjective approach, as he will isolate, interpret, and use details of the artist's life, temperament, influences, and intentions, the type of data employed by the short-term critical approach. Though Berger claims "the two are mutually opposed" because "you are demanding that the critic is simultaneously in one

place (in X's imagination) and everywhere (in history)", it is his own method to move back and forth between imagination (his own or his subject's) and history, between the subjective and the objective, the particular and the general. Berger now says that, in retrospect, he sees that in his criticism he proceeded methodologically "somewhat as a storyteller". This is the way he accounts for the subjective content of the criticism:

> ... that is to say, well, let's take any artist from Courbet to Piera della Francesca. Years ago I was writing quite a lot about Piera della Francesca. Relatively little is known about his life. But instead of beginning-- as I suppose many art historians, rightly, or as art critics, do-- by looking at Piera della Francesca in relation to his contemporaries, with whom he studied, what philosophers or texts he was likely to have read... that is very good, but what obsessed me was just one narrative fact: that he went blind. And then I began to construct my vision of Piera, not making that fact the most important of all, but it was my way in, and that's a storyteller's fact in a certain sense. And so then I began to try to think, so what happened when he went blind? He lost the visible, so what did the visible really mean to this man...? And I could repeat that, similar things like that [for] most of the artists I've written about. [1]

A personal fact is the starting point for Berger's own vision of the artist or his/her art; this fact provides him with his 'way in'. The exercise of criticism becomes a creative construction which begins with a particular and moves out to place the artist or the work in a larger context.

Berger wrote about art, initially and primarily, because he saw "reflected and expressed in the field of art" (PR 8) that which he wanted to speak out about in

bourgeois society. One stated aim was "to help, in however small a way, to destroy this society" (PR 8). He says:

> We live in a world in which we are surrounded by a very tall and gigantic wall, almost invisible, which cuts us off from any very different past... If we live within that wall, the most profound political function of the writer is somehow to try to describe what is happening within, as if it were addressed to those who might be in the future outside, on the other side of that wall. ("Seeing Red: the Vision of John Berger" 14)

Berger differs from most modern Western writers in the rigour of his spirit and vision. His active assumption that people are capable of changing things, that people have within them a sense and vision of something better, creates the spirit of affirmation and faith that, with few exceptions, informs his work. Such a spirit is antithetical to the notion that 'we are each alone', which is a concomitant of bourgeois society. As his aim is "to keep hope alive" ("Seeing Red"), Berger despairs of the rampant cynicism and despair (which he associates mainly with British society), which he views as an 'illness'. He writes against the grain of "the general ideology projected by the modernist movement in the arts", summarized by David Caute as:

> Knowledge?-- mere subjectivity. History?-- chaotic, arbitrary, a cycle of recurring spasms. Freedom?-- man will always be as free as a slave crawling east along the deck of a boat travelling west. Alienation?-- it is ontological, rooted in the human condition. The popular masses?-- at best a passive herd, at worst a vile mob of philistines. Who am I?--'Je est un autre'. With a kind of 'Schadenfreude', an elite has celebrated the helplessness of man.[2] (Collisions 67)

Berger is no longer writing from 'inside the wall' however: "nothing about [the bourgeois] class now interests me, for there is nothing left to discover there for the future" (AOF 65). This class and society rather has become for him part of the general 'evil' persistent in the world. Yet opposition can be expressed in several ways, and Berger continues to offer, in his work, hope and potential solutions, as well as a critical perspective. He has been concentrating for roughly the last fifteen years on fiction, writing that contains little language of direct criticism. Yet it is, as a general project, implicitly and indirectly critical of certain aspects of culture and society consistent with his previous work. It does not, however, self-translate to the same extent as either his criticism or much of his previous fiction. (That his previous writing self-translates so readily, largely due to its clarity, causes one critic to write of a study on Berger: "So, do we need an exposition of his expositions?" [Beloff 114]). While Berger's evolution has brought him to concentrate on creative writing, this work is no less that of 'fighting words' than his previous work, though style and tone have evolved. He shows his antagonism towards certain trends in modern society by making equivalence between language and experience. This can be seen as an attempt to disprove the modernist notion that language is dead or "worn out".[3]

In this pursuit, Berger is fighting what Sartre calls "literary positivism", or, broadly speaking, the pessimistic "bourgeois concept of the impossibility of communication through language":

> ... there are people who say there is no such thing as equivalence, whereas in actual fact I think the writer is a person who says to himself that, thanks to all this, equivalence does occur. That's his job. That's what we call style. (Politics and Literature 87)

All of Berger's work searches for and makes dialectical, reciprocal movements. Whether translating between the language of art and the language of sociology, or seeking equivalence between language and experience, it builds bridges, thereby combatting discontinuity among areas of human experience and the fragmentation we are so used to finding confirmed in most modern literature. Such a methodology, in its understanding of totality, can act to challenge fragmentation, understood as "categories into which reality ha[s] been separated" by certain developments of capitalism and bourgeois society:

> [Darwin and Marx] saw that such categories had become prisons for the mind, because they prevented people seeing the constant action and interaction between the categories. They found that what distinguished a particular event was always the result of the relationship between that event and other events. If, for a moment, we use the word space purely diagrammatically, we can say that they realized that it was in the space between phenomena that one could discover their explanation: the space, for example, between ape and man (Darwin); the space between the economic structure of a society and the feelings of its members (Marx). (SFP 67)

Berger's creative writing has a particular readership, consisting of those who know and love his way of expressing such ideas and issues, who hold the same ideological concerns. But he has received less general recognition for his creative writing than for his (distinctly creative) criticism; the only exception to this is G. (for which Berger received the Booker prize). The recognition he has received for his creative writing has been relatively scant, often distorting. Certainly, the works of fiction have seldom been viewed from a literary perspective. Berger does not see this as necessary, but it subjects him to a different kind of treatment, recognizes different qualities and traditions.

For example, Geoff Dyer's book on Berger's work (the first such book), very thorough and effective in other respects, treats the fiction somewhat superficially: in spite of calling for greater recognition of Berger's skill as a creative writer (see chapter on PT), Dyer sees as praiseworthy only Berger's ability to convey issues and ideas effectively. And on a couple of occasions Dyer is unfairly dismissive, such as in his judgement of Corker's Freedom and The Foot of Clive as "unmitigated failures", as "bad" and "silly" (Ways of Telling 33; chapter four). Corker's Freedom, especially, deserves a deeper, more thorough analysis. There is no question that Berger made his mark, deservedly so, as a critic, but he calls himself, not a critic, but a writer, and as

a writer he is equally adept at the more subjective, creative modes of expression as at the objective, issues-oriented ones. The lines between the various genres Berger employs are not easily drawn, and the point is that such divisions are false if one is attempting to render a totality, a continuum.

Readers, in general, are perhaps more receptive to qualities of creative writing imported into criticism, than to didacticism imported into prose fiction. Berger's fiction stands against a prejudice in the literate Western world of the last century: that creative writing, primarily fiction, and political ideology simply should not be mixed. In "Realism and Committment", Caute explains how difficult it is for a writer 'seriously committed to both artistic and political revolution' to gain wide public acceptance: "the basic problem remains. To prove to the public that to love both art and the revolution is not schizophrenic" (65). The public divides roughly into two camps: those who believe that "political passion [especially of the radical left-wing variety] enters the province of writing only to plague it" (61), and those who look only for "fidelity to the party line", as was the case with Socialist Realism. Hauser goes as far as to claim as "fact" that overt ideological content has a counterproductive effect on the reader:

> ...it is a significant fact that the social and political effect of a work is that much stronger the less obviously the intention is expressed and

> the less it seeks agreement. Naked, crude, direct tendentiousness alienates, arouses suspicion, and provokes a defense, whereas latent, hidden ideology, the opiate which is sneaked in and the hidden poison, act unexpectedly and do not put us on our guard. (216)

Hauser's "latent, hidden ideology" may well be called "philosophy", which, as Caute notes, is seen as more palatable than overt ideology:

> ... the fall-back position which welcomes 'philosophical' influences on literature but condemns 'ideological' influences is usually garrisoned by critics who take ideology to be a sinister black box of obsessions poised like a bomb in the hands of a tight-lipped fanatic. (62)

In all of Berger's writing there is at work a 'philosophy of composition'[4] which combines and moves back and forth between the objective and the subjective voices and perspectives. It is one of the most important and distinctive qualities of his work. The nature of the mixture of the subjective and the objective varies, and it is employed for specific philosophical-political purposes. In "A Note to the Reader" of A Seventh Man, Berger makes his reason for the combination clear: "The subject is European, its meaning is global. Its theme is unfreedom. This unfreedom can only be fully recognized if an objective economic system is related to the subjective experience of those trapped within it". Generally, a movement between the two voices and perspectives exposes and renders the total situation of the relationship between objective reality and subjective experience. The transition between the two is often

jarring and sudden: it is meant to be, to show the disjunction and lack of continuity between them. At this disjunction, especially as created and sustained by bourgeois society, thrive "injustice, hypocrisy, cruelty, wastefulness and alienation" (Preface, PR 8).

A Seventh Man, through a self-conscious examination of how it is treating its subject-- 'the experience of migrant workers in Europe'-- provides a key to Berger's work as a whole: "A man's resolution to emigrate needs to be seen within the context of a world economic system. Not in order to reinforce a political theory but so that what actually happens to him can be given its proper value" (41). Berger wants to take measure of the value of individual life and experience, to show how an individual takes her or his picture and understanding of her or his own worth from the society in which she or he lives, and to show how certain societies provide their citizens with false, distorted, limiting and cruel pictures of the value and validity of their individual lives and subjective experiences.

This point provides the conclusion to A Fortunate Man: we live in "a society which is incapable of knowing what a human life is worth. It cannot afford to..." Such a realization would involve major transformations of the society. Berger goes on:

> I do not claim to know what a human life is worth. There can be no final or personal answer... The question is social. An individual cannot answer it for himself. The answer resides within the totality of relations which can exist within a

certain social structure at a certain time. (166)

The waste and destruction of human lives, sensibilities, and capabilities by bourgeois society is a deeply embedded and recurrent theme of Berger's work, as he examines the consequences and implications of the disjunction between the external (objective) and the internal (subjective):

> ...half-men, sophisticates, cynics, time-servers abound in this society, for it is a society incapable of recognizing or using the capabilites of the vast majority of its citizens... The recognition of every man's capabilities should be an exterior social process; it has become a personal and introspective one which only a few have the strength to even partially carry through. (PT 88)

In his fiction (up until the trilogy) Berger explores the consequences and implications of the disjunction by focussing on individual subjective consciousness. His discussion, in A Seventh Man, of "underdevelopment" in terms of "underdeveloped economies" is precisely applicable to the kind of consciousness he examines; bourgeois society 'underdevelops' consciousness and life on an individual level.

As above, the point is often clearly stated, but it is also made apparent through Berger's 'philosophy of composition', which insists on relating the subjective to the objective. Stated another way, we must "count [his] vision as [his] technique" (PT 65). In other forms and terms, this same relationship appears as that between interiority and exteriority, particular and general,

inductive and deductive, and in the case of the two critical approaches deemed possible by Berger, short-term limited and long-range historical.

Running through all of Berger's work is a preoccupation with these dualities as representing philosophies of reasoning and perspective. He insists on the primary importance of particularity, on beginning with the particular, out of respect for the quality of individual human life and experience. The 'particular' is "the point of departure of induction", and the 'universal' or 'general' is "the point of departure of deduction" (Adorno 471): Berger states that he "[tries] to describe as accurately as possible the experience in question; [his] starting point is phenomenological, not deductive" (SS 9). (Aristotle writes that, of the two types of dialectical arguments, induction is "the more convincing and clear" and "more readily learnt by the use of the senses".[5] This last view is highly relevant to Berger.)

In G. the writer/narrator explains why exploration of the particular is the only way to grasp the most personal and subjective of experiences: "one can represent all", but description of all, of the general, cannot reflect or correspond to the power and originality of experience of each 'one':

> All generalizations are opposed to sexuality... Why does writing about sexual experience reveal so strikingly what may be a general limitation of literature in relation to aspects of all experience?

> In sex, a quality of 'firstness' is felt as continually re-creatable. There is an element in every occasion of sexual excitement which seizes the imagination as though for the first time.
>
> What is this quality of 'firstness'? How, usually, do first experiences differ from later ones?
>
> Take the example of a seasonal fruit: blackberries. The advantage of this example is that one's first experience each year of eating blackberries has in it an element of the artificial firstness which may prompt one's memory of the original, first occasion. The first time, a handful of blackberries represented all blackberries, Later, a handful of blackberries is a handful of ripe/unripe/over-ripe/sweet/acid, etc., etc., blackberries. Discrimination develops with experience. But the development is not only quantitative. The qualitative change is to be found in the relation between the particular and the general. You lose the symbolically complete nature of whatever is in hand. First experience is protected by a sense of enormous power; it wields magic.
>
> The distinction between first and repeated experience is that one represents all: but two, three, four, five, six, seven ad infinitum cannot. First experiences are discoveries of original meaning which the language of later experience lacks the power to express. (111)

While Berger insists on the primacy and uniqueness of the 'particular' for philosophical reasons, he mediates between the general and particular and the objective and the subjective out of faithfulness to the dynamic of dialectical reasoning; to make the clearest possible statement of totality. His own writing achieves such expressiveness, and he also holds up and uses other media for this purpose. In photography he has discovered another medium in which 'one can represent all':

> A photograph which achieves expressiveness thus works dialectically: it preserves the

> particularity of the event recorded, and it chooses an instant when the correspondences of these particular appearances articulate a general idea... In every expressive photograph, in every photograph which quotes at length, the particular, by way of a general idea, has been equalized with the universal. (AWT 122; see also AL 43)

One challenge, when attempting to mediate consistently and effectively between the subjective and the objective, or the particular and the general, is to discover how to integrate them, and how far to integrate them. Where in critical, didactic works, the assertion of the relationship can be made obvious because it becomes part of the didacticism, in creative writing the challenge is greater. The writer must somehow show the particulars as bearing on the general without making an obvious display of the relationship between the two. Berger has experimented with various ways of doing this. Often, in non-specific genre works like A Seventh Man, he has found "A Note to the Reader" necessary. When he came to write the trilogy, he attached to the first book, Pig Earth, both "An Explanation" and an "Historical Afterword", in order to ground the content of the work. (He has since said that he would like the three books of the trilogy published as a whole, with "An Explanation" from Pig Earth and a preface at the beginning, and the "Historical Afterword" from Pig Earth at the end. Pig Earth, more factual and descriptive than the other two books of the trilogy, would then form a "threshold" for the other two works. In itself it would then become a

kind of grounding also for the highly creative, imaginative, subjective remainder of the trilogy.) He tells us why the "Explanation" and "Historical Afterword" are necessary:

> Inevitably a poem or a story deals with a particular experience: how this experience relates to developments on a world scale can and should be implied within the writing itself-- this is precisely the challenge posed by the "resonance" of a language...; nevertheless it is not usually possible in a poem or story to make the relation between particular and universal explicit. Those who try to do so, end up by writing parables. Hence the writer's desire to write an explanation <u>around</u> the work or works he is offering the reader.

Berger goes on to explain how, in the nineteenth century-- "because it was a century of revolutionary change"-- writers were conscious of "the relation between the individual and history", and so the tradition of explanatory grounding of the work became common:

> Yet now it is rare for a writer to try to explain his book. The argument has been that the work of imagination he has created should be sufficient unto itself. Literature has elevated itself into pure art. Or so it is assumed. The truth is that most literature, whether addressed to an elite or mass readership, has degenerated into pure entertainment. ("Historical Afterword" <u>PE</u> 195)

Unlike Berger, few writers do have the aforementioned desire to 'write an explanation around their work or works'. But Berger reflects a great deal on "the relationship of writing to the world" (Caute 65), the job of writing, its possibilities and aims. As a form of work, writing, like any other job, has its responsibilites. For Berger, writing is not an end in

itself: the aim of writing is not fulfilled once the writing is done. He holds a "utilitarian view of art":

> ...that is, the tendency to impart to its productions the significance of judgements on the phenomena of life, and the joyful eagerness, which always accompanies it, to take part in social strife... (Plekhanov, Marxists on Literature 277)

He is opposed to certain currents in much modern literature "for many reasons, of which the simplest is that it is an insult to the dignity of the reader, the experience communicated, and the writer" (PE 196).

It can be argued that current developments in literature (of bourgeois Western societies) should be opposed because the resulting literature merely caters to a collective and individual imagination already disabled, a mind already imprisoned, by the society from which it springs. A mirror is set up, rather like that of the society from which an individual takes her or his notion of what a human life is worth, which reflects back a distorted, false, or limited picture, and which merely reflects a people "hopelessly out of harmony with their social environment" (Plekhanov 277).

One of Berger's main concerns is for the health and vitality of imagination: both his creative and his critical works express his belief that the imagination, humankind's strongest asset as a social animal, is stunted and thwarted by bourgeois society. He addresses the violence done to human imagination (AWT 105), and therefore, also to the creative spirit (PT 101). And

imagination is linked with subjective experience, especially in the context of how the quality of individual experience and life is diminished in capitalist society (FM 78). Berger's work also expresses his faith in the present and future of imagination if, when, and where the imagination is released from these fetters.

Berger is clear, strong, and prolific on the objective, the general, the universal; this type of view and voice, didactic and distant, seems to have come relatively easy for him. A greater challenge has been to overcome that problem discussed by the writer/narrator of G. as "a general limitation of literature in relation to aspects of all experience": to render particular subjective experience and internality in words, to find the appropriate fictional form for such experience. Reading all his works chronologically gives one the clear impression that he has always been searching for the most true and effective way of doing this, sometimes declaring it impossible or necessarily resulting in a poor translation. Compounding the challenge is to make that rendering resonant with reference to the larger reality, as an alternative to explanatory grounding. How does one 'bring into effective action' for the reader the most deeply personal experiences of an individual? In G's "moment of total desire", "the stuff of imagination (memory, language, dreams) is ... deployed"; Berger

treats 'the stuff of imagination' as the seat of subjective experience and meaning, and renders internality by exploring perception, memory and time, language, and dreams.

Berger's fiction spreads before us a variety of 'ways in' to subjective experience. In A Painter of Our Time, subjectivity is handled, in part, structurally: the narrative alternates between two personal voices, one of the journal of Janos Lavin, and one of his friend who found (and is publishing) the personal journal. As Lavin's internal struggles relate directly to larger struggles, there is an evident correspondence between the particular and the general. In this novel, Berger treats the personal particular with tenderness, which we do not see again until the second book of the trilogy, Once in Europa. The Foot of Clive is an impersonal novel, in one sense, and the characters are rather emblematic. The strongest note of subjectivity is of the deep fears and illusions of the characters. But usually these are representative of something else, as the novel is a display of the constituents of British society and how they think. When the narrator moves close in to a character to render personal perspective or qualities of his or her inner life, we are taken into the character's head, as into issues. Each is marked and categorized--and they mark and categorize each other-- according to the place he or she holds in society outside the

hospital. It is as if the characters' subjective lives are entirely predicated on class, status and history, and narrated from the outside in. Corker's Freedom addresses the very problem of one's subjective experience and inner life as having legitimacy in a society intent on stifling and conditioning these for its own ends. The main subjective consciousness of the novel, Corker's, which alternates structurally with the narrator's, is split, fragmented, and confused in an increasingly desperate attempt to make what he knows/thinks/says and believes be manifestly consistent with one another and to live through them. G. faces the complex of objective/subjective head on, but in a new way, for Berger. Here the writer/narrator points to the question of how much he can actually know of interiority. Discussion of the complexity of this novel is best left for when it can be analysed all at once. In G. one has mainly to look at the merging of subjective consciousnesses, the formative factors in subjectivity, and subjectivity as pertaining mainly to the writer/narrator. The main "character" is not really a character, but rather a myth let loose in the world and events of roughly 1887-1915.

While in all his writing up to the early 'eighties, Berger has employed both the impersonal, objective voice of fact and reason and the subjective voice of empathy for the personal experiences of those about whom he is

writing, he has arrived, in the last several years, in his creative project of the trilogy, at a point of concentrating on personal narrative voice; either that of the teller's or that of the subjective experience of his characters. (And Our Faces, My Heart, Brief as Photos, also written during these years, offers up some of the most personal and philosophical of his own experiences.)

Berger's sociological interest in myth and his study of traditional stories has provided the key to his rather new way of narrating internality. Myth and traditional story provide a solution as old as civilization to the problem of bridging the gap between subject written about and audience/reader, of bringing home a personal significance to the reader, of mediating between general and particular. As Joseph Campbell states[6], myth does not, as is commonly thought, "make meaning". Rather, it externalizes internal experience; it places outside, concretizes, and therefore endorses, what people already feel and 'know', consciously or not, in their own internal 'geography'. Myth, therefore, is one thing that offers 'recognition' in a way that many structures and facets of bourgeois, capitalist societies do not. That they do not offer 'recognition', Berger feels, accounts for much despair, disillusion, and the diminished quality of individual life and experience: "it is a question of failing to find any confirmation of oneself in the outside world" (FM 75).

The project of the trilogy grew out of Berger's desire to understand better the nature of the personal lives of those he was studying as migrants for A Seventh Man:

> ...in so far as there was any rational thinking behind it at all, it was when doing the book on migrant workers, A Seventh Man, and meeting and living with and interviewing and identifying with these migrant workers, nearly all of whom were peasants from Southern Europe, that although... I knew quite a lot, and I could imagine, I could describe, I could narrate their shocking experience when they arrive in metropolitan countries, about their village life, about what they left behind, I had rather little to go on except their words. And so when that book was finished I wanted to know more. And then I started reading sociology and magazines and books about peasants and peasant studies... including Marxist ones. And the more I read, the more I realized that, with one or two exceptions..., these books, these studies, were simply written from an urban point of view... like old-fashioned anthropology... strictly economist. Which only encouraged me or pushed me further into the decision to try to... somehow get a little closer to the face of this experience. (Interview May 1988)

In going from an examination of the phenomenon of the migrant workers' experience as migrant workers to writing about their personal experiences, Berger is shifting from writing about these people from the outside in to the inside out. He moves, literally (physically) and figuratively, into their subjective realms.

This move caps Berger's long struggle to 'get close to the face of experience' in writing. His overall creative project has been one of constant experimenting with methods of narration and description, two distinct and opposed ways of telling, according to Lukács

("Narrate or Describe?" _Writer and Critic_). In narration, Lukács maintains, "we ourselves experience the events in which the characters take active part", whereas in description "we are merely observers" because "the characters are merely spectators, more or less interested in the events. As a result, the events themselves become only a tableau for the reader, or, at best, a series of tableaux" (116).

The two ways of telling-- experiencing and observing-- are "socially determined for writers of two different periods of capitalism"; the opposition between the two "arises out of divergent basic positions about life and about the major problems of society" (118). Lukács's examination of the two styles through time leads him to the conclusion that the predominance in modern time of literature based on observation and description is the inevitable product of the development of capitalism. Epic literature, which narrated "the inner poetry of life, of human experience, is the literature of men in struggle", and "description is the writer's substitute for the epic significance that has been lost" with the development of capitalism. To an extent, Lukács's examination of narration vs. description is relevant to Berger's experiments with different modes of writing. When writing from inside a society to be opposed, he frequently maintained that the writer's duty is to 'ruthlessly and honestly describe' ("Seeing Red..."

14). Lukács's aligning of narration with experiencing, and with getting close to the "inner poetry of life", as opposed to observing and describing, corresponds with Berger's move to a style of creative writing (also evident in earlier creative writing to an extent) that brings both the narrative voice and the reader closer to the face of experience.

This work traces Berger's evolution and explores his various ways of describing and narrating as well as the political-philosophical purposes behind his 'philosophy of composition'. It will look at Berger as a writer and an "articulator of experience"[7], and will concentrate on his 'ways in' to subjective experience. It attempts to redeem his early fiction, and to defend his creative writing of the last fifteen years (the trilogy) from the suggestion by Randall, Harkness, and McTernan in the Special Issue Edinburgh Review and Robbins in The Minnesota Review that it is a 'cop-out', by placing both in the context of his overall evolution. Many critics ask ideological questions of Berger's work, which is perhaps inevitable with a writer whose voice is known for its strident Marxism. This work will probe his writing and voice along broader lines, in the belief that, as Berger says, "ideology determines the finished result, but it does not determine the energy flowing through the current" (SS 203).

Notes

[1]Interview with the author, May 1988, at Berger's home in France. Subsequent references to this interview will cite Interview, May 1988.

[2] See Caute's introduction to Sartre's The Age of Reason (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd.), in which he also uses "man will always be as free as a slave crawling east along the deck of a boat traveliing west" and "Je est un autre" ('I is another'): the first is from Beckett's Molloy, the second from Rimbaud (unidentified source).

[3]William Carlos Williams, "Paterson".

[4] Georg Lukács, Writer and Critic edited and translated by Professor Arthur Kahn (London: Merlin Press) 116.

[5]Aristotle Topics Book I.II:12. The Complete Works of Aristotle Jonathan Barnes ed. (Princeton: Princton University Press) Vol. 1, 174-5.

[6]Television interview, in which Campbell discussed his extensive research into various world mythologies (details of interview unknown).

[7] "I think of myself as an articulator of experience, and obviously my experience helps me to articulate the experience of others." Berger, as quoted by Bill Quillian, "Pig Earth: Writing inside the Wall" The Minnesota Review N.S. 28 Spring 1987, 85.

2

Empathy, Dreams, and Heroism: A Painter of Our Time, The Foot of Clive, Corker's Freedom

Empathy

Lee Baxandall writes of Marx: "he remarked... broadly that the industrial age had produced impoverishment of the creative imagination... the sense of rage against the degradation of the quality of life, and the warping of the potential for self-realization of our human species, is paramount in [his] writings"[1] (Bottomore ed. 286). Much of Berger's work addresses these same concerns. And because those whose imaginations are impoverished and those for whom the quality of life is degraded are not able to articulate what is happening to them, Berger has appointed himself as one of their spokesmen. He has been labelled a 'humanist Marxist', but because empathy guides his concern for the individual, the 'humanist' in him should be emphasized.

If Berger writes out of a tradition-- though generally speaking he does not-- it is that which is characterized by '"old-fashioned" rationalist and humanist elements of the Marxist tradition'[2] made modern as "the politicalization of humanism" (Dyer 153). His work is comparable, to an extent, to that of the broadly

defined 'thinkers' such as Lukács and Sartre,[3] but there are few bases on which he can be compared to other writers of fiction. He differs from Lukács and Sartre, though, primarily in the fact that he is not as systematic a thinker.[4] Empathy consistently informs his work, from his examination of those disabled by modern British society, to those ignored or dismissed by Marxism, such as the peasants about whom he now writes.[5] The impulse of empathy takes precedence in his work over the tenets of a programme:

> I would like to emphasize two things that are so deeply inside me that they are hardly even at the level of informed ideas. One... is the gut solidarity with those without power, with the underprivileged. Where perhaps I am a bad Marxist is that I have an aversion to political power whatever its form. Intuitively, I am always with those who live under that power.[6] ("Ways of Witnessing")

Berger often makes statements about faculties other than rational ones being at work in his writing. When explaining to me how A Seventh Man began, he said:"In a certain sense maybe it simply began because it was my destiny to write it... I don't think everything has a kind of rational explanation". In another interview he talks about the impulse to write as coming before he has fully intellectualized or rationally understood that about which he writes:

> What interests me in a novel is trying to define and express something which has not been defined or expressed before. It can be the taste of tea at two a.m., an insight into the Etruscans, or working in a factory. If there is something I have half perceived I feel it necessary to turn it into prose and make it therefore part of our

consciousness. (Interview with Geoffrey Wansell)

The writer/narrator of G. claims to be writing in the dark of a similar 'half-perception': "The way my imagination forces me to write this story is determined by its intimations about those aspects of time which I have touched but never identified. I am writing this book in the same dark" (148).

Berger believes, and wants us to believe, that a subject seizes his imagination before it appeals to his intellect. Some critics find it hard to believe Berger is ever only half conscious of the intellectual significance of what he writes, and they find it hard to reconcile the idea of a writer guided by intuition and half-perception with the writer of the full-blown ideas we find in Berger's work. For example, David Gervais finds a contradiction between Berger's insistence on imagination as a fundamental well-spring of meaning and the fact that in his fiction "the idea always precedes any imaginative rendering of it" (191). This charge is relevant but to mitigate it somewhat, we can look at Berger's definition and understanding of non-rational faculties like 'imagination' and 'intuition'. Ultimately the charge is proved wrong because Berger's 'ideas' are a result of his imaginative engagement with reality: the two cannot be defined separately.

The faculties of 'imagination' and 'intuition' are, like rational faculties, informed and conditioned by

culture and society. They are as much a part of consciousness as other faculties, and are not exempt from particulars of time and place. Berger's intuition makes him empathetic. But empathy is not for him a sentimental function (though he now wonders whether he can be accused of sentimentality):[7] it is an exercise of the imagination, and imagination is a social product. For Berger, all non-rational and subjective experiences should be seen as part of social reality, and in modern capitalist societies they are not.

Berger claims that psychological and subjective reality is too often and too easily dismissed by those on the right and those on the left. In "Article of Faith" he writes about a fundamental contradiction that "the political programme of the left" inherited from Stalinism: "A subjective retreat from reality leading to the dogmatic stressing of the need for pure objectivity" (AL 125). By his own reckoning, his empathy makes him a "bad Marxist", but through his empathy and emphasis on the importance of imagination and other subjective experiences, he is attempting to counteract the mistake of the programmes on the left that have failed to credit the imagination and subjective experience with their full significance. He feels "the importance of subjective experience as a historical factor" (AL 125) has been ignored.

It is perhaps valid to say, as Gervais does, that Berger goes too far the other way, that in his retreat from pure objectivity he ends up dogmatically stressing the need for examination of those areas of human experience not conducive to dogmatic analysis. But then we must realize that Berger is most interested in subjective experience as a manifestation of history: he feels that writers in general

> ... have not paid enough attention to the way history can be subjectively active in the creation of a character. I say subjectively because I am not talking about the direct effect of historic events or trends, but about the historical content residing in particular character-traits, habits, emotional attitudes, beliefs: and how this content, which may be highly inconsistent in objective terms, then expresses itself through the formation of a specific character... The whole of history is part of the reality which consciousness reflects. (SFP 128)

In two separate interviews Berger discusses the value of the "capacity to understand... to speak for or to take pictures for other people's experience and for their individuality" (Willis). Writing, for him, is a social act achieved through empathy: "what is the faculty of imagination? It seems to me that imagination is, in fact, the faculty to share experience. It is the faculty to put yourself in somebody else's skin... this faculty of imagination is a social product; it is what happens because man is a social animal" (Willis). As the ability to share experience declines in modern capitalist societies, the faculty of imagination atrophies. If we cultivate our roles as social beings, which many current

trends and forces work to destroy, we act on this imaginative capacity, and therefore keep alive the imagination and 'serve rather than search arrogantly alone' (PT 89).

Berger believes that empathy "may reveal an area of truth between the objective and the subjective" (AL 130). It is one of the means by which he attempts to strike a balance, to mediate between the subjective and the objective. The fact that he does not always succeed is apparent in that empathy and rage sometimes lead him to make large untenable statements such as the one in Art and Revolution that Gervais deems "passion... on the verge of hysteria" (188): "he is explaining that the only 'logical conclusion' for someone who is willing to accept the world as it is, who acquiesces in the exploitation in it which makes 'every value meaningless', is 'suicide' ". In statements such as this Berger is offering his own empathy and rage as a testament to the horror he sees. He believes more firmly in the immediate power of words than many writers to whom he can be compared: his words rush to respond to what he sees as immediate pressing problems. A reflection of this is the urging of the writer/narrator of G. as he addresses a civilian wounded by a soldier:

> Write anything. Truth or untruth, it is unimportant. Speak but speak with tenderness, for that is all that you can do that may help a little. Build a barricade of words, no matter what they mean... Say anything, for his pain is larger than the distinction you can make between truth and untruth. Dress him with the words of

your voice as others dress his wounds. (75-76)

We can see Berger's stress on empathy and on imaginative identification in his perception of his role as a writer. This perception has evolved into one of himself as a storyteller. This examination begins and ends by looking at what Berger is doing now as a way of seeing this as a culmination of his development as a writer, and also to provide a context for his overall project as an "articulator of experience". The concerns of his current work seem remarkably consistent with the concerns of his early fiction, even though his focus and technique have changed.

Writing

The storyteller is primarily a "witness" to that which is immediately around him. In the closest Berger comes to defining what he means by this key term 'witness' he says: "storytellers lose their identity and are open to the lives of other people" ("Ways of Witnessing"). This statement accords with Walter Benjamin's assertion of the natural forum for storytelling as dependent on states of mind and activities conducive to "self-forgetfulness": "...the more self-forgetful the listener is, the more deeply is what he listens to impressed upon his memory" ("The Storyteller: Reflections on the Work of Nikolai Leskov" Illuminations 91). In "Ways of Witnessing" Berger goes

on to say (of storytellers):

> Maybe when you look at their entire output you can see something that really belongs to that one person. But at any one moment it is difficult to see what the job of your life is because you are so aware of what you are lending yourself to. This is perhaps why I use the term 'being a witness'. One is a witness of others but not of oneself.

Berger uses the term in several places, always to name the phenomenon of how one becomes situated in, open to, and aware of the larger stream of human life and history. In G. the writer/narrator talks of the 'primitive satisfaction' of the role of witness:

> ... but what may be the deepest is the satisfaction of witnessing, and so of taking part in, what they believe will be an historic occasion. This is a very primitive satisfaction, connecting the time of one's own life with the time of one's ancestors and descendants. (130)

To witness is to experience "the great pole of history... notched across at the same point as the small stick of one's own life" (130). In A Fortunate Man Berger ascribes the function of an agent of continuity to Dr. Sassall, as he is the "objective witness" to the lives of his patients (who are economically and culturally marginalized). As "the clerk of their records", "he represents them, becomes their objective (as opposed to subjective) memory, because he represents their lost possibility of understanding and relating to the outside world, and because he also represents some of what they know but cannot think" (109). Berger seems to see Sassall as performing the same function as he does as

writer and storyteller.

Berger's own experience puts him in the position of being a 'witness' to the lives of the peasants with whom he has lived for several years, and from whom he has culled his most recent stories. Within this context he has cultivated the role of the storyteller. But he also acts as a witness as writer of his earlier novels, as a kind of 'clerk of the records' of the lives of those such as Corker, in 'representing some of what they know but cannot think'. A 'witness' is not objective in the sense of being unfeeling and impersonal: quite the opposite. Berger's witnessing is rooted in empathy, what Carrie Rickey describes as "a psychology central to his ethos and eros" that "makes the remote immediate" (1). Though Berger's receptive active witnessing is perhaps kindred to Keats's 'negative capability', the aim for Berger is not the creation of art, but rather the fulfilling of his imaginative duty as a social animal. To 'witness' is also to abide by a fundamental belief in equality, to offer "recognition of being" (SM 141). To recognize and believe in equality among all humans is the first step toward effective witnessing. Berger sees Sassall as offering 'recognition of being':

> ... in our society frustration is far more usual than satisfaction, unhappiness far more common than contentment... It is a question of failing to find any confirmation of oneself in the outside world. The lack of confirmation leads to a sense of futility. And this futility is the essence of loneliness... If the man can begin to feel recognized... the hopeless nature of his unhappiness will have changed: he may even have

the chance of being happy. (FM 74-75)

In Berger's first novel we find the same emphasis: "Any suicide is the result of lack of recognition" (PT 121). The technique by which Sassall 'furthers the process of recognition' is to offer himself and his experience as an equal, and to respond to and receive the other as an equal. This is a dialectical and reciprocal process, one of mutual imaginative identification, and it is because of this that Gervais has problems with Berger's assumption that he offers recognition (194). He feels that those with whom Berger assumes he is having a dialogue do not feel the common nature with the writer that is necessary for the dialogue. While one can agree with Gervais to a point, it is going too far to suggest that Berger desires such a relationship with his audience. 'Recognition of being' can operate on a personal basis, such as in the relationship Sassall has with his patients, but writing is not intended to offer personalized recognition: if the reader and the writer have a relationship of mutual identification, it is only through the sharing of the ideas presented. The ideas Berger posits mediate between himself and his reader. In the ideas the reader can find herself or himself, or be reminded of something she or he knew but was not conscious of; ideally the writing goads the reader into some action.

We have only to look at Berger's conviction that art can offer this same 'recognition of being' to see that the recognition is impersonal and more abstract than Gervais suggests. In A Painter of Our Time Lavin writes that the artist "recognizes what others have felt but never known. Technique and genius are nothing more nor less than recognition" (66). A Painter of Our Time deals with the question of the creativity of an artist in a similar way to how Berger deals with the creativity of a storyteller in later work. Lavin argues that artists are not 'special creators' whose creativity has some mysterious source:

> As bourgeois society increasingly destroys and corrupts the general, popular creative spirit, the experience of imaginative creation becomes rarer and rarer till in the end people think there is some magical secret for creativity. (101)

Artists create, he writes, "out of faith... We create to improve the world, 'to establish', as Tolstoy wrote, 'brotherly union among men' ". Berger began his career by looking at art, and by seeing in it the realization of and the potential for this 'recognition of being' in the form of an offer of 'fraternity'.[9] He sums up Courbet: "... one might say that Courbet's socialism was expressed in his work by its quality of uninhibited Fraternity" (PR 198). Ernst Fischer, an acquaintance of Berger's until his death (see "Ernst Fischer: a philosopher and death" SS 126), and an influence on Berger, writes with great faith in the power of art to provoke identification among

people, to offer recognition and fellow-feeling:

> ... our limited 'I' is... marvellously enlarged by the experience of a work of art; a process of identification takes place within us, and we can feel, almost effortlessly, that we are not only witnesses but even fellow creatures of those works that grip us without permanently tying us down... Art as the means of man's identification with his fellow-men, nature and the world, as his means of feeling and living together with everything that is and will be, is bound to grow as man himself grows in stature. The process of identification... has already extended beyond recognition, and will eventually unite man with the whole human race, and the whole world. (224)

Creativity, then, is not the inventiveness of an independent, solitary mind.[10] Berger writes: "the question of invention of the writer, author, storyteller, so much insisted upon by certain schools of modern critics and professors, becomes patently absurd" (SS 240)[11] when we consider that creative imagination is bred of a social context and addressed to a social milieu. Creating is a social act stemming from faith in something better.

The kind of stories Berger is now interested in are intended to offer 'recognition of being': in their language readers and listeners are meant to recognize their experience and their place in the larger scheme of things. Berger discusses this phenomenon in terms of 'allowing definition'. 'Offering recognition' and 'allowing definition' have the same root in confirmation of existence. In the peasant village in which he lives he has discovered many natural storytellers and has found that every one of their stories (and "every comment on

the story which is proof that the story has been witnessed") "allows everyone to define himself" on a personal level. On a collective level, "the function of these stories, which are, in fact, close, oral, daily history, is to allow the whole village to define itself" (SS 16). Stories are one way in which the village continually creates a "living portrait" of itself. This is not true of larger cities or centres where there is not the cohesion of common experience, aspiration or "identity of spirit". General culture no longer "acts as a mirror which enables the individual to recognize himself" (FM 93):

> There are large sections of the English working and middle classes who are inarticulate as a result of wholesale cultural deprivation. They are deprived of the means of translating what they know into thoughts which they can think. They have no example to follow in which words clarify experience. Their spoken proverbial traditions have long been destroyed: and, although they are literate in the strictly technical sense, they have not had the opportunity of discovering the existence of a written cultural heritage. (FM 92)

This is precisely where Berger's fiction (up until the trilogy) comes in: as he attempts to articulate for those of the working and middle classes who cannot articulate or clarify their own experience, or attempts to 'translate' what they know into thoughts, he attempts to reintegrate them, in the reader's consciousness, into a cultural heritage, and to counteract the consequences of modern British society. Because his vehicle for these ideas is fiction, he has free rein of the imagination.

When, however, he has acted as a witness to the lives of real subjects-- Sassall, Picasso, Neizvestny-- he has been accused of identifying with them to the point of distorting the subjects about whom he writes: overimaginative identification results in the imposition of views and aims onto subjects. It is true that Sassall's concerns seem very much the same as Berger's. And Roland Penrose accuses Berger of "creat[ing] Picasso in his own image' (in The Success and Failure of Picasso). Gervais finds that Sassall and Neizvestny are too much alike and too much like Berger for credibility. Berger, he writes,

> ...is unwilling to recognize himself directly enough for his reader to be sure of seeing Neizvestny and the doctor in the full light of their separateness. The odd effect of this is that he sometimes seems to have invented them. (193)

Implied in this criticism is that others who write studies of living subjects (or dead ones) and biographies write objective truth, which is absurd. Also implied is that Berger's sole aim is for us to come to know Sassall as an individual, when really Berger's aim is to show, through Sassall, the social reality of which Sassall and his patients are a part. Where Gervais finds "false objectivity", Berger does not even claim to be purely objective. He claims his authority on the subject about which he writes comes not from scientific provability, but from his own conviction of the validity of what he observes:

> What I am saying about Sassall and his patients is subject to the danger which accompanies any imaginative effort. At certain times my own subjectivity may distort. At no time can I prove what I am saying. I can only claim that after years of observation of the subject I believe that what I am saying, despite my clumsiness, reveals a significant part of the social reality of the small area in question, and a large part of the psychological reality of Sassall's life. (FM 110)

He is also identifying the study of Sassall and his patients as an "imaginative effort", not unlike that of his fiction. What stands behind Berger's work is his own credibility and his own imaginative talents, and his readers either trust in him as an observer or they do not. It is significant that A Fortunate Man is subtitled "The Story of a Country Doctor". Berger believes the lines between various kinds of writing should not be rigidly drawn, and his own writing, in its attempt to mediate between the subjective imagination and objective reality, prevents this. Yet he has been castigated for bold imaginative embellishment in works that readers want to see as documentary works of truth-uncovering, as well as for placing the idea before imaginative rendering in fiction. Writing in Britain, Berger was made to feel, at times, that he transgressed certain unwritten rules of what is acceptable in non-fiction and in fiction, rules that do not apply in other cultural and literary traditions. Moving out of that society has given him greater freedom to write what he wants to write, without having to be defensive, as previously he was to an extent. Also, in his discovery of peasants as tellers of

stories about their lives, as those who 'believe life is a story', he finds a natural forum for the meshing of imaginative embellishment and realistic depiction of living subjects.

In <u>Corker's Freedom</u> Berger is the observer of the "historical content residing in particular character traits, habits, emotional attitudes, beliefs: and how this content... expresses itself through the formation of [the] specific character" of Corker. <u>Corker's Freedom</u> is the earliest work of fiction that most clearly displays the empathetic response at the heart of all of Berger's writing. The book opens, not with an idea, but-- after providing a few facts-- with imaginative identification with the patterns of Alec's experience of his daily life. In <u>Corker's Freedom</u> Berger addresses the repression and death of the imagination particular to modern British society. I asked him about this:

JB: ...the withering of the imagination... exactly comes from the conviction that experience is incommunicable and that everybody is exactly alone. Imagination is at one level something very very simple; imagination begins in childhood, very early... it is actually empathy (a word, incidentally, which doesn't exist in French). Now, the validity of empathy actually comes from, in my opinion, the social nature of man's imagination. That's the way our imagination begins to be born. Imagination is a social product. If you believe that experience is incommunicable, then empathy is illusory and imagination has nothing to work with, and so the imagination withers. But this seems to me in our time to have been a sympton or the result of a particular culture and not all over the world at all. And in fact now I would be very careful about drawing a world map of where that applies. Even if one said that it applied to, say, northwest or western Europe, one would really have to make many exceptions... In fact what one is talking about is a hegemonic, metropolitan culture of a certain part of the world. We're talking about a kind of parochialism.

DW: In _Corker's Freedom_ you imply that everyone is born with a rich imaginative capability and a great capacity to identify with, relate to, share experience with others. But what happens? Are you saying it is drummed out of them? And that they lose touch with this capacity?

JB: Absolutely. And that's what _Corker's Freedom_ is all about... And incidentally, I think it's quite an important book. Not only in my own development, but just in itself. Because it's about that, and I think that's quite a good way of talking about it.

DW: Somewhere you look back on _Corker's Freedom_ and talk about Corker's inability to articulate his inner life as not due to simplicity and naivity and ignorance...

JB: Yes, and its a question of deprivation, cultural starvation of a kind.

Corker's Freedom focusses on the lives of the lower and working classes of south London in 1960 to 1962. The people examined equate being alive with being the victims of circumstance, and they fatalistically assume that the reality of life is treachery:

> They have learnt how near the mud always is, how quickly the grass grows over, how easy it is to drown... The forces against you are so strong that you have only to glance away for a second for everything to revert to its inhospitable, inert, winter state. (206)

The book fleshes out Berger's assertion in _A Fortunate Man_ that "It is the knowledge of the impossibility of satisfying any such appetite for new experience which kills the imagination of most people over thirty in our society" (78). Corker's whole struggle is to feel that his inner life, the life of his imagination, is legitimate. But because the society in which he lives forces people's inner life underground, and enforces a

repression and a hiding of their inner life. Corker's consciousness is split between the half-sensed logic of his imagination and that which he lives through on a public level. The life Corker dreams of is deemed, by himself and others, unacceptable to talk about and unacceptable to even want: it is "building castles in the air".

Thinking

As Corker makes the first tentative motions towards the life he dreams of-- he moves out of his sister's house and makes plans for his future-- he lives in a constant state of fear, and keeps all of his plans a secret. He longs for 'recognition'[12] of his true self, as defined by his inner life, but to gain such recognition he would have to open up and expose his inner life: he would have to live a kind of honesty. The prospect is too frightening for him. The habit of keeping his inner life, his ideals, true feelings hidden is too deeply ingrained, to the point where he is almost out of touch with them himself. One of the most remarkable aspects of this book is that it so accurately depicts the repression with which so many in this time and place live. (It has been said that Britain produces both the best actors and the best spies because British society has cultivated in its people the hiding of their inner life, secrecy of true thoughts and emotions, and the compulsion to go

about, essentially, in disguise.) Honesty is, for Corker, closely followed by shame:

> There are times when, for a fraction of a second, I am tempted to be honest and to throw away all disguise. It happens when my heart, that is to say the physical organ itself, feels swollen and heavy in my chest. The relief of being recognized would be sweet indeed. But afterwards, as soon as it became clear that there was no further disguise to throw off, I would be reduced to shame and this shame would be so comprehensive that I would have to pretend to be dead in the hope that Alec or whoever it was who had recognized me would abandon me to fetch an undertaker. (14-15)

And so for the first seventy-odd pages there is a split in Corker between what he consciously 'thinks', which represents the public self he presents to everyone and which he mostly believes himself, and what he 'knows', which represents what is deeply inside him but which does not manifest itself on a conscious level. He 'knows' things not in the same way he 'thinks' things, but in a way that suggests there is a natural self, unconditioned by society, buried inside of him that he periodically senses. For the first seventy pages there are passages, then, of what he 'knows but cannot think', 'knows but never thought', 'knows without thinking', 'knows but cannot remember', and 'knows but never remembers'. Of this self he is fearfully possessive, sensing that it would be destroyed if brought into the public realm:

> I know but never remember that there is a special kind of dirt, made distinct for me by the use to which I once put it. In this particular dirt I scrabbled with my hands to hide something which I did not wish anyone to see. I do not even know what it was. It has become so well hidden that I could not even find it again myself. It is lost in the dirt. Sometimes for a fraction of a second I

> become frightened because I know that whatever I hid could be found and recognized by another. This woman might be prepared to look in this special kind of dirt. But I do not think this. (28-29)

But from about page seventy-six on, Corker does begin to find what he has hidden, as he gradually becomes conscious of what he previously only sensed, and what he senses intrudes on his conscious thoughts to make him doubt and question his public, conscious life. As this process gains momentum, a frenzy of contradictory impulses sets in and there is a further breakdown of the compartments of his consciousness into what he 'thinks', 'knows', 'makes believe', and 'a voice screams' (beginning 106). When he then gives his travel talk, the split takes the form of what he says versus what he would like to say: he is aware of this split and feels he is not telling the truth he would like to tell (188). The whole process of Corker's struggle culminates in his feeling he 'must say what he would like to say' (189). The price paid for this though, is, as he predicted, that some of his audience write him off as drunk (which is partly true), and some think him mad. Alec, the only one whom Corker believes is taking him seriously, actually thinks "he is playing with himself" (211).

Alec, Corker's junior clerk in his employment office, is eighteen years old, and therefore fairly exempt from what the book observes in the older people, the people 'over thirty whose imaginations are killed' or

warped. Corker's predicament is viewed much of the time through Alec's eyes, which makes it more effective; Alec acts as kind of foil (Robin serves the same function in The Foot of Clive). We see how all those over thirty are somewhat warped by the habit of telling themselves and others things that contradict their natural impulses, and that thwart their own imaginative lives. In what they tell themselves and others, they are guided by what is commonly known as "common sense": they use the "syntax of common sense" (FM 108).

Mazurek writes that "Berger's work since [and including A Fortunate Man] is deeply influenced by Gramsci's notion of the hegemonic role of 'common sense' and the intellectual's role in unmasking it by becoming the 'organic intellectual' of the people" (note 13, 146). But such an approach towards 'common sense' can be found earlier, in Corker's Freedom.[13] Berger is firmly anti-common sense: he sees it as comprised of a series of myths generated by a particular ideology, and as effectively perpetuating the hegemony of the ideology that produces it. In the early seventies, Berger was to find in Barthes a similar approach to common sense which he admired immensely. Barthes's Mythologies, says Belsey, "has come to be regarded as the classic exposition of the ways in which ideological myths are naturalized to form common sense in our society" (45). When Berger reviewed Mythologies for New Society (24 Feb.

1972) he found the essay "Myth Today" "indispensable to anyone who wants to know why our society perpetuates itself relatively easily in the minds of the majority".

In A Fortunate Man Berger expounds on the common sense that both he and Sassall reject as a disabling factor in the lives of most people:

> It is generally thought that common-sense is practical. It is practical only in the short-term view... In the long-term view common-sense is passive because it is based on the acceptance of an outdated view of the possible... Common-sense is part of the home-made ideology of those who have been deprived of fundamental learning, of those who have been kept ignorant... But the point is that common-sense can never teach itself, can never advance beyond its own limits, for as soon as the lack of fundamental learning has been made good, all items become questionable and the whole function of common-sense is destroyed... Common-sense is essentially static. It belongs to the ideology of those who are socially passive, never understanding what or who has made their situation as it is. (101-102)

Corker attempts to 'advance beyond the limits of common-sense', and the results are that he is overwhelmed with fear and doubt and "all items become questionable". But the indirect yet practical result, eventually, is that he loses everything (a process intiated by his uncharacteristic response to Velvet), and ends up as a reject of society. He gains imaginative freedom and the conviction that his inner life has legitimacy, but at the expense of societal legitimacy. The book suggests that in this society there exists an either-or situation: one gains imaginative freedom and the freedom to live as one thinks at the expense of a 'legitimate' place in society.

Common sense is shown as partly responsible for the warping and demise of the imagination as people are split in an effort to live in contradiction to their deep impulses and the dictates of their inner lives.

In A Fortunate Man Berger writes that the same people who live a good deal by common sense "say or do many things which are an affront to their common sense. And when they justify something by saying 'It's only common-sense', this is frequently an apology for betraying or denying some of their deepest feelings or instincts" (102). Corker, quite naturally, for instance, feels empathy with others, yet he has so far lost touch with this capacity that when the opportunity comes along to empathize with the down-and-out Mr. Hodges, he is confused between this impulse and the common sense one that Hodges has brought on his own situation because he is "an ignorant, stupid, inarticulate, lazy, drunken, dishonest, foul-mouthed, penniless, probably lousy, soon to be senile, undeserving vagrant" (53). Corker's inner impulse of empathy tells him that he could, through circumstances, be in the same position as Hodges, 'without it being his fault', but he does not know how to live through this impulse consciously: "I do not know how to admit the possibility that his condition may not be his fault either" (54). The "profound ignorance" with which he is struck on this occasion represents the gap between his conscious knowledge and the natural impulse

toward empathy for what might have made Hodges the way he is, this last with which he can barely connect. This "profound ignorance" creates in him "moral vertigo" (54). By abiding by the dictates of common sense, he betrays his deep instinct to find the man innocent.

Unlike Corker, Lavin in A Painter of Our Time lives with his ideals on a conscious level, and his imaginative life is actively engaged with his work as a painter. He finds little forum for his ideals and imaginative life otherwise, and is conscious of the threat of self-betrayal. In A Painter of Our Time,[14] Berger's first work of fiction, he does not yet endorse the importance of examining subjective experience in and for itself. The creative imagination is seen and treated as wholly engaged with objective reality. Imaginative experience is important in so far as it can reflect and perpetuate a collective dream or vision. A Painter of Our Time does not examine Lavin's subjective experience so much as it examines "the dilemma of the artist...as an intense reflection of a wider but less obvious dilemma" (89).

We examine this wider dilemma through Lavin's experience, as recorded in his journal. Lavin's consciousness bears almost exclusively on what he feels to be 'historical necessity': he almost entirely 'lives history'. Berger's work, however, gradually gives way to the realization that people do not live history exclusively. Subjective experience continues to remain

important as a historical factor, but it is gradually less rationalized as Berger, in subsequent work, highlights various areas of subjectivity in order to explore 'lived experience'.

By the early eighties, for instance, Berger was interested in meaning as constructed within each individual's imagination: "With his inner eye man experiences the space of his own imagination and reflection. Normally it is within the protection of this inner space that he places, retains, cultivates, lets run wild or constructs Meaning" (AOF 51; see also SS 217). It should be noted that this does not reflect a radical shift: Berger consistently maintains that meaning is born of a dialectical process and that it arises in the space between the subjective and the objective. This kind of meaning requires duration to become apparent. Lavin explains this as one of the 'necessities of art': "What separates my hands when working from my direct experience of my subject is not a barrier in space like a curtain. It is more like a barrier in time" (118). Time must pass before the correspondence between action and consequence is clear: while the artist works on one side of the barrier, directly experiencing his subject, his hands work on the other, attempting to translate the experience but really making something not yet understood. In G. the same idea is articulated this way:

> A moment's introspection shows that a large part of our own experience cannot be adequately formulated: it awaits further understanding of the

> total human situation. In certain respects we are likely to be better understood by those who follow us than by our selves. Nevertheless their understanding will be expressed in terms which would now be alien to us. (104)

While the larger meaning of actions and phenomena is generally not accessible to present experience, as it lies beyond or outside of the subjective experience of the individual, Berger becomes increasingly interested in meaning that is accessible to the present of subjective consciousness.

Dreaming

Of consistent importance in the mediation between the subjective and the objective is the dream. Szanto calls Berger a "sometime semiologist of dreams"[15]: "Berger is fond of using the image, the notion, and the reality of the dream as a point of departure... both dreams from sleep and dreams of waking" (376). Dreams figure heavily in The Foot of Clive, G., A Seventh Man, the film Jonah Who Will Be 25 in the Year 2000, Pig Earth, and And Our Faces, My Heart, Brief as Photos. In Berger's use of the dream we can see his shift of emphasis from rationalizing subjective experience in order to investigate how it pertains to the larger objective reality called 'history', to exploring subjective experience and how an individual makes meaning. In A Painter of Our Time, as we will examine here, the dream is the vision of the potential for collective change, a rational figuring

forth, whereas, as used frequently from the time of *G.* on, the dream offers the individual resolution on a personal level, as it inspires through evocation:

> The strange thing about dreams is not so much what happens in them but what one feels in them. In dreams there are new categories of emotion. In all dreams, even bad ones, there is a sense of imminent resolution such as one scarcely ever experiences when awake. By resolution I mean the answering of all questions. (*G.* 121)

In "The Three Lives of Lucie Cabrol" (*PE*), the narrator finds such resolution in his final dream-vision after Lucie's death.

In *A Painter of Our Time*, the dream embodies the idea of an improved reality and shows the way to an alternative objective reality. It inspires at a personal level in that the individual takes his or her direction first and primarily from a vision of the desired collective social reality. As Lavin writes: "It is in dreams that we often first discover real and actual possibilites of freedom" (166). Works of art are, in one sense, materializations of these kinds of dreams.[16] Many times in many ways Berger discusses art as that which "mediates between our good fortune and our disappointment" (*SS* 186), the given and the desired,[17] and the actual and the potential. The artist provides a way of looking at the world that "can increase our awareness of our own potentiality" (*PR* 16), and thereby produce "a potential model of freedom" (*SS* 203) for humankind. Writing can per[illegible] the same function.[18]

The influence of Gramsci is evident in Berger's use of the dream as a vision of humankind's potential. An Italian Socialist who originated the concept of 'hegemony' and who was one of the founders, in 1921, of the Italian Communist Party, Gramsci organized many of his thoughts on the role of the intellectual in society and on the potential basis for a new order of society into his Prison Notebooks, which he wrote while in prison from 1926 until his death in 1937. Like Gramsci, Berger assumes that the question 'what is man?' is equivalent to the question 'what can man become?' (Gramsci, as quoted PR 209). In focussing on 'becoming', works of art (and literature) address the future. Where Berger is a 'good Marxist' is in this espousing of the basis of historical dialectic:[19]

> The most essential characteristic of dialectic... consists precisely in the principle of regarding eveything which has being as something which has become and of explaining not only what is being but also what has been as a being which is in the process of becoming. (Hauser 376)

Repeatedly we find this equation in Berger's work, and many critics base their analysis of his work on this "continuous study of the immense gulf between the real and the potential, between what man is and what he could be" (Bras 125; see also Caute's "What We Might Be and What We Are: John Berger and the Artist's Duty to Transcend Despair"). McMahon finds that "what is noteworthy about Berger is the intensity of his personal effort to study the chasm between the ideal perceived and

the reality attained and to propose possible ways of bridging it"[20](202). Humankind has been thwarted from achieving its full potential particularly by capitalism.

Art, as a materialization of a dream, "is an attempt to define and make unnatural [the distinction between the actual and the desired]", writes Berger (SS 186). Dreaming, in A Painter of Our Time, is the "dreaming ahead" (Ernst Bloch, as quoted by Zipes 175) of what humankind can become, in which "the present is pregnant with the future" (Leibniz, as quoted by Hauser 376). For Ernst Fischer too, art is the site of this 'dreaming ahead'. In "The Dream of the Day After Tomorrow" (The Necessity of Art: A Marxist Approach) he writes about the way in which the function of art has been warped under capitalism, but of how art will be able to fulfill its true function in the communist world he envisions. Its true function, and the reason it is necessary, is that it materializes the dream of humankind's potential:

> Our aim is not unconsciousness but the highest form of consciousness. But even the highest attainable consciousness of the individual will not be able to reproduce totality in the 'I'-- will not be able to make one man encompass the whole human race. And so, just as language represents the accumulation of the experience of millenia in every individual, just as science equips every individual with the knowledge acquired by the human race as a whole, so the permanent function of art is to recreate as every individual's experience the fulness of all that he is not, the fulness of humanity at large. And it is the magic of art that by this process of re-creation it shows that reality can be transformed, mastered, turned into play. (223)

(This last expression-- that reality can be 'turned into

play'-- alludes to Fischer's previous analysis of Prospero's magic as an analogy of the affirmation offered by art that 'we are such stuff as dreams are made on' (222).) In A Painter of Our Time, Lavin holds the same convictions about the function of art and the role of the artist as Fischer, as he talks about those artists who have fought for their vision:

> They fought for their various visions and most of their militant energy was concerned with fighting the difficulties of realizing their vision, of finding the visual forms that would turn their hunches into facts. Each of their different visions, however, sprang from the same kind of conviction; they each knew that life could be better, richer, juster, truer than it was. Every modern attempt to create a work of art is based on the desire (usually undeclared) to increase the value of the experience that gave rise to the work... The important artist actually sees how he can improve the world... For the artist the improvement is largely a matter of greater accuracy, in telling the truth as he sees it... It is only a subjective improvement? No, because a true work of art communicates and so extends consciousness of what is possible. (143, 144, 145)

For Berger, "all works [of art and literature] should be addressed to the possible future" ("Seeing Red..." 14), and should embody hope for and faith in an improved future. This is as true of his first work of fiction, A Painter of Our Time, published in 1958, as it is of his latest, Once in Europa, published in 1987. In A Painter of Our Time, John the narrator quotes Lavin as saying: "There is something even more fundamental than sex or work... The great universal, human need to look forward. Take the future away from a man, and you have done

something worse than killing him" (18). We see in subsequent fiction-- in <u>Corker's Freedom</u>, <u>G.</u>, and the works of the trilogy-- the various means to which people resort in order to write their own futures or to reclaim the futures they feel have been taken away from them. In <u>G.</u>, revolutionary action is shown as a means of taking one's future into one's own hands. Lavin bears out what Michel, in "Once in Europa", states: that "Hell begins with hope. If we didn't have any hope we wouldn't suffer... Hell begins with the idea that things can be made better" (<u>OE</u> 171). The epigraph of <u>A Painter of Our Time</u> is a testament to the belief that 'dreaming ahead' arises out of poor quality of life: "Life will always be bad enough for the desire for something better not to be extinguished in men (MAXIM GORKY)". The 'hell' for Lavin is that he is living in Britain, a society with which he is at odds, and in which his art is misunderstood, while Hungary, the home from which he had to flee in 1919, is in the midst of crisis (the book is set in 1956). He channels his disappointment and discontent into his art (145), but still does not manage to 'transcend despair'.

In <u>The Meaning of Contemporary Realism</u>, Lukács addresses the place of the dream in revolutionary thinking. He distinguishes between the "unfettered subjectivity" (127) of revolutionary romanticism, in which the dream contributes to the blurring of the distinction between perspective and reality, and

revolutionary socialism, which does not confuse perspective and reality:

> According to Marx, the poetry of the socialist revolution cannot draw its inspiration from the past, as did that of the bourgeois revolution, but only from the future... The poetry of the future demands, in Marx's eyes, sober and inexorable criticism of the forces leading-- in actuality, not only in imagination-- towards socialism. The poetry of the future is the means by which the character of the present can be understood in its own particularity...
>
> The theoreticians of revolutionary romanticism often refer to Lenin's saying, in his early work What is to be done?, that revolutionaries 'must dream'. Mistakenly. For Lenin always distinguished sharply between perspective and reality, even while pointing out their interdependence... Lenin's 'dreaming' is simply that profound, passionate vision of a future which it is in the power of realistic revolutionary measures to construct. This 'dreaming' adds a new dimension to every revolutionary act, however insignificant. But only if that act is based on a correct understanding of the objective reality...
>
> The 'dreams' of revolutionary romanticism are the direct opposite of what Lenin called for. (126-127)

On this count, as often, Berger's work holds Lukácsian views, but transformed somewhat through empathy with the individual and dislike of orthodox programmes. In A Painter of Our Time, reality and the dream are not confused: the dream is put firmly in the context of the necessary perspective of revolutionary thought. And Lavin, the 'artist as emigré', struggles to address the future in his art. But Berger is romantic,[22] as he says himself ("Ways of Witnessing"), as well as Marxist. And this is apparent in all his fiction, in part by the place it gives the past as informing the perspectives of the

characters. What Dyer calls the 'nostalgia' of A Painter of Our Time (42)-- which ruins the book, he claims-- is actually part of the portrayal of Lavin as suspended between the past and the future. Lavin, in fact, is not unlike the peasants in Berger's latest fiction, Pig Earth and Once in Europa, whose "ideals are located in the past" and whose "obligations are to the future" (PE 201). Much of his journal is a remembering of his past, his days of activism with his friend Laszlo. But Lavin's remembering is not simply a bourgeois romantic nostalgia (I shall examine the function of 'remembering' in chapter three): it is not that the past, as Angela Carter says, 'seems beautiful only because it is doomed and the viewer of this past is an innocent slave of bourgeois aesthetics who always sees elegiac charm in decay' (Fireworks 116). Lavin's remembering helps him make sense of his present, and helps to situate him in his own history. His present daily life is informed by, and his work is driven by, the "agony of conscience" (117) he experiences because he is in England and not participating in the struggles in Budapest. From the time he learns of Laszlo's execution (59), he vigorously interrogates his past and Laszlo's, in order to determine whether Laszlo was innocent, or, as speculated by others, guilty of turning his back on his socialist comrades when he became "more of an administrator and less of a poet" (41). And as the questions "Were you, Laci?" and "How guilty, Laci?" recur

throughout his journalistic interrogation, we can hear shades of Corker's 'If he is innocent, what am I?', 'If he is guilty, what am I?'.

Lavin's dreams are those of a 'scientific socialist' who remembers his past with Laszlo as consisting of striving towards the living of the dream, which, in other terms, is the striving towards the merging of theory with practice: "... the world has long since possessed something in the form of a dream which it need only take possession of consciously, in order to possess it in reality" (Marx, as quoted by Lukács, History and Class Consciousness 2). Writes Lukács: "Only when consciousness stands in such relation to reality can theory and practice be united" (2). Lavin remembers coming across Laszlo reading Lukács: "We would still have said that that was the way to live, theory and practice inseparable" (75). Far from serving as static nostalgia, such reflections remind Lavin of the truth of such a life, reactivate his conscience, and cause him finally to leave England to return to participate in the struggle in Hungary.

Because he cannot serve the society in which he lives, Lavin claims he 'works arrogantly alone' (76) to materialize the dream in his art: "It is in the name and the virtue and the potentiality of the life that the working class can gain for the world, that I am arrogant" (89). Lavin believes that "any extension of the range of

human imagination is a contribution to [the socialist] aim" (146). Like Corker, with his slides and lecture, who presses his audience to extend their imaginations and who claims, as he shows the slide of the statue of Goethe, that "...it is not beyond my imagination to be Goethe. It is only beyond my means" (146), Lavin claims it is only circumstances that prevent individuals acting on their capabilities (105), and that it is society that prevents people living to their full potential (88).[23] Lavin hopes to extend the range of human imagination by painting heroic forms, not by painting hard-line socialist realism. His dislike of hard-line socialist realism is evident in his criticism of the 'conventional, centralized, organizational words' of the published speech Laszlo makes, when he is an 'important administrator', before his execution (153). As he defends his avoidance of socialist realism, Lavin writes in his journal:

> Do not demand a Socialist art. Many do, but they haven't the slightest idea what they are asking for. Demand Socialist propaganda when it is needed and encourage art. The artists will suddenly realize that they have created Socialist works, whilst only thinking about the truth. (147)

Lavin defines as 'arrogant' his choice to 'work by the light of his senses rather than by the light of an historical principle' (148), and yet, in his painting of what he conceives to be the heroic spirit and the heroic will, he is materializing the dream of humankind's

potential.

The major painting that Lavin works towards and completes in the time-frame of the novel is The Games, which depicts athletes. He writes about the conception of The Games and his choice of subject matter in his journal:

> The athlete is one of the few individuals under capitalism who demonstrates purely and hopefully the process of civilization. Capitalism has brought with it a higher and wider degree of self-consciousness than ever existed before. This self-consciousness is an advance beyond a life of intuition. But the final creative aim of self-consciousness must be to consciously lose oneself, to return to a reliance upon intuition within certain consciously created limits. To live as the athlete runs or jumps. (121-122)
>
> ....
>
> My athletes are all the heroes I have known, now made victorious... Yet Bill Neale would question this! What's their victory? he would demand. Are they working-class athletes who have been given their chance by Socialism?...
>
> Yet in my painting their victory consists of the way in which they have been painted. Their arrangement, the energy of their forms, the way my colour reveals them-- that is their victory. (139)

In Permanent Red Berger defines 'the function of the hero in art':

> The hero in art is not of course just a man who is portrayed behaving bravely-- or who ends up by marrying the heroine. The function of the hero in art is to inspire the reader or spectator to continue in the same spirit from where he, the hero, leaves off. He must release the spectator's potentiality, for potentiality is the historical force behind nobility. And to do this the hero must be typical of the characters and class who at the time only need to be made aware of their heroic potentiality in order to be able to make their society juster and nobler. Bourgeois culture is no longer capable of producing heroes. On the highbrow level it only produces characters who are embodied consolations for defeat, and on the lowbrow level it produces idols...[24] (211-

212)

The great irony (or tragedy) is that the spectators of Lavin's work are art dealers, the fashionable art world, and art collectors, those who prove mostly oblivious to being "made aware of their heroic potentiality". When Lavin attempts to explain the nature of heroism as he sees it to Banks, the art collector, he meets complete disagreement (37); Banks calls him an 'idealist'. Whereas Lavin does not accept this label, Corker, being non-politicized and non-intellectual, does (55). That Berger writes so well about the lack of 'common nature' between Lavin and his 'audience' tends to disprove Gervais's contention that Berger is naive about the nature of his readers in falsely assuming a 'common nature' with them.

Lavin's art has a quality deemed by members of the London art world as 'simplicity', 'innocence' ("on the other side of puberty" 114), and 'Desperate Optimism' tainted with sentimentality (112): his dream, in other words, is seen by the fashionable as outdated. Corker's dream, too, is seen as naively optimistic and simpleminded, and embarrasses the public to whom he exposes it. Like the fatalistic public in Corker's Freedom, the fashionable art world with which Lavin has to deal takes the cynical attitude that it is wrongheaded not to accept that reality is irrational and chaotic (112), and believes the 'Hope, Beauty, and Order' of

Lavin's social dream (and of Corker's dream of 'civilized' and 'natural' life in which life is worth living (151), and everone feels at home (191)) merely reflects an illusion about what is possible.

In the clash between Lavin and London's art world and between Corker and the public we are seeing a clash of two ideologies and of two different answers to the question 'what is man?'. As the public in Corker's Freedom and the art world (which gauges and caters to what they perceive to be the public state of mind) in A Painter of Our Time reject the dream of the potential reality proposed by Corker in his lecture and by Lavin in his art, they represent what Lukács describes as the modernist ideology. In Corker and in Lavin they come up against the ideology of realism.[25] Lukács's explication of the distinction between the two different propositions about the nature of man put forth by modernism and realism provides us with insight into the function of the dream in Corker's Freedom and A Painter of Our Time. To the question 'What is man?', realism answers: "Man is 'zoon politikon', a social animal" (The Meaning of Contemporary Realism 19). The 'ontological being' of realist characters "cannot be distinguished from their social and historical environment" (19). To the question 'What is man?', modernist ideology answers: "Man... is by nature solitary, asocial, unable to enter relationships with other human beings" (20). To the ideology of

realism, solitariness (like Corker's and especially Lavin's due to his status as an emigre) "is a specific social fate", whereas to the ideology of modernism, solitariness is a universal human condition (20). Modernism is ahistorical, and "the only development [in literature inscribing the modernist ideology] is the gradual revelation of the human condition" (21). Modernism proposes that "Man is now what he has always been and always will be" (21), as opposed to the proposition that man is what he can become. Of the two kinds of potential described by philosophy-- abstract and concrete-- Lukács says that the modernist ideology acknowledges only abstract. Since modernism is essentially subjectivist, it treats potential as existing "only in the imagination of the subject, as dreams or day-dreams" (22). "But", Lukács says, "in life potentiality can, of course, become reality" (22), and "the literature of realism, aiming at a tr ul reflection of reality, must demonstrate both the concrete and abstract potentialities of human beings in extreme situations..." (23).

Where modernism sees and treats objective reality as "inherently inexplicable" (25) or negates it entirely, realism is "concerned with the dialectic between the individual's subjectivity and objective reality" (24). In Corker's Freedom, through what Corker 'knows' but at first cannot think or articulate, and in A Painter of Our

Time, through Lavin's journal entries, we see abstract potentiality. Both Corker and Lavin move toward and espouse concrete potentiality. Corker when he makes actual changes in his life, gives the feeling to Alec that it is "as though he were living with opportunities instead of just calculating what they might be" (71), and then begins to say what he thinks. Lavin moves toward concrete potentiality in his art, and in the reactivation of his conscience. Corker ultimately fails in his attempt to realize concrete potentiality due to the crushing weight of the ideology of the society in which he lives; Lavin, in order to make concrete the potentiality of humankind to engage with and alter objective reality, must leave England. What the art world and the public reject is the realist ideology of Corker and Lavin that proposes man is a social animal who has a part in the dialectic between the subjective and the objective.

Heroism

Berger often addresses the concept of the heroic in his work. This is mainly because the hero acts; he symbolizes the active principle, and "in Marxism, action is regarded as a greater ingredient in historical change than ideas" (Clark 60). We need only look at Katerina Clark's The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual to see that of central importance to Soviet literature is the hero

figure, who actively embodies the ideological aspirations of his society. His nature adapts to the shifts and changes in the party line over time: such changes are more often than not reflected primarily in this figure. Berger's fiction does not employ a central hero, but rather imparts to each individual the capacity, though sometimes unconscious or hidden, to act on heroic spirit and heroic will. As Szanto writes: "Berger explains: any individual, however deprived, can and does act, and through action, can and does make" (369). Berger accords "the production of the world" to the individual. ("The Production of the World" is the title of an essay in which he writes that Van Gogh "believed that reality could best be approached through work, precisely because reality itself was a form of production" (SS 280).) The individual is inspired to act on his or her own heroic will by an heroic image. Berger, too, argues that the concept of the hero changes over time according to the collective dream of the society it reflects (see AR 129, and "Che Guevara", LT). He speculates, in The Success and Failure of Picasso that "perhaps the cosmonaut-- with all he implies of technical resources and of liberation from the earth itself-- will soon take the place of the worker as a revolutionary image" (126): in Soviet literature, aviators and cosmonauts were already, when Berger wrote this, used as hero figures, for the reasons Berger cites and for other reasons. Berger uses flying

as an image of liberation from the earth and the heroic will in G.

In "The Time of the Cosmonauts" (OE), the cosmonaut is used to set the changes in the alpage (in a peasant community) against the changes in the world and in technology. At the time of the Russians' first manned space flight, twenty five years before the present of the narrative, there were twenty inhabited chalets in the alpage at Peniel: now (1982) there are only two. Here the cosmonaut is not used as a revolutionary image--Once in Europa was written twenty-five years after The Success and Failure of Picasso-- but as a measure of how the civilized and technological world develops at the expense of the disappearing peasant culture.

The time, the late fifties and sixties, and the place, England, in which Berger's first three novels are set is characterized by the lack of heroic images and of the heroic will and spirit. As Berger pronounces in 1960: "Bourgeois culture is no longer capable of producing heroes" (PR), Lavin similarly remarks to his collector: "The old heroes are dead. And the new ones, they do not exist" (37). Where the epigraph for A Painter of Our Time could be "It is in dreams that we often first discover real and actual possibilities of freedom" (PT 166), and where that for Corker's Freedom could be "It is the knowledge of the impossibility of satisfying any... appetite for new experience which kills

the imagination of most people over thirty in our society" (FM 78), the epigraph for The Foot of Clive could be "Our deepest fears reside just behind the everyday and the banal" (SS 82). The lack of a collective dream and the void left by the society's destruction of a coherent heroic image informs the quality of life and the quality of relations in the hospital ward of Clive, a microcosm of London.

In The Foot of Clive, which was published between A Painter of Our Time and Corker's Freedom, the dream reflects the realm of unconsciousness wherein reside deep fears. This discussion has so far ignored The Foot of Clive not because it is "a bad novel that should be a play" (Dyer 45)-- it is better than this suggests-- but because it does reveal a weakness in Berger's early experiments with rendering subjective experience. What is successful in A Painter of Our Time and in Corker's Freedom works only to a limited extent here: Berger's treatment of individual imaginative experience as if its figurations strictly reflect social scientific reality. In The Foot of Clive 'the idea preceding imaginative rendering' takes the form of systematic description and gets in the way of what the book claims to be about. It does, however, have some unusual strengths, one of which is its effectiveness in portraying the perspective of each of the six protagonists as representing six various, mostly petit-bourgeois, types of British society and how

they are alienated from each other. When having a discussion around the meal table,

> ... not one of them talks about the same thing as the next. Each goes back to his own previous opinions, to his own allotment where in his own ground he has planted his own beans and seeds. There is no longer any common land. Either the soil there is too poor or they have long since been bullied and cajoled off it. By their nature, all allotments are small. (21)

Those in the hospital ward lead a passive, static existence, cut off from others both inside the ward and out. Because they are in the ward, but also symbolizing life in modern London, they are prevented from action, and hence, all they do is think, talk, and feed off their fears, largely fears generated from life in such a society; all, that is, except Harry, the worker and trade unionist: "What distinguishes [Harry] from the others is his attempt to live in Clive actively rather than passively" (20). The six main characters also spend a lot of time judging each other, again, except Harry: "Harry blames very few people whom he knows personally. He judges arrangements, acts, situations but not people" (48). So the only one to have a sense of a different future-- "Some day, said Harry, things will be different" (141)-- and a revolutionary spirit is the one who is active and who refrains from personal judgement.

We see this theme of judgement in all three of Berger's first novels, and to a lesser extent in subsequent fiction. Such judgement is seen as arising from fear and isolation, and from the image of the self

as solitary rather than as a social animal. In A Painter of Our Time Lavin continually debates, in his journal, as to Laszlo's guilt or innocence, and concludes that to pass such judgement is destructive and unrealistic: "Judge people as you have known them. Do not jump to conclusions. It took me a long time to learn" (PT 61; also 178). Corker's process of liberating himself from the expectations of his society includes a questioning of his society's proscribed judgements on who is guilty and who is innocent. In G., one of the writer/narrator's refrains is "there is no judge" (76; also 69). The way in which Berger, particularly in The Foot of Clive and G., delineates multiple points of view discourages fixed objective judgement of characters' guilt and innocence. In 1961 he claimed that fixed viewpoints no longer have relevance,[26] and this conviction was to lead him to celebrate and to write extensively about Cubism for its multiple points of view.[27]

In Corker's Freedom and The Foot of Clive, Berger is primarily challenging the traditional judgement against those with whom he empathizes the most: 'those without power... the underprivileged'. Similarly, the stated aim of the story "Boris is Buying Horses" in Once in Europa is to overturn the judgement of Boris by his community as guilty: they see the way he died as confirmation of his guilt. The story opens with: "Sometimes to refute a single sentence it is necessary to tell a life story"

(39). The 'single sentence' is subsequently supplied:

> Boris died, said Marc, leaning one Sunday afternoon against the wall that twists like the last letter of the alphabet through our hamlet. Boris died like one of his own sheep, neglected and starving. What he did to his cattle finally happened to him: he died like one of his own animals. (39)

It is Berger's concentration on the sensibilities of these people in The Foot of Clive that causes some to balk, even those who claim political sympathy with Berger's total project. They question whether such people are appropriate vehicles for the portrayal of Berger's complex, sophisticated ideas, and therefore they implicitly question his insistence on realism. Dyer claims (of The Foot of Clive): "there is an uneasy marriage between the Olympian tone of Berger's pronouncements and the seediness of what he is pronouncing upon" (49).

Before the publication of The Foot of Clive, Berger sent a copy of the book to his friend and mentor Herbert Read for his opinion, saying that he would like to "concentrate more and more on writing like this".[28] Read had both praise and blame for the book: praise for Berger's technique, language and aim, and blame for his choice of characters. (Read's criticism is given and received in the spirit of "friends have the duty to attack-- to tear the pretensions off like dressings from a wound that needs the light" (PT 50).) Read writes:

> There is the assumption that the groping sensibility of the man on the street is intrinsically more valuable than the refined

> sensibility of the aristocrat. (I use the extreme word, without any political implications.) There is the assumption that the untutored feeling (let us call it sentimentality, for that is what it really is) is somehow more genuine than controlled or educated feeling--that form, style, intelligence, intuition, discrimination etc. do not really matter, or are not so important as the chaotic and crude reality of life-- the crudities and vulgarities of the masses... You are really saying I choose a hospital ward and these soiled proletarian patients because this is an aspect of life that the bourgeois artist neglects. The reading public turns its eyes the other way. I will redeem the neglected creatures and lavish my art on their deformities of thought and feeling. But you don't do it objectively... you romanticize your types, you love their limitations, their dreary preoccupations.[29]

Read sees in Berger's restrictive use of "soiled proletarian patients" a "limited vision of reality". In Berger's response to this letter he claims to write out of pure empathy and identification, and not out of the dictates of an intellectual or ideological programme:

> I didn't mean by my choice of characters to imply that your 'aristocrats' were not worth considering. I didn't mean this at all, but in one way or another most novels of today are written about them and I wanted to attempt something else.

(This is a Realist intention, according to Berger: "The only thing shared by all Realists is the nature of their relationship to the art tradition they inherit. They are Realists in so far as they bring into art aspects of nature and life previously ignored or forbidden by the rulemakers" (PR 208).) In his response to Read, Berger goes on:

> Not really for an ideological or publicist reason... but simply because I have an overwhelming imaginative feeling for those who have had cultural traditions denied them or stolen

> from them. It is not an act of principle on my part, it's spontaneous sympathy. Without, I think, any patronage in it. Even because in a kind of way, I myself am also such a person. I lack all cultural training and in many respects-- to an extent that might surprise you-- am uneducated. I have no chip on my shoulder about this. It simply means that I am naturally at home with a man who gropes, a man who doesn't recognize where he is at any given moment and has to find his bearings for himself, a man who sometimes finds terribly inadequate nouns to define the amorphous differences for which he longs.[30]

Berger is not studying these people as victims of society, for he does not see them as simply victims.[31] And also, he is partly like them.

In The Foot of Clive, those who level the sternest judgements at others in the ward finally suffer some kind of condemnation themselves. The main focus of Cyril's and of Ken's judgement is Jack House, a man accused of murdering a policeman, who is brought into the foot of Clive to be healed-- he needs an operation-- before he is hanged for murder. Both Cyril and Ken end up figuratively aligned with House: Cyril dies in a frenzy of self-condemnation, and Ken is implicated in the death of the motorcyclist with whom he was involved in a road accident. As each of the six men considers the presence of the murderer House in their midst, we can see how his presence prompts the questions 'if he is innocent, what am I?', 'if he is guilty, what am I?'. (The guilt and innocence refers not to whether he is literally guilty or innocent of murder, but whether, assuming he did kill the policeman, he can be condemned as a person for

sinning.)

While Cyril, the religious fanatic and the most self-righteous, pronounces House unequivocally guilty, and Ken, the young advertising executive who least likes the idea of a murderer in the same ward with him (being given the same treatment, being treated equally), pronounces him guilty, Dai, the underdog of the invalids-- he is described as a filthy 'tramp'-- pronounces House innocent by explaining how one ends up a murderer: to young Robin's question 'who makes a killer a killer?', Dai answers:

> He found himself on the wrong side of the netting. There are streets by railways where you look up every ten minutes and see trains rushing to the cities and leaving only dead sparks and smut behind, there are passages in institutions you must file along, there are blows delivered on the face when you expect an answer to a question, there are shop windows with a whole life laid out behind them and everything your size except the money in your pocket, there are thousands of corners in which you can stand and hear the winter foxes barking on the icy hillsides, you envy them till you've bitten off every nail. (117)

The Image of the Dog

In the ward of Clive, imagination is deemed dangerous, and dreams are menacing and haunting, as they threaten each man with his past. The metaphor for this lurking menace is the 'dog'. Each man is haunted by a 'dog', except, in this case, Pepino, the working-class Italian, who does not speak English and does not understand the English. He is said to be "free of the

dogs" (43) because he has had an injection, but his unconscious state is representative of his lack of the self-consciousness so endemic to the society portrayed, the self-consciousness brought on with capitalism that is "an advance beyond a life of intuition" (PT 121), the self-consciousness that contributes to the hauntedness of the others. Ken's 'dog' is sycophantic sexuality, the cloying physical impulse of men, as embodied in his dream by a girlfriend's dalmatian. His later outburst (106-109) at the others upon his imagining their fantasies of his wife confirms his disgust with what his advertising profession and what her job as a model has achieved: his wife is the object of men's ultimate desire. Harry's 'dog' is that which holds a threat to his son's life and future, as embodied in the dog who nipped his son's leg when they were on their way home from swimming. His dream manifests his worry about the world Peter will inherit. Robin's 'dog' arises as a result of being thrust into the world of adult men in Clive: the image he has been given by the society of what a man should be contradicts his natural sensibility. His childhood dog, which fell out of a window and broke its leg, was calmed in the sensitive, gentle hands of a vet. Robin is extremely bothered by Pepino's gentle physicality, feeling that a man should not behave the way Pepino does. But then Robin makes sense of Pepino by remembering the vet. He is left perplexed by two contradictory images of

what a man should be.

Cyril's 'dog' is the sin of licentiousness, what he deems the innate evil of women, as embodied in the dogs at the dog show that was part of the fair at which his wife got drunk, made a fool of herself, and was left unconscious in a dog's stall. (We find out later that the 'sin of licentiouness' is not only his wife's, but, according to him, his also.) Dai's 'dog' is his own shamelessness: he is the dog of his youth as he, with some other boys, chased a deer, cornered it, killed it, and gutted it. Dared by the other boys, he ate an apple from the deer's stomach, and was remembered afterwards as "the one who would eat like a worm out of the beast" (43). At first, each of these five men is visited by a 'dog' in a dream at night, in the dark of Clive.

On the third day, "the dogs, who once only dared to enter dreams, have been emboldened by the last day's events. They can now be heard in the foot of Clive when all are awake. Each man knows a dog is near, and this knowledge transforms his surroundings" (109). The 'last day's events' were: House was brought in, taken to surgery, and returned to the ward; the police came to question Ken about his accident and to inform him that the motorcyclist died; there was a physical fight between Ken and Dai, who represent two poles of the society; and Pepino broke out of the hospital in an attempt to get news of his wife (who is due to have a baby in Italy),

and was caught and returned to the ward. Each of these events offers a potential for disorder and an outburst of chaos: by the end of the day, all potential is tamed and order is restored: the killer House is drugged and operated on; Ken lies to the police to cover up any possibility that he is responsible for the death of the motorcyclist; the fight between Ken and Dai is smoothed over and hidden from the authorities; and Pepino is caught and returned to his bed. But these events have aroused the fears of the men to a fever pitch, and the continuing presence of House "feeds their doubts" (112). But figuratively, it is the impulse to cover up, to "screen" truth, that in the book is shown as feeding the personal fears and doubts of the men: this is symbolized by the screens continually up around House's bed[32] and the police continually guarding him. The dogs, generally, can be seen as that haunted consciousness of the conditioned impulse to hide the truth from oneself that each man experiences: truth lurks at the edge of consciousness, but is rarely fully admitted into consciousness. The conditioned impulse to hide the truth is also apparent on this third day: as the men debate various issues raised by the day's events, and they approach a grim, realistic truth, the 'dogs' boldly enter: "ROBIN:The Dogs! DAI: We must turn again" (122).

When Cyril has a kind of fit, and deteriorates towards death, "Even Robin knows what is to happen. Four

dogs stand at the corner of Cyril's bed" (131). When Cyril dies, each of the other men imagines the dogs prowling "through the ruins" behind the screens that have now been put up around Cyril's bed; the dogs are "pawing all to dust" (131). When Ken, Harry, Robin, and Dai realize that, in relation to House, the doomed man, and Cyril, they are "complete and alive" (132), they rejoice in their survival and make plans for their future. The Foot of Clive is heavily allegorical, and becomes moreso here. What has happened is that through the death of Cyril, a religious fanatic who, before dying, confesses his sin of raping his wife and asks to be judged and taken to death, the others have found redemption. This is the significance of 'the place being full of the noises of Golgotha' upon Cyril's confession. Golgotha is a Christian archetype of a 'sacred mountain where heaven and earth meet'. In the ward, Cyril's bed is between Harry's and Ken's, and House's bed is between Robin's and Dai's. Cyril calls for the judgement of God and dies, symbolic of the birth of redemption for the living:

> For Christians, Golgotha was situated at the centre of the world, since it was the summit of the cosmic mountain and at the same time the place where Adam had been created and buried. Thus the blood of the saviour falls upon Adam's skull, buried precisely at the foot of the Cross, and redeems him. (Mircea Eliade The Myth of the Eternal Return 12, 14)

Cyril's 'blood' falls upon those in the foot of Clive.

Conclusion

The Foot of Clive can be seen as showing what Berger finds in Lucas van Leyden's painting of the city of Sodom and in Albrecht Durer's painting *The Deluge*. The articles on these two paintings constitute the section entitled *Two Dreams* in *The Sense of Sight*. In the painting of the city of Sodom Berger finds "a vision of the wrath of God" (77). The power of God as painted here is

> ...symmetrical, ordered, lucid... It is part of the order of justice which man fails to understand but cannot escape. Perhaps the reason why such an image can still work on one powerfully-- if one allows time-- is to be found in the fact that in one's dreams and unconscious the notion of a higher order may still remain. (77)

The waking and sleeping dreams of the men in Clive seem to evoke this terrible higher order of justice, in comparison with which, their society's system of justice pales in its reliance on a distorted sense of truth. The men's redemption is short-lived, for when they remember the existence of House in their midst-- a man condemned not by a higher order of justice but by the twisted justice of humankind-- the 'survivor' aspect that had accompanied each man after Cyril's death leaves, "without warning Harry, Dai, Ken, or Robin that they were no longer survivors" (146).

Berger's use of the dream and his conception of the heroic changes from novel to novel, according to his own shifts in perspective, the shifts in political and

historical climate, and the time and place he is addressing. As Lavin notes, and identifies as "the problem of art in our time", what is strikingly relevant at one time may be meaningless twenty years later (140). Lavin's dream is that of a 'scientific socialist'[33] which rationally figures forth the collective dream of a socialist society. Thereafter the dream enters Berger's fiction less as an idea and a rational figuring forth and more as a given of subjective experience, less as a projection of historical necessity and more as an individual necessity to make sense of the world and of life. The distinction between dreaming, as part of "the stuff of imagination", and objective reality at times blurs, as Berger explores more deeply into subjective experience. The implication is that dream and reality merge in the imagination and that imaginative experience does not always distinguish between the two as sharply as Lenin would have it.

As the influence of phenomenology begins to show in Berger's work[34] in his attention to 'lived experience', so too its notion that objective reality is not separate from perception of and perspective on objective reality. Instead of bringing history to bear on the subject, as in A Painter of Our Time, he begins to strike a balance by also bringing the subject to bear on history. Corker, politically and historically rather innocent, propounds a utopian dream of a 'civilized life' for all in which

money has no place and in which everyone is surrounded by beauty and peace. The writer/narrator of _G._ interjects descriptions of his own dreams into the narrative: while grappling with the mysteries of experience, he claims to be writing a book of his and the readers' dreams (234). In _Pig Earth_ and _Once in Europa_ the dream is a transcendent, subjective experience.

Berger said, in the year of his next novel's publication: "Up to date it seems to me that everything I have written has been no more than a preparation for the work of the last five years on _G._" (as quoted in _Contemporary Novelists_ 117). Gone from _G._ are settings of London's working class, the tracing of days in their working lives, and depictions of innocent proletariats who long for harmony and fulfilment. These are replaced with cosmopolitan social events, moments charged with sexuality and revolution, and depictions of intense personal struggles with history and time.

Notes

[1] Writing on Marx's and Engels's ideas about literature, Baxandall ends by claiming that 'literature, and the other arts generally, are the ideal sphere in which to set out a conception of the alienated and the space in which it exists'. A Dictionary of Marxist Thought ed. Tom Bottomore (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press) 286.

[2] From a review by Daniel O'Connell of two recent books on Lukács. The Minnesota Review N.S. 28 Spring 1987, 136.

[3] Both Lukács and Sartre have been influences on Berger. When asked about his move to France, he replied: "there were people working in France whom I felt close to: Sartre, in a different way, Camus; Merleau-Ponty. In the Britain that I left there were no thinkers like that" "Ways of Witnessing". Writes Jameson: "France has...become the philosophical home of phenomenology...of Freudianism (with Lacan)...as well as applied Marxism" Marxism and Form xiv.

[4] de Bolla claims that Berger is "far from a systematic thinker" (The Minnesota Review N.S. 28 Spring 1987, 78). This suggests a haphazardness of thought that is inappropriate to Berger's somewhat systematic thinking.

[5]In the interview with me Berger said:

> ...the people who say that (I have turned my back on and forsaken the modern world) are mostly on the left; they are mostly Marxist-influenced or

> Marxist. And they take over Marx's view, more or less, that the peasantry was an uninteresting class in revolutionary terms (that is, the smaller peasants could be subsumed under the proletariat and the petit-bourgeois, and the big peasants could be subsumed under landlords). They do this at a time when it is absolutely clear that the first colossal disaster in the Soviet Union was a misunderstanding of the peasants by the forced collectivization of the land, which not only cost millions of lives-- which is quite enough-- but which also explains the enormous difficulties, economic, that they are still in. Because basically their first problem is agriculture. This is obvious; there's nothing original in saying that. But this problem stems exactly from the dismissal of peasants as politically unimportant and as subsumable as petit-bourgeoisie. In a sense one could perhaps say that it was one of the most colossal political mistakes of this century-- Marxist. Interview May 1988

[6]In 1984, Berger expanded on this conviction, as he wrote about the few canvasses he painted in the late 1940s of the streets of Livorno:

> This city was then war-scarred and poor, and it was there that I first began to learn something about the ingenuity of the dispossesed. It was there too that I discovered that I wanted as little as possible to do in this world with those who wield power. This has turned out to be a lifelong aversion. AOF 79

[7]Berger is clearly aware of having been criticized as sentimental. It was after we discussed the way that Death appears in the unpublished third book of the trilogy-- An Old Wives' Tale of a City-- as tender, warm, and welcoming, that Berger remarked "Maybe I am sentimental". In An Old Wives' Tale of a City he tries to capture the tenor of street life in large cities, and, while mythologizing Death as it appears to those living in a traditional peasant culture works, it is hard to

say-- because we do not yet have the whole published work of the third book of the trilogy-- whether it is appropriate to mythologize Death as it appears to those immersed in the street life of a metropolitan city.

[8] Few critics have managed to avoid using this phrase, the title of Berger's best-known work: it is almost unavoidable to do so when immersed in his work.

[9]Lavin describes how he talks every day to an old man whom he passes and claims he does this because he wants the old man "to have good thoughts... of the living, of the world he leaves" when he dies:

> I want to give him reason for thinking the best possible thoughts. And so it has been for every artist... We have all wanted others to take away the best possible thoughts that we can struggle to make manifest. And in that is our fraternity. 64

[10] Berger writes, in "The Moment of Cubism": "Theories about the artist's inspiration are all projections back on to artist of the effect which his work has upon us. The only inspiration which exists is the intimation of our own potential." SS 186-187.

[11] When asked "What is the role of an intellectual writer? Does one talk at a certain level with one's comrades and then present a watered-down version of that discourse for publication?" Who do you write for?", Berger replied:

> I don't think that the intellectual or writer talks to other people quite like that, because talk is dialogue. The great distortion imposed upon art, or thought even, by revolutionary theory was always that in some peculiar way theorists or the artists represented an avant garde who could talk to other people and actually even tell them

> what they themselves were really thinking when they hadn't thought it yet, but they would. That I think is the crux of one of the great historic dilemmas of our time. Because actually talk can only take place in terms of dialogue.' "Berger Bears Witness" Interview with Matthew Hoffman.

[12] Boris, in "Boris is Buying Horses" does too: "Boris liked to remain mysterious. He believed that the unsaid favoured him. And yet, despite himself, he dreamed of being understood." OE 41 When he falls for the blond woman, he finds "He was destined, at the age of forty, to be recognized" 53.

[13] Berger was quoting Gramsci as early as 1958. See "Star of Cubism", New Statesman March 1 1958.

[14] I talked with Berger about the publication of this book:

> JB: ...I knew Western Europe quite well by then: I'd spent a lot of time in the Soviet Union, I'd spent a lot of time in East Germany. I didn't know Hungary at all. But I had at least two very close Hungarian friends-- Antal was one and Peter Peri was the other. And I spent an enormous amount of time with them, and so it was as if I had been to Hungary. And it was because of them in a sense that I chose, or made Janos Hungarian rather than Czech or German... There's a very nice story about A Painter of Our Time, because now it has been published in Hungarian, but some of the English copies got into Hungary, just to be read by a few intellectuals, in English anyway, or perhaps by people interested in painting. And some art school or something asked me where Janos's paintings could be found. In other words, it was all completely credible. I was very glad about that.
>
> DW: Why was it taken off the press?
>
> JB: It was published by Secker and Warburg. It was the first book I published in England, in Britain. I had actually published an earlier book that nobody knows anything about, which I haven't even got a copy of, in German, in East Germany: a book about an Italian painter called Guttuso. And

so Secker published (A Painter of Our Time), and Secker were also at that time--this is quite important--of Encounter. Now Encounter magazine was, we all know, backed and financed by the CIA, but nobody believed us at the time-- now it's in all the books. One of the editors of Encounter at the time was Stephen Spender. So the book came out and...well, you have to know about the absolute hysteria of the cold war period at that time, and especially after '56, because otherwise the thing doesn't really make sense--it's absolutely lunatic. Anyway, the book was very well reviewed by Peter Levi, the poet-- who was at that time a Jesuit priest-- in the Catholic paper. It was the best review the book had--very good. Most of the other reviews were pretty negative, and above all saying that it was a dirty book because it apologized for the Soviet intervention because it sided with Kadar. And then Spender, in The Sunday Times, wrote an absolutely virulent attack, saying that this book stank of the guilt and blood of concentration camps, and could only have been written by one other person apart from Berger and that is Goebbels as a young man. Well then Secker... really got cold feet, and I don't know what kind of pressure was put on them directly. So it had been out for about a fortnight or three weeks, when these reviews occur, and then they simply stopped distributing it. And even when I accused them of this they didn't deny it at all. So, apart from those copies sold in the first few weeks, the book was unavailable for about ten years, until Penguin brought it out as a paperback about ten years afterwards. That's the story. But it was quite interesting... I don't pretend that it was very agreeable, but for such a thing to happen with your first book, makes you quite tough.... It is a perfect example of what political hysteria can do in, as it were, a period like McCarthy's, because in fact what all that was about was one sentence: at the end when I say 'the tragedy of the Hungarian situation is such that I, who knew Janos so well, do not know on which side he is fighting at the moment...(That is what I mention of the tragedy)..Personally I hope he is fighting with Kadar.' And the full irony of the affair is that--now everyone recognizes that Kadar became the most 'liberal' leader in Eastern Europe. More liberty for the arts, not total liberty, and with many problems, but more 'liberal' than in any other country there. And so in the last ten years all those professors from Oxford and Cambridge go on seminars to Budapest invited by Kadar and are

very happy etc....

[15] "Semiologist" was changed to "semiotician" in a republication of the article in Szanto's Narrative Taste and Social Perspective (MacMillan).

[16] In The Success and Failure of Picasso, Berger quotes Juan Gris: "It would be very interesting to preserve photographically not the stages, but the metamorphosis of a picture. Possibly one might then discover the path followed by the brain in materializing a dream." 35.

[17] See About Looking 158 and Ways of Seeing 148.

[18] When writing G., Berger said "I do not know whether it will be eventually categorized as an essay, a novel, a treatise, or the description of a dream." as quoted by Caute, Collisions (London: Quartet Books) 138.

[19] Which evolved after Marx's Communist Manifesto of 1845.

[20] This is, essentially what G. offers women: to perceive them either 'as they really are', or as they would like to be perceived. He appears to recognize their ideal self and to bring it to consciousness.

[21] and passim, particularly 61.

[22] "I am a romantic-- without any question. I wouldn't deny that for a moment. I see it as something positive" "Ways of Witnessing". In A Painter of Our Time, Janos writes: "today every artist is forced to be romantic, even though he may struggle with all his might

for classicism." 53.

[23] And in G.: "What stood between a man and his becoming Garibaldi was not his own identity but the wretched state of Italy..." 21.

[24] see A Painter of Our Time 37: Janos explains the relationship between the heroic and the artist in modern times.

[25] In his art criticism of the fifties, Berger argued consistently for a return to realism.

[26] Letter to Herbert Read, December 29, 1961. All quotations from the letters exchanged between Berger and Herbert Read are from the Read Archives at the University of Victoria. Copies were passed on to me by Dr. James King, whom I would like to thank.

[27] See especially Berger's "The Moment of Cubism" (republished in SS). See also "The Changing View of Man in the Portrait" (LT).

[28] Letter to Herbert Read, November 27, 1961.

[29] Letter to Berger, July 24, 1961.

[30] Letter to Herbert Read, December 29, 1961.

[31] Similarly, A Seventh Man addresses subjects who could be painted as victims, but who are not. I spoke to Berger about this:

> DW: In A Seventh Man, aside from mounting important facts, you show how the people you are studying have certain capacities that make their experience richer than that of most people living in modern cities, and you highlight the abilities and strengths that these people have in spite of their physical and economic fetters...
>
> JB: Yes, one of the sort of orders of the day

> that I gave, or that we gave ourselves, Jean and I, in doing A Seventh Man, was that, at the end of the book, having exposed a lot, we did not want these men to seem simply victims. I mean, they are victims of colossal violence and exploitation and so on, but they're not only victims. On the contrary: it is exactly like you say, and that was very, very conscious. Because if that happens [if you turn them into simply victims], as always when one is making or writing something about the underprivileged, all you do is make yet another ghetto-- you make the book into a ghetto.

[32] Berger uses 'house' as a metaphor in Corker's Freedom and in G. as well. In all three cases 'house' is used for something like 'identity', though , if possible, something more all-encompassing and deeply ingrained.

[33] 'Scientific', as opposed to 'Utopian', because it disclaims religious and moral ends. Social scientism usually refers to that of Marx and Engels.

[34] The relation, or supposed opposition, between Marxism and phenomenology is very complex. For an understanding of how they differ and how they can mesh and compliment one another, see Phenomenology and Marxism (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul), especially "Phenomenology and Marxism in Historical Perspective" by Fred Dallmayr, which begins by acknowledging:

> At first glance there does seem to be a sharp opposition between the two concepts. Phenomenology is generally understood to be concerned with the analysis of consciousness and with the investigation of subjectively intended sense; Marxism, on the other hand, is generally identified with economic determinism or with a materialism which reduces the striving for sense to an epiphenomenon according to the maxim that (economic) being determines human consciousness. 4

But Dallmayr goes on to show how, especially "from Merleau-Ponty's point of view, phenomenology can be seen to have a great deal to offer the Marxist self-understanding at a variety of points". 26

3

Time and G.

"The Problem of Time"

We can divide Berger's fiction into three phases: the first, A Painter of Our Time, uses the world of an emigre to explore the crossroads of culture and politics. The next three novels, The Foot of Clive, Corker's Freedom, and G., were written from 'inside the wall' in the sense that Berger claims to have "thought about [them] quite consciously in terms of British society" (Interview May 1988). The third phase consists of the works of the trilogy. A study of G. can illuminate the strengths and complexities of Berger's writing in general. As a book that falls midpoint in his writings so far and that also closes out the phase of works written from inside the kind of society of which he is most critical, G. looks both backwards to ideas and struggles of previous work and forwards to the solving of questions it raises about writing and to other possibilities of philosophical and ideological perspective. Particularly relevant here is the way in which it elucidates the workings of time and memory, with which Berger is increasingly concerned, and the way in which it attempts to come to grips with how we

internalize the abstractions of time.

What is known as "the problem of time" is a focus of analysis of modern literature. Mendilow claims that the twentieth century is obsessed with time and that this is most apparent in the novel[1]. Michael Hollington finds that the modernist preoccupation with and treatment of time is part of the movement away from fixed objective values: "... the keynote of Modernism is liberation, an ironic distrust of all absolutes, including those of temporal or spatial form" ("Svevo, Joyce and Modernist Time", Modernism, 432). His comparison of the nineteenth century novel's treatment of time and the modernist novel's treatment of time reveals a stark contrast between them: in the first, the laws of time are seen as informing the pattern of individual lives, whereas in the second, individual lives are lived in spite of or outside of the laws of time, which themselves are questioned:

> For the nineteenth-century novelist, time is the medium in which people grow, individually and collectively: hopes and ambitions come to fruition or are dismayed. Events mark the critical points of change. Individual development is regarded as of general human importance, and considered logical in form... Three decades later, in Sartre's Nausea, the notion of coherent growth in time is bourgeois bad faith, a piece of cowardice in the face of the surrounding contingency. (431)

Lukács uses the different treatments of time by modernists and realists as a point of comparison between them. According to him, the distinct ideological perspective of each is manifested in its treatment of time. His analysis helps us to see how Berger, in G.,

incorporates a modernist perception of time into an overall realist vision. It is no coincidence that in G. Berger is at his most modernist and at his bleakest: it seems his final statement on the illness of urban life in a Western European society. Modernist literature, according to Lukács, has a "static apprehension of reality" (The Meaning of Contemporary Realism 35), as opposed to realism's assumption that change and development is the proper subject of literature (35). The modernist apprehension of reality as unalterable leads to the assumption that human activity is meaningless and ineffective, and to the "mood of total impotence, of paralysis" (36).

Modernist literature is based on the clear separation of subjective and objective, as the subject recoils from the incomprehensible, horrific, and unalterable objective reality. The subject even has problems finding expression powerful enough for what he or she encounters as objective reality. And time falls within the realm of what becomes exclusively subjectively perceived. First manifest in philosophy, then cemented by Bergson --it is now standard practice to attribute the turning point to Bergson[2]-- then increasingly apparent in literature from the turn of the century, "experienced time, subjective time, [becomes] identical with real time: the rift between this time and that of the objective world [is] complete" (37). To Lukács, this is

indicative of "how deeply subjectivism is rooted in the experience of the modern bourgeois intellectual" (38). When time is purely subjective, the world and the personality are subject to disintegration.

In realist literature, no such separation between subjective and objective takes place. Rather, the particulars of individual subjective experience are related to the general. There is coherence and continuity between man and 'the world of man': "in realistic literature each descriptive detail is both individual and typical" (43). While adopting the strategies of the modernist treatment of time as subjective, and while showing G's perception of time as cut off from general historical time, Berger does not give subjective time credence as real time: the nature of real time remains a mystery here. But nor does he condemn subjectivism: he sees it as a condition into which people have been forced. He shows how the modern perception of time is bound up with the general, and he shows how this perception is characteristic of a certain time, place, and class. His ideological intention is, therefore, that of a realist, as described by Lukács: "... major realists of our time deliberately introduce elements of disintegration into their work-- for instance, the subjectivizing of time-- and use them to portray the contemporary world more exactly" (39). But Berger's handling of time is more complex than this basic

scheme suggests.

While Lukács sees preoccupation with subjective time as nihilistic and indicative of the illness of society, Berger gives subjective time some legitimacy as a kind of stronghold of experiences that are denied by objective reality. The experience of time as subjective is a form of private resistance to the forces of general historical time and to the picture of time propounded by the society. Particulars of human history are almost always, in retrospect, subsumed and consumed by the general. In order to counteract this tendency of general time to negate particulars, and in order to access particular experience, Berger highlights those kinds of individual experiences which are perpetually recognizable as having individual subjective significance: mainly, that of the elasticity of time, and within this realm, sexual passion. The nature of sexual passion changes little or not at all over time, and is a most effective example of an experience that is both individual and typical.

"Passion must hurl itself against time. Lovers fuck time together..." (G. 306): in G. passion is the epitome of liberation. But why is time a fundamental component of the experience, and why is 'fucking' it a supreme necessity? Time is shown, like Larkin's 'work',[3] as a toad that squats heavily on the lives of people at this historical time and in this place. The bourgeois attempt to manipulate it and the proletariat attempt to harness

it. Individually, everyone attempts to escape it. That time squats heavily on our lives is a modern experience. We get away from the weight of this 'toad' only in moments, and so the moment, in modernist literature, becomes of paramount importance.

G. shares the modernist preoccupation with the phenomenon of the moment as a spot of highly-charged time that transcends the general flow, and on this count, it offers nothing original. The modernist preoccupation with time has to do with new ways of understanding how we perceive and with a general overturning of the concept of linear progression through time, wherein "conventional instruments of measurement become useless" (Hollington 431). The moment acquires breadth and depth as 'lived dur'. In accordance with Ford Madox Ford's declaration "we saw that life did not narrate, but made impressions on our brains", the novels (of James Conrad, Ford, Woolf, Joyce) employing so-called impressionist technique attempt, in various ways, to render actuality in a moment, a flash, by offering supposedly visual and audible sensations of a moment. Moments take on significance as 'actuality' by being associative (Proust, Joyce), transcendent (Eliot), or by offering further opportunities for meaninglessness as they pile up but fail to connect or to cohere (Beckett). In A Fortunate Man Berger explores the way in which time is distorted through suffering and anguish, and he asks "What is the

value of a moment _sub specie aeternitis_? ... How much then can a moment contain?... And how can one moment be compared to another person's experience of the same moment?" (127, 131). In _G._ the moment is both associative and transcendant, but never empty and meaningless.

Historical Time

"How easy it is", Berger writes in _And Our Faces..._, "to lose sight of what is historically invisible-- as if people lived only history and nothing else!" (63). While this statement was made several years after the writing of _G._, when Berger was looking more closely at what people really _do_ live, in _G._ he gives equal weight to and grapples with the living of two kinds of time: historical and subjective. But the two do not function entirely separately: here Berger has chosen to write about a time in which the general historical process deeply pervades and informs the particulars of subjective historical time. The book deliberately separates historical time into what is objectively perceived and what is subjectively perceived. Historical time as objectively perceived is linear, based on cause-and-effect reasoning, and accessible through facts. This kind of perception is presented in the novel in passages of historical commentary and report, quite clearly signalled in the narrative structure by a change in language.

Subjectively perceived, historical time is non-linear, in the sense that its particulars reverberate in our minds and form part of our present experience: the facts of historical time to an extent dictate consciousness by limiting choices, and so we all live from inside of and view everything from a subjective perception of historical time. As Ricoeur writes:

> As readers of history are we not ourselves made contemporaries of past events by a vibrant reconstruction of their intertwining? In short, is the past intelligible any other way than as persisting in the present? (Time and Narrative, Vol. 3 144)

The writer/narrator of G. acknowledges, in various ways, that he is presenting his imagination at work on historical time, and to this end he quotes Collingwood:

> All history is contemporary history: not in the ordinary sense of the word, where contemporary history means the history of the comparatively recent past, but in the strict sense: the consciousness of one's own activity as one actually performs it. History is thus the self-knowledge of the living mind. For even when the events which the historian studies are events that happened in the distant past, the condition of their being historically known is that they should vibrate in the historian's mind. (as quoted 54)

The writer/narrator is performing a kind of 'historical operation' that appears "as a de-distanciation, an identification with what once was" and that conforms to what Ricoeur calls Collingwood's "conception of history as a 'reenactment' of the past" (Ricoeur 144). Berger here is attempting to reclaim that which is 'historically invisible' to an exclusively objective perception of historical time. Ricoeur writes

that in order to "formulate a conception of the past that is based exclusively" on identifying with what once was, one must go through three steps:

> (1) to submit the notion of an event to a radical revision, namely, to dissociate its "inner" face, which we call thought, from its "outer" face, namely the physical events affecting bodies; (2) next, we have to take into consideration the historian's thought, which reconstructs a chain of events, as a way of rethinking what was once thought; (3) finally, we have to conceive of this rethinking as numerically identical with the initial thought. (144)

G. embodies a conception of a particular time of the past based on the writer/narrator's identification with what once was. Ricoeur's step one is apparent in the clear separation of the objective perception of historical time from the subjective perception of historical time; Ricoeur's step two is apparent in the self-consciousness of the writer/narrator as he openly considers his own thought processes and the way in which events appear in his imagination; step three is apparent in the writer/narrator's merging with his characters, (who are rooted in their historical time), in order to close temporal distance. The novel does not fictionalize the historical setting of its time in the way that most novels do;[4] instead, it preserves the past as an historical past that is in part unknowable but that is in part reconstructable through imaginative identification. It sets up a dialectic among three modes of time perception: objective perception of historical time, subjective perception of historical time, and subjective

time. Each comments on the other. The reader is forced to realize that meaning resides in none exclusively, but rather among them and in their interaction.

In G. Berger uses fiction to identify with what once was in order to ask 'certain questions about what really happened to people during that time'. The flexibility of the medium of fiction allows for the asking of such questions:

> History, political theory, sociology can help one to understand that 'the normal' is only normative. Unfortunately these disciplines are usually used to do the opposite: to serve tradition by asking questions in such a way that the answers sanctify the norms as absolutes. Every tradition forbids the asking of certain questions about what has really happened to you. (SM 100)

Lukács claims that the basis of all realist literature is that, as declared by Chekhov, it puts reasonable questions, even if the answers are unreasonable (The Meaning of Contemporary Realism 69). The power of G. resides in the questions it poses, both those of the writer/narrator to his characters, his readers, and himself, and those that arise out of the dialectic of the work.[5] While Berger maintains the philosophy of composition of mediating between the general and the particular-- "to understand [Jocelyn] closely we must consider him from afar" (31)--, he does not explicitly bridge them, or rather, the book refrains from passing judgement on causal relations. Instead, it explicitly exposes the mechanics of such a philosophy of composition and probes its feasibility. It denies that answers and

resolutions to the questions it raises can be found in external, objective reality: a sense of resolution is more likely to be found in individual consciousness (121). G. maps and develops connections among phenomena without pushing the connections through to conclusions in order to leave questions open. This is a more honest methodology: "hypocrisy and idealization close questions, frankness leaves them open" (PE 11).

Berger's previous writing attempts, within itself, to provide some answers to the questions it raises, or at least to point to potential solutions. It frequently looks to the external structures of historical time for solutions. Though A Painter of Our Time leaves the final question of what happens to Janos unanswered, the unanswered question itself provides the writer's didactic point. As John, the narrator, points out:

> ...the full tragedy of the Hungarian situation is revealed by the fact that we, who have the advantage of knowing some of this man's most intimate hopes, thoughts, confessions, cannot with any certainty declare which of these courses of action he was bound to follow. (190)

The writer/narrator of G. probes rather than proves. Like G. as a boy, he uses a "mixed language": often merging with the consciousness of his characters, and laying events, observations, extracts from didactic works, and social commentary side by side, he leaves the reader to perceive the relations between the different kinds of language. Posing questions, he addresses the complexity, mystery, and apparent haphazardness of life.

It is an act of recognition, on the part of the writer's persona, that subjective experience has a logic of its own; one that is not always definable or explainable by recourse to exterior processes of society and history.

Milan Kundera claims the quality of question-posing is the mark of a true novel:

> A novel does not assert anything; a novel searches and poses questions... The stupidity of people comes from having an answer for everything. The wisdom of the novel comes from having a question for everything. When Don Quixote went out into the world, that world turned into a mystery before his eyes. That is the legacy of the first European novel to the subsequent history of the novel. The novelist teaches the reader to comprehend the world as a question. There is wisdom and tolerance in that attitude. In a world built on sacrosanct certainties the novel is dead. (Interview with Philip Roth, afterword to The Book of Laughter and Forgetting).

The writer/narrator of G. addresses this same issue as that of a type of closure he refrains from making:

> What the old man says I do not know.
>
> What the boy says in reply I do not know.
>
> To pretend to know would be to schematize. (51)

he writes, yet, falling into a cause-and-effect explanation shortly afterwords, he chastises himself: "Everything you write is a schema. You are the most schemetic of writers. It is like a theorem" (52). The writer/narrator constantly attempts to resist being schematic in his speculations on that which is 'historically invisible': to do so would be to conspire with the methods of objective historical time and to close out possibilities. And so to the above charge he

defends himself:

> Not beyond a certain point.
>
> What point?
>
> Beyond the point where the curtains are drawn back.

At this point, that being focussed on should speak for itself.

When the writer/narrator refrains from explaining and interpreting, he is claiming that such an approach does greater justice to the true patterns of subjective life and perception. Yet in order to reclaim the importance of what is 'historically invisible', he must somehow point to that realm. One way of doing so is to draw attention to the various options a writer has:

> I cannot continue this account of the eleven-year-old boy in Milan on 6 May 1898. From this point on everything I write will either converge upon a final full stop or else disperse so widely that it will become incoherent. Yet there is no such convergence and no incoherence. To stop here, despite all that I leave unsaid, is to admit more of the truth than will be possible if I bring the account to a conclusion. The writer's desire to finish is fatal to the truth. The End unifies. Unity must be established in another way. (77)

In "Once in Europa" Odile realizes how the life of an adult is "so unfinished" (OE 166); to write about lives as converging towards ends, resolutions, closures, is to falsify them. The writer/narrator of G. identifies the writer's craft as one of selecting and choosing in order to construct an ordered reality. Such a licence to choose and select employs "consequential reasoning, all

the speculation which pertains to being able to choose among possibilities" (50), and inevitably results in an illusion. The illusion of ordered reality created by a writer, he implies, is analogous to that maintained by those who believe that individuals have a full range of choices and selections in their lives. Particulars of time and place, of historical time, prevent such freedom and control. In this way, as in others, the writer/narrator figuratively merges with his characters: both are limited by the larger reality of what they are born into and up against. He undermines the licence of consequential reasoning employed by traditional observers of historical time as a pretentious God-like reasoning which claims to account for, know, and order that which cannot be fully known and which does not correspond to any order. Hence, when he literally merges with his characters' consciousnesses he makes it clear it is his imagination at work on his material:

> I look at her fingers as though I were on the point of inhabiting each one, as though I might become the content of its form. I and her phalanxes. Absurd. Yet what is the absurd? Only a moment of incongruity between two different systems of thinking. I am speaking of her fingers, the flesh and bones of another person, and I am speaking too of my imagination. Yet my imagination is not separable from my own body; nor is hers. (162)

Alternatively, he conspires with the reader in a vantage point made possible by his position as writer, and readers' as readers:

> The charity ball at the Stadttheater. Not until that Thursday night could he take his revenge on

> von Hartmann. Beyond this he was incapable of seeing. The degree to which we can postulate or see beyond this is the degree to which we cannot be him. (274)

A.R. Bras claims that certain features like these in the novel's mode of narration give one "the disturbing impression that one's intelligence is being underestimated, that the author is usurping the reader's role" (133).[6] At times the writer/narrator does offer analyses of that which is taking place, analyses usually made, perhaps, in the act of reading analytically. But to say that the author 'usurps the reader's role' is to ignore the writer/narrator's role as a consciousness at work. He is not simply a spokesman for the author, nor is he simply Berger, though some statements reflect directly on Berger's own writing habits and idiosyncracies (136-7, for example).

In G. more than in any other work, Berger grapples more overtly with the relation between language and experience. The writer/narrator is plagued by the inability of language to convey what he wishes to convey or to indicate, without explicit statement, what he wishes to be understood about subjective experience and time. Much of what counts in G. occurs in gaps and silences, but the writer/narrator has to direct our attention to these, as at the close of the book: "What happened can be quickly told and the rest can be conveyed at last by my silence" (315). Where, previously, Berger had described effectively, particularly in his non-

fiction, and will come to narrate powerfully, the writer/narrator of G. questions both modes of writing, as he tests and discusses their limitations. (The closer Berger moves toward the purer narration of Once in Europa and An Old Wives' Tale of a City, the third, and as yet unfinished novel of the trilogy, the more open-ended and universally relevant his writing becomes.) In G., the writer/narrator finds narration inadequate: "the experience = I + life. But how to write about this? This equation is inexpressible in the third person and in narrative form" (112). And he finds that "description distorts" (80) and is totally inappropriate for rendering subjectivity: "When you describe something, when you name it, you separate it from yourself. Or to some degree" (161); "some experiences are indescribable but they are nonetheless real" (159).

The writer/narrator continually comments on his own way of seeing that which he is writing about: here we see Berger's clearest statements of frustration with his own problems in writing and with the apparent incompatibility of previous strategies with truthful expression. While attempting to close temporal and spatial distance, he is often thwarted because, as he notes, a translation is required in order to make certain realms and experiences accessible to his and to our "world of third persons": "The look in her eyes is an expression of freedom which he receives as such, but which we, in order to locate it

in our world of third persons, must call a look of simultaneous appeal and gratitude" (115). When G. is uttering tender words to Leonie, the writer/narrator cites these words, and adds "But such words recorded for a third person lose their precision and their outrageous eloquence" (132).

Subjective Experience of Historical Time

Subjective time is examined for its ability to transcend both the particulars of time and place imposed by objective historical time and the awareness of context imposed by subjective perception of historical time. Subjective time has its own rhythms, and in moments dominates perception by taking us over "thresholds beyond which space, distance, time [are] meaningless" (117). G. shows how subjectivity can manipulate time in order to form a positive resistance to the 'remorselessness' of historical time. Subjective time can constitute opposition to the conflation of time and history-- when "people can no longer read their experience of them separately" (AWT 105). Such a conflation makes people feel mere objects and victims of historical time.

Berger maintains that "this conflation began in Europe in the nineteenth century" (Ibid.). In G. we see how people are inescapably partially objects of history, and how subjective experience is to a large extent dependent on and conditioned by exterior processes. It

is set in the Europe of the mid eighteen-eighties to 1915, a time that showed

> ...the most remarkable period of economic growth in history, not excluding our own time. In the years 1870-1913 the expansion of the international economy... was more rapid than ever before or since... Europe dominated the world politically as well as economically... This was the great age of imperialism, based not only on the material superiority but, as the great majority believed without a shadow of a doubt, on the cultural and racial superiority of the white races of European stock. (Alan Bullock "The Double Image" Modernism 59-60 [7])

This is a time period which, especially in Italy (the particular setting), saw the rising strength of the workers' left threatening the bougeoisie's control of the state, and the response of the ruling class to this threat, in which "crude repression gave way to political manipulation" (G. 77). The book builds toward the historical climax of 1914, and documents the "discontinuity between... two successive centuries" (Hauser 663) and the juncture of two worlds: that of the dominant, but by now fearful, bourgeoisie, into which G. is born, and that of the revolution, into which G. at times stumbles. Revolutionary action and protest, writes Berger, are expressions of an opposition to history: "to what happens in it. But not only that. Every revolutionary protest is also a project against people being the objects of history" (AWT 104). Revolutionary action then, according to Berger, is more than a response to literal, practical oppression: it is an expression of an experiential, metaphysical

disorientation. Through revolutionary protest, the feeling of being an object of history is negated, and "history ceases to have the monopoly of time" (AWT 108). Though not of the world of this kind of expression, G. shares with this world an opposition to history having the monopoly of time: his opposition takes a different form, as will be discussed later.

One particular way in which consciousness, in G., is informed by exterior processes and conditions is in regard to the way in which men and women conceive of and experience love: "...the account one renders to oneself about being in love is always informed and modified by the specific and social relations of the time" (151). The writer/narrator shows and tells how "the state of being in love" (151) and sexual desire (as distinct from actual sexual passion, which "may have varied little throughout recorded history" (151)), are prompted by and fraught with the certainties and uncertainties of the time. These insights bear directly on Berger's Ways of Seeing, published in the same year as G. They also correspond to Denis de Rougemont's Love in the Western World, which shows and tells how "the human heart is strangely sensitive to variations in time and place" (5), and how myths, literature, society, and culture form the language, and hence the conceptions, of love throughout history. Though most criticism of G. concerns itself with G's adult life, almost one half of the book

addresses the time and circumstances of his preconception through to fifteen years old: it is here, in the relationships among his immediate family members, that the characteristics of nineteenth century European love and desire are first made manifest.

The social world into which G. is born is one of well-entrenched, fixed values. This his mother learns when she takes him, as a baby, to her rich mother's house in Paris and comes up against "the sheer force of routine in a nineteenth century household", and learns that "an infant, like everything else in the nineteenth century had its own place-- which was unshareable" (27). It is a static, hierarchic world, and the book's insights into love and sexual desire are based on the premise:

> In an indeterminate world in flux sexual desire is reinforced by a longing for precision and certainty: beside her my life is arranged.
>
> In a static hierarchic world sexual desire is reinforced by a longing for an alternative certainty: with her I am free. (110)

Umberto and Laura's affair, to each of them, represents the alternative certainty of a freedom. Umberto, a successful Italian merchant, simultaneously believes in the social structure in which he has earned a privileged place, and feels 'hemmed' in by it. He acutely fears the threat to the social structure by what he calls spasmodic outbursts of madness, yet welcomes into his life a degree of controlled 'madness' in the form of his affair with Laura: "...he arrives at the

conclusion that limited madness may grant him greater liberty within the structure. He calls Laura mad in the hope that she will bring into his life a modicum of liberty" (11). It is the controlled aspect of the freedom, the "limited" aspect of the "madness" that he wants, however: he loves her independence most because he can tame it with his physical touch. To Laura, Umberto represents a similar possibility of controlled freedom. An independently wealthy, sophisticated, young Anglo-American, she is scornful of the crudeness of the Italian Umberto-- who is known as 'La Bestia'-- when not in his company. Being in his company, however,

> ...was like entering a tower which she could not leave until he departed. Inside the tower she was both mistress and child. She played there, either gravely or frivolously, with whatever he gave her. She could look out from the tower but she could never see the tower from the outside. The tower was their love affair. (6-7)

Umberto's passion for her is an attractive place to visit, as long as she can leave when she likes. It offers her "an opportunity to show him the intricate sexuality of her body which has always seemed to her to be as unpredictable, as delicate and as pure as an almond hidden in its two shells" (14).

The first few pages of the book, in examining the relationship between G's parents, present the tenor of all the middle and upper class social and familial relations in the book.[8] We see in these first pages how Laura, Umberto, and Umberto's wife are heavily dependent

for their self-images on their social roles, and on the roles of others in relation to them.[9] We are told how Esther's reputation for spirituality is preserved, and her social position confirmed, by her marriage to Umberto. And "the fact that Esther was Umberto's wife saved him from appearing too extreme. Without her, he might have been reckoned a profligate" (5). Through Umberto, Laura's fascination with the secrets and sensitivity of her body is confirmed: she sees herself through his passion for her. When Laura becomes pregnant with G., the dynamic of their affair changes dramatically, because their images of themselves change accordingly. Laura sees Umberto as "a man with a weakness for a little American tart" (17): since she is now potentially bound to him as the father of her child, she rejects him entirely, since he represents not freedom but the opposite. She sees herself as entirely self-sufficient and committed to the child within her. Umberto now sees himself as a father, and Laura not as his 'mad' mistress but as the mother of his son, and is determined to set them up as a family. Because "the values and judgements by which he must make sense of his lived life", those of his privileged position in bourgeois society, are threatened, and he can find no "sense of succession and continuity", Umberto is "abandoned in time" (10). A child would provide him with this sense of continuity and succession; his desperation

to play the role of father comes from his desperate need to be reoriented in time.

The two-dimensional perception of self and of others that arises out of defining self and others according to social roles results in a fundamental withdrawing and repression of the subjective self. This can take several forms, from mere detachment on the one hand to extreme theatricality on the other. With Jocelyn, G's uncle, with whom G. is sent to England to live, it takes the form of theatricality. Jocelyn is a remnant of the English upper class, whose "own chosen image of themselves was threatened" (31): his social role is outdated and so has become a matter of empty theatrics (31-32). Yet Jocelyn 'believes the play' of the 'Social Life' of the English elite is real.

We can gain some insight into this phenomenon of social roles dominating perception at the expense of subjective self by looking at Berger's essay "The Theatre of Indifference". He calls 'the theatre of indifference' that public city life in a static society in which each individual is forced into being a spectator or performer, or both, of the roles fixed by that society: in such a society there is little continuity between internal life and external life, and little cohesion among its members. Individuals are forced to fix their hopes on false values, and an individual can then become "the living caricature of the expression towards which he is most

generally forced, either by temperament or situation, in his performances" (SS 71). In G. this is especially apparent among the social elite.[10] Near the end of the book, when G. has resolved to avenge himself on von Hartmann and the social elite of Trieste, he recognizes that "to insult or threaten them openly, to shout or shoot at them, would only have amused and confirmed them. They were all addicts of the theatre" (291). They would have been indifferent to a subjective response as such, and seen it in the context of performance in social life. Berger writes:

> The theatre of indifference should not be subsumed under 'the artificiality of city life'. The antithesis of the theatre is not spontaneous simplicity, but drama in which both the principal protagonists and the audience have a common interest.
>
> The historical precondition for the theatre of indifference is that everyone is consciously and helplessly dependent in most areas of their life on the opinions and decisions of others... Its precondition is the failure of democracy. The indifference is the result of the divergence of personal fantasies when isolated from any effective social action. The indifference is born of the equation between excessive mobility of private fantasy and social political stasis. (SS 72)

Such a condition pervades G's whole early life. Laura takes him to England and, as she becomes increasingly involved with Fabian socialism, she becomes less involved with her son. She abandons him, when he is approximately three years old, to her cousins Jocelyn and Beatrice and to their farm in the country while she remains in London. She is not only literally absent from

G's life thereafter, but, even when she spends time with him, she is figuratively absent. The lack of fundamental engagement of subjective self in relations is manifest in there being this sense of absence in people's presence.[11] This is apparent in the relations among Laura, Umberto, and G., and is a model for that which G. is to encounter in the world as an adult, (and which he counteracts in his relations with women). This is particularly apparent when Laura takes G. to Italy, when he is eleven years old, to meet his father for the first time. (A measure of Laura's failure to "achieve the new way of living with her baby which she had wished" (27), and which entailed a promise that "If he is a boy, he will begin life with the advantage of never having been told lies" (20), is that up until this point, G. had been told his father first lost his mind, and then was dead. "What force disarmed her?" (62) The values and structures of the time in which she lives.)

On this visit G's view of his mother is that of a detached spectator: to him she is not felt as a person who is part of him, but is seen as someone playing the role of 'mother', which prompts him to play the game of 'imaginary mothers' (59). And "with her he has the sensation of playing a part in a story which concerns a life he might have led" (58). When Laura, Umberto, and G. meet, they "seem to each other to be huge, improbable apparitions-- like faces drawn on kites" (59). Umberto

appears to Laura "like a caricature of a capitalist" (60), and Laura appears to Umberto not as she is now changed, but still simply as the mother of his son. And Laura is "furiously embarrassed" (64) by what she sees as Umberto's "theatricality" in his gestures of devotion to her.

"The global system of late capitalism" is responsible for the lack of forum for expression as an extension of subjective self:

> In such a system there is no space for experience. Each person's experience remains an individual problem... Nor is there space for the social function of subjectivity. All subjectivity is treated as private... (AWT 100)

Around subjectivity, then, builds up the fascination of secrecy and mystery. G's experience, as a child and youth, of Laura, Umberto, Jocelyn, and Beatrice is to a large extent informed by an awareness of the secrecy and hiddenness of their real thoughts and feelings. When not acting out his social role, and thereby feeling connected with time through tradition, Jocelyn "becomes profoundly secretive and passive" (31). His incestuous relation with Beatrice signifies, in the book, the profound secrecy of subjective life: there is perhaps no greater kept secret in familial relations. Living on the farm with Jocelyn (Beatrice marries and is away in South Africa for a time), G. is immersed in the world of men and their secrets, a world from which he is excluded, but into which, he believes, informed by Jocelyn's elitist

notion of initiation rites, he will at some point enter:

> He knows some of the terms of this world but he believes that all of them refer to something which nobody ever mentions. He assumes that the men around him have, for their own reasons, a need for secrecy comparable to his own. When he enters their world-- and follows Captain Elwes' hounds-- he will learn their secrets. (35)

G's mother, who "does not say what she thinks", remains "unknown" to him, while his "newly-discovered father" (78) remains merely a representative of another world. How little they have revealed to each other and know each other is obvious to G.: "In the history of his own life their innocence makes them like two children" (61). When the three of them are together, Laura is prompted by a reminder of her past relation with Umberto to acknowledge this past, not openly, but in a momentary glance. To the boy G., this glance is loaded with profound secrecy, but represents, again, a world from which he is excluded:

> The boy, intercepting the glance, recognizes it. He has seen Beatrice look at Jocelyn with a similar expression. It is a look which confesses a secret common interest deriving from some past experience from which, by its nature rather than by its timing, he is conscious of being inevitably excluded. It is a look which makes him conscious of being the third person. (65)

This, in part, explains why, as an adult (in the second half of the book) G. disturbs others with his secretiveness (129) and his apparent indifference: inevitably linked in this society with his engagement at a deeply subjective level with women is the realm of hiddenness and secrecy.

As an adult Don Juan character, G. has been much addressed by critics. But his childhood and youth are significant; and he is, after all, still relatively young when he meets his death (twenty-eight years old). As child, youth, and adult, he is drawn in the novel less as a character than as a phenomenon arising as a result of certain particulars of time and place. He functions as a Lukácsian Archimedian point. Lukács, in discussing the strengths and weaknesses of critical and socialist realism,[12] finds many points of shared technique and effectiveness between the two. What makes socialist realism distinctive, and what gives it its unusual strength, he claims, is that, "based on a concrete socialist perspective", it uses "this perspective to describe the forces working towards socialism". More importantly, it is "concerned to locate those human qualities which make for the creation of a new social order" (The Meaning of Contemporary Realism 94). (In this, "the revolt against the old order, against capitalism", which critical and socialist realism share, is subordinated in favour of the different perspectives of the two types of realism.) Socialist realism therefore employs a distinct treatment of character, one that involves working 'from the inside':

> By the 'outside' method [of critical realism] a writer obtains a typology based on the individual and his personal conflicts; and from this base he works towards wider social significance. The 'inside' method seeks to discover an Archimedian point in the midst of social contradictions, and then bases its typology on an analysis of these

contradictions. (94)

The character of G. is not the foreground of the novel, but the gauge by which social contradictions are measured and analysed. Through him are pointed up disfunctions in the social relations of the time and place. In particular, he provides Berger with a 'way in' to women's subjective experience: in his capacity to remain apart from the world and yet to contact deep needs within women, he both taps areas of subjective experience not recognized or fed by the world in which they live and threatens the structures of the world in which they live. He is like a secular Garibaldi, after whom he is nicknamed at school. As the writer/narrator analyses the Italian people's need for Garibaldi and the nature of his heroism, many of his comments are applicable to the needs G. meets in women:

> When men set eyes on Garibaldi they amazed themselves: until that moment thay had not known who they were. They met him as from within themselves.
>
> ....
>
> Garibaldi was a threat to order, not only because his methods were conspiratorial, but because he inspired. (21; 22-23)

The public image of Garibaldi as a 'national genius' arose as a result of his meeting deep needs of the historical time previous to the time-frame of the novel. As an adult, G. meets private, subjective needs. Janos Lavin (A Painter of Our Time) and Corker (Corker's Freedom), who function more as critical realist characters, experience private revolutions; G. provokes

private revolutions within women. Only in the end does he approach this experience himself, and then, simultaneously with the possibility of private revolution, comes submission to destruction.

Myths are generated out of the certainties and uncertainties of the historical time. Garibaldi obtained mythical status among Italian patriots for a time when he was alive and for a time immediately following his death, "yet this name was as irrelevant to what now occurred in those streets and piazzas as the blue sky above" (23). At the time of writing G., Berger was interested in the Don Juan figure as a myth that has persisted at certain historical times in certain societies. He was most interested in raising the question of why this is so. The question is not definitively answered, but the tendencies and qualities that form such a phenomenon, the structures of society which prompt and allow it to function, the areas of human experience which feed on it and are fed by it, are examined for possible keys to the answer. In discussion with me it was notable that Berger conceived of G. as a kind of 'Archimedian point':

JB: G. is a novel about a Don Juan. In my view, a Don Juan is not a constant historical character.

DW: You have said that the energy he puts into his own exploits, in other times would have been put to use in other more constructive directions.

JB: Yes, but more important is the historical preconditions, in which a Don Juan and not a Casanova -- very different-- is possible. And it seems to me there are two preconditions. Which is why, for example, in the sixties and seventies of this century, or the twenties and thirties, I don't think Don Juans were possible. In

fact I took the last period, historically speaking, up to the last ten years (which is perhaps completely different again), when it seemed to me a Don Juan was possible, because it seemed to me there were two preconditions: one, women have to be considered the property of men, either of their husbands, their brothers, or of their fathers, and so on. The second is that the overall political situation, social situation, has to be a stagnant one... Now this, I think, is very important: one cannot assume a Don Juan is absolutely cynical, And one cannot assume that when he is seducing his latest woman, or conquest...

DW: ... that they are only that?

JB: Yes. What is so extraordinary in the myth of Don Juan, or in the legend of Don Juan (and what this book talks about) is that it's not even as though the latest woman in question doesn't know what he's done to the others. On the contrary; she does know. So it's not just a con trick. And yet, the women-- not all the women, but the women in question-- submit. WHY? That is the interesting question. And that is the question which the facile Women's Liberation answers or questions just do not face. Finally I think that question probably can only be answered by a woman, not by a man. But so far as I can feel it, it has to do with the fact that during those hours or days, he offers an attention, a subjective sensibility, so close that it is very close to tenderness.

DW: The power of immediacy.

JB: And the power of immediacy. That, in that world, is incredibly rare, like rain in the desert...

DW: Part of the crucial framework of his life, aside from Nusa and the Roman girl at either end, is his childhood, which seems to be ignored by most critics.

JB: For me at least as an important part of the book as all the rest is his childhood. This boy, who is not born a Don Juan-- how does he become a Don Juan? Not 'why' exactly; 'how' is the better question here. Well, of course it is partly to do with <u>him</u>; mystery. But it is also undoubtedly to do with his parents, his mother, and his aunt... Everything begins there. And, if he becomes a kind of partisan-- in the sense that I'm talking about, on the field of feminine sexuality-- to historical preconditions, it is because he is pulled into that field by his aunt, very unexpectedly, at a very early age, very agreeably. He was initiated by her, which seems to me a rather plausible explanation of a Don Juan character. I don't think a Don Juan character, for example, begins in brothels. It could... but for anyone it could.

DW: It's more fundamental than that.

JB: Exactly. And he becomes (what he becomes) because of something that happens between him and a woman rather than him and another man. And then there is the very important relationship with his uncle.

DW: The sportsman.

JB: Who is lost. And the whole husband and wife, brother and sister relationship, of two adults, man and woman, is established there in his adolescence, representing the outside world, until he comes across the Austrian banker... What interests me about the book are two things. One-- the most important-- are the portraits of the women. Just accepting the phenomenon of G. as a given... I think I would never have been able to have written so many later stories about women, or even in the first person of women, had I not written _G._ It is for other women to judge with what success I did it. I think I succeeded: I do make four, five, six very closeup, intimate portraits of women. And that was a challenge. I didn't identify with G.; I identified with those women. To put it very simply. And maybe that's why I wasn't very interested in G. in a certain way. I was interested in his formation, but after that I'm not so interested in him.

DW: That shows in the sense that after a certain point he has no substructure, no 'blood', few values...

JB: Yes, and why does he never really have a name? I could put this this way, and maybe it actually is the final answer to the whole; my answer to the controversy. I did not want to write a book about a man who, afterwards, can be called a Don Juan. I wanted to write about the myth which is called Don Juan, which has persisted for so many centuries, and which is obviously a very powerful myth. And probably there was never an original Don Juan; there was an original Don Juan, but he wasn't like [the mythical] Don Juan. Don Juan begins with a myth, in a certain sense. And myths are a kind of force of nature in the collective imagination of people. What interested me in that book was what happens to women when confronted with this 'force of nature', this myth. Or, alternatively, where do women fit into the creation of this myth? Because the first two women are part of the creation of this myth [his mother and his aunt]... And after, how do women react to this given, this myth? It is the women who are real. And what interested me was, in the light of this myth, it seemed to me to be possible to narrate aspects of some women which, without that light, it would be very difficult to narrate. That

was the aim for the reader, and for women particularly: to judge how it works or doesn't work, how it is true or false. But that, very clearly, was the aim.

Subjective Time

It has been necessary to look closely at the effects on people of the conditions of the historical time in order to see how subjective time relates to it and plays against it. Two things make the nature of subjective experience elusive to the writer/narrator, however: his desire that experience stand for itself and for its own meaning (and not be translated and interpreted), and his general claim to not understand all the implications of time, about which he writes:

> The way my imagination forces me to write this story is determined by its intimations about those aspects of time which I have touched but never identified. I am writing this book in the same dark. (148)

Berger forces a recognition of the power of internal logic and the mystery of experience by studying and probing our experience of subjective time through the writer/narrator struggling to come to grips with it. Even though how it works is something of a mystery to the writer/narrator, Berger begins to give subjective time more precedence than objective historical time in his work.

Though time that can be quantified can be more easily grasped and understood by the mind, such time is inadequate as a measure of its function in our lives:

> ...how approximate and arbitrary is our normal

> reading of time. Calendars and clocks are our inadequate inventions. The structure of our minds is such that the true nature of time usually escapes us. Yet we know there is a mystery. Like a never-seen object in the dark, we can feel our way over some of its surfaces. But we have not identified it. (148)

The 'mystery' is addressed by the writer/narrator, but is embodied in the experience and perception of the child G., so that his groping consciousness becomes a metaphor for the general lack of understanding of "the true nature of time": to G., many ideas "at this stage of his learning led to a mystery" (46). Adults, on the other hand, sadly and wrongly assume that rational quantifiability determines meaning, that once they determine meaning they know all, and that therefore furthur meaning is closed to them: "What is it that cannot happen? And the child answers himself: Nothing. What is it that can happen? And the adult answers himself: Nothing" (46).

In A Fortunate Man Berger discusses the uniqueness of a child's subjective perception of time. To a child, time is 'elongated'. Children are not objectively aware of the steady pace of time: by their "own reckoning", days and nights, for instance, are not quantifiable pre-determined blocks of time which will succeed one another, but potentially never-ending experiences of the continuing present. Where adults are often 'abandoned in time' then (like Umberto and Jocelyn), children are abandoned to time, and therefore, to them, time changes

its pace according to their experiences. To illustrate the difference between an adult's subjective perception of time and a child's, Berger looks at Sartre's Nausea. Through Antoine Roquentin, Sartre here explores "the habitual life of an adult" (AFM 120), in which the monotonous procession of time comes to constitute his or her 'living'. As Berger notes, "Sartre contrasts this 'living' with the occasional 'feeling of adventure' ", which "is a form of heightened awareness giving a sensation of order-- and therefore of meaning-- to the very fact and limitations of existence" (120). To Roquentin this 'feeling of adventure' comes from "the way in which moments are linked together": each moment is new and leads to another new moment, and each moment is irrevocably lost. And then, according to Roquentin, "you attribute this property to the events which appear to you in moments; you extend to the contents what appertains to the form" (as quoted 129).

Berger maintains that this 'feeling of adventure', otherwise known as the experience of 'the irreversibility of time', is what children know and live with: "their attention... remains on the present in which things constantly appear for the first time and are constantly being lost forever" (121). This does not cause children to suffer, though, as it does not cause adults who experience the 'feeling of adventure' to suffer; for adults it is a form of heightened awareness, a release.

Adults often adopt protective beliefs against what they perceive as the remorseless passing of time, and are often debilitated by a sense of lost time. But for children, whose "own time is endless", everything is meaningfully connected with everything else in a persistent present that stretches and elongates and in which anything is possible. When adults are oppressed by an awareness of time, it is by an awarenesss of the form of time; children, unaware as yet of the objective form, without as yet this "standard of judgement" (AFM 119), experience only the content of time and not the form. When the child G. is forced to recognize, by the ticking of the clock, an objective measurement of the form of time dominating his experience, he feels oppressed:

> The ticking of this clock has a hypnotic effect upon the boy, alone in the room. Its promise of a seemingly endless time lulls him; but the way the ticking fills the time, whose passing it records, oppresses him. He has thought of smashing the round window in the clock... (45)

Two main experiences of G's early life are shown as intimately connected with his perception of time. They are those in which subjective time interrupts the tyranny of clock-time and arrests its apparent progression: his fall and his sexual encounter with Beatrice. His fall, literal, but figurative as a fall into self-consciousness, is immediately preceded by the "Two Men" episode. In this episode G. is overcome with a 'revulsion' that stays with him for the rest of his life. As the writer/narrator says, this revulsion has "nothing

to do with the slaughtering of horses or with the sight of blood" (49).

Randall Craig writes that G's revulsion "...is not at the perception of unmediated reality as in Sartre's Nausea but at the attempt to control and manipulate others" (680). But it is not so simple as Craig suggests, and it is kindred to the nausea felt by Roquentin. Part of Roquentin's discovery about existence has to do with his belief that 'the passage of time is an invention of man' (Nausea 132). Mainly, his nausea comes about with the realization that existence is 'gratuitous', inexplicable, "the perfect free gift" (131); that all that exists is qualified only by the absoluteness of its 'contingency'. Berger calls this feeling of gratuitousness awareness of the "arbitrariness of our condition": we can be aware [of this] as children cannot" (AFM 122). G's revulsion is also kindred to Corker's "moral vertigo", which arises at times he is made aware of what he does not know, when he is introduced to something for which he has no prior experience or knowledge that tells him what to do or to think: "I am made ignorant, or I am reminded of my ignorance, and the ignorance is profound, so profound that I suffer a kind of vertigo. This is not a physical vertigo, but a moral vertigo" (CF 54). We are reminded of Roquentin's struggle to see things, like the chestnut trees, in relation to one another: he insists on these

relations, he says, "in order to delay the crumbling of the human world, measures, quantities, and directions" (Nausea 128). Nevertheless, Corker's "moral vertigo" is a very innocent version of Roquentin's nausea, and of G's "disgust to the point of nausea" (49).

As if to reinforce the idea that some experiences are, like Beatrice's 'tilt',[13] untranslatable, the writer/narrator admits that it is beyond him "to create a name for this revulsion: the ones I can think up all simplify" (49). A chain of events leads to this point of revulsion, which is immediately followed by his fall: taken together they can be seen to represent G's fall into self-consciousness, into adulthood.[14] Adult consciousness is characterized by an awareness of the form of time and an awareness of the apparent arbitrariness of the content of time. The chain of events begins with G's weighing of two perspectives on poachers: Jocelyn's of them as "murderous criminals", ("the equivalent in his uncle's code of public danger to the city mob in Umberto's" (46)), and the farm-hands' of them as friends who are driven to poaching through hunger. If we recall the writer/narrator's definition of absurdity as "a moment of incongruity between two different systems of thinking" (162), we can see how this whole chain of moments leading to G's revulsion is informed by existentialist concepts. When Roquentin becomes conscious of the word "absurdity", he realizes he

has "found the key to Existence, the key to my Nauseas, to my own life" (Nausea 129). The concept of the absurd is "the quintessence of the whole existentialist doctrine" (Hauser 744).

The two perspectives on poachers, which affect G. as 'incongruity between two different systems of thinking'-- clearly class-related-- and his imagining, according to the farm-hands' perspective, the animal-like desperation of hunger (for which he has no experience and of which he has no knowledge), fill him with fear. Walking at dusk in this state of paralysed fear, he comes across two such men, who lead him to the site of the dead horses. From the questions that arise in his mind it is clear this is, for him, a vertiginous situation. The men lead him to and show him the two horses lying twisted on the ground, and subject him to an acting out of their killing, making sure he observes, repeats back to them and remembers every step of their 'show' so that he will tell others what he has seen them do. He knows the horses are already dead before this act, and that he has to lie and say "Yes I saw you". At this point he is overcome with revulsion.

The paraffin by which the men had lit their lamp to take G. through the dusk to the horses is now for G. associated with the blood on the man's hands that represents a purely false, ritualistic killing, and with his "disgust to the point of nausea". The paraffin

therefore represents his disorientation in the face of a staged, apparently arbitrary act. As it is used to light the lamp, the paraffin can also be seen to symbolize a light on, in the sense of a new perpective on, a kind of act. In A Fortunate Man Berger writes that no child ever sees the "light which objectifies everything and confirms nothing" (123). This is the light that characterizes the time-scale of an anguished adult, and of an adult aware of the gratuitousness of existence.

As an adult, G. experiences his revulsion again in moments in which he is made to take part in a staged act. Most importantly this occurs at the moment von Hartmann attempts to control and direct G's affair with his wife Marika.[15] In publicly condoning it and trying to use it to his advantage, he 'stages' their affair by arranging when and where they can meet. At this point in the narrative, the writer/narrator repeats much of the narrative of the "Two Men" episode, saying "It is only now that I understand an incident in G's childhood and a prophecy which were mysterious to me when I wrote them" (272). After repeating the chunk from the "Two Men" episode, he writes:

> When G. descended the balustraded staircase of the von Hartmann house into the massive vaulted entrance hall, from which doors led off to the servants' quarters, he had the impression that permeating the stone-cold darkness was the smell of paraffin. (273)

When at the ball, "the revulsion he had first felt in the face of von Hartmann had by now extended to every guest,

man and woman, at the ball" (290), and it is here we are reminded of this class's addiction to the theatre.

The other time in which G. is invaded by revulsion is when he is participating in a revolutionary action in Trieste "on the day war with Italy was declared" (308). However, he is participating only as an actor, for what he is doing does not represent any beliefs he holds or express his own convictions: he is merely swept up in the crowd. What precipitates his involvement is being lost to absurdity: "Once more G. was aware of the absurdity of the question: where should he go? Once again, in place of an answer, he could only think: further. He began to walk with the crowd in their direction" (307). While helping to set fire to a newspaper office, he urges the others on, "for the smell of paraffin was choking him" (313). G's revulsion here, at the end of his life, (for he is suspected of being an Austrian agent and is killed immediately after burning the office by those with whom he is engaged in this act), is self-directed: he is aware of the stagedness and arbitrariness of his own action.

After the killing of the horses, G., going through the woods, literally, physically, reproduces the disorientation he had experienced. He trips and falls down a slope; he could "stop himself... But he has no wish to" (49). Thereafter he often reenacts this by deliberately rolling "head over heels down the bracken slope" (50). He is, in effect, practising, or

familiarizing himself with, inevitability; these deliberate falls foreshadow the fall off his pony of the next episode. Several things mark the fall off his pony as a crucial transition in his life. "What will become known as his leer [is] born" (50-51), the leer that, to others, marks him in adulthood as a seductive, secretive force. Most significant is that during the fall he becomes aware of the form of time altering. He is swept off his pony by a branch, but the event is characterized by his clear impression that it is meant to be so, that it is inevitable. Here we should remember the statement that to a child, "the unknown is persistent. What is it that cannot happen?...Nothing". To G. at this moment nothing can happen but what is meant to happen, and he has no choice but to participate. Such a feeling of inevitability is fundamentally linked with a perception of time:

> Time is measured not by the numerals on a clock face but by the incidence of our apprehended possibilities. Without these-- in the face of the branch already above the galloping pony's ears, time suffers an extraordinary change. The slowness of it cannot be imagined. (50)

In this period when the pace of time is slowed, while G. 'waits for it to return to normal', he becomes old, like the farm-labourer who finds him and takes him to his cottage, and to whom he feels an equal. As time is slowed, he enters a state of consciousness in which the self withdraws from that rooted in the cause and effect sequence of time: "...his own body, its sensations

and acquired memories become a vast estate in which he could wander without concern about the means of his locomotion" (51). In this altered state of consciousness he has a kind of vision:

> Far away from where he was in his estate he saw a dark mass, composed of stone surfaces and water. He was approaching it fast. He entered it as his back struck the pony's haunches. He lay vertical in a fissure of cloud-like substance as his feet shot up into the air above the pony's withers. (51)

While it would simplify to see this as a direct foreshadowing of his death, if we compare this passage to the end of the book we can see it as a moment which undoes the linear progression of time to make him aware of his end in the future. The 'dark mass composed of stone surfaces and water' that 'he was approaching fast', and the 'cloud-like substance in which he lay' corresponds to his experience when taken, at the close of the book, by two men to meet his death. They walk him through the town to the water's edge: "They struck him on the back of his head. He fainted. The taste of milk is the cloud of unknowing. They supported him, moved forward a few inches and then dropped him feet first into the salt water" (316). More than just a foreshadowing of his death, this moment of his fall off his pony is a moment in which consciousness constitutes time as synthesized. G's experiences of time as synthesized corresponds to and reinforces the presentation of historical time as the 'contemporaneity of history'.

In G., subjectivity is examined as consciousness, and as consciousness that, in the words of Merleau-Ponty (in whose work Berger has been interested), "deploys and constitutes time" (Phenomenology of Perception 414). In discussing temporality, Merleau-Ponty tells how the accepted understanding of time as passing or flowing by, for which the standard metaphor is a river which "flows from the past towards the present and the future" (414), is fallacious. Time actually requires consciousness for its existence: "time presupposes a view of time" (411). And it arises from the relation of consciousness to objective reality. All time then-- what we separate and name as 'past', 'present', and 'future'-- is present in the world, or we would not be able to claim consciousness of these stages of it: "within things themselves, the future and the past are in a kind of state of pre-existence and survival... what is past or future for me is present in the world" (412). Time is never fully constituted, though, but is always essentially "in process of self-production" (415). Yet, inevitably, since consciousness constitutes time, it must somehow objectify it in conceiving of it and positing it; one way of doing this is to record it as 'passing'. Therefore, Merleau-Ponty separates 'constituted time' from 'true time', the last about which we can only speculate, since all we can know is time as constituted through consciousness.

The ideas of phenomenology, which is a kind of "science of subjectivity" (Eagleton, Literary Theory 58), aid Berger in his concern that the individual human subject be redeemed as more than a mere object of historical time. That G. is set in the nineteenth-century is particularly appropriate, for, as Eagleton puts it: "the crass positivism of nineteenth-century science had threatened to rob the world of subjectivity altogether" (58). While Eagleton is dismissive of phenomenology as restoring, in classical bourgeois fashion, the individual human "subject to its rightful throne" as the "source and origin of all meaning", Berger uses the phenomenological understanding of consciousness as one side of a dialectic between subjective experience and objective reality, out of which meaning comes. In And Our Faces... he elucidates the conjunction of consciousness and culture, citing culture as responsible for consciousness. In man, "two times coexist": that corresponding to "the event of his biological organism" (the only time that animals know), and that corresponding to "the event of his consciousness". Our understanding of past, present, and future, and of their interrelatedness, is informed by the culture in which we live. This understanding is 'the time of our consciousness'. And "it is indeed the first task of any culture to propose an understanding of the time of consciousness, of the relations of past to future

realized as such" (9).

Increasingly dominant in European culture, Berger maintains, is the explanation of human consciousness as "an event... like any other... as passive as a geological stratum" (10). This explanation "constructs a uniform, abstract, unilinear law of time" and applies it, in a positivistic manner, to all events, including consciousness. Hence, increasingly over the last two centuries of European culture, "the time created by the event of consciousness" has been denied recognition. Phenomenology recognizes the event of consciousness, and while recognizing the conscious being as a transcendent subject, it does not disregard economic conditions and structures,[16] but accords to individuals a source of awareness that pertains despite the vagaries of economic conditions and structures. "N- social value any longer underwrites the time of consciousness" (AOF 12), but revolutionary action, for instance, can be seen as an attempt by people to take responsibility for, or to 'underwrite', the time of their own consciousness by proposing different relations between past, present, and future than that which their culture provides. At the moment of G's fall, his 'time of consciousness' separates from and transcends the 'time of his biological organism'. His vision of "stone surfaces and water" is a reconstitution of time as synthesized. But also, it can be seen as an image of the true nature of time, some of

the surfaces of which we feel our way over, but which we cannot really identify (148).

The phenomenon of 'the moment' as a spot of highly-charged time which transcends the general flow is significant in G., as in much other modern fiction. Berger uses the moment, in G. and elsewhere, to overturn the inhuman nineteenth-century view of time as "a sentence and a punishment", as "the supreme and unopposed annihilator" (AOF 38). Like Marx, whom he praises for the same, he "wish[es] to return this supremacy into the hands of man" (38). We have inherited "the nineteenth-century view of a unilinear and uniform 'flow' of time" in which time is "objective, incontestable, and indifferent" (35). Time can be reclaimed for man as subjective by recourse to phenomenological understanding, and by focussing on the moment as 'lived duree': "the lived duree is not a question of length but of depth or density" (35). The content of time is then not dictated by a horizontal stratum, but includes another 'dimension' that is "intractable to the regular, uniform flow of time" (36). For Berger, time is spatially oriented, which is evident in the often-quoted explanation of his technique in G. (an occasion on which the voice of Berger and the voice of the writer/narrator are indistinguishable):

> ... I have little sense of unfolding time. The relations which I perceive between things-- and these often include causal and historical relations-- tend to form in my mind a complex synchronic pattern . I see fields where others

> see chapters. And so I am forced to use another method to try to place and define events. A method which searches for co-ordinates extensively in space, rather than consequentially in time. (137)

Important analyses of Berger's technique in G. have related it to Cubism, "its stress on interconnection... multiplicity of viewpoints", and dislocation (Dyer 83).[17] While it is generally appropriate to relate the aims of Berger's technique to those of Cubism, it is more specifically relevant to see Berger as playing with the temporal orientation of reading. In Time and the Novel, A.A. Mendilow argues that the pattern of disclosure of meaning through time varies among the arts. We 'read' the temporal arts (literature and music) differently than we 'read' the spatial arts (sculpture, painting, and architecture); because of their different nature of presentation, they have different relations to temporality.[18] Simply put, 'reading' temporal arts is a process that unfolds through time, while 'reading' spatial arts involves simultaneity of perception, wherein totality and interrelatedness of parts can be perceived practically instantaneously. Mendilow goes on to acknowledge that this is "too narrow a view", and that there is a certain amount of crossover between the two kinds of 'reading'.

Still, it is true that we can, in 'reading' pieces of spatial art, move around them in any way we choose, that there is 'co-existence' of presentation, rather than

the fixed succession of parts we encounter in temporal arts. 'Reading' spatial arts requires perception that moves back and forth and around the piece presented, wherein "the spectator is...free to concentrate on any part of any size for any length of time and in any order..." (25). Mendilow calls this "distinguishing feature of reversibility" (26) inherent in the viewing of a piece of spatial art. But the experience of 'reading' "a melody or a sentence... is not complete, is not even fully intelligible, until the last word or the last note, and the order of its recurrence is irreversible" (Sir W.H. Hadow, as quoted by Mendilow 25). G. is most effective and comprehensible if read in the same way as we 'read' a piece of spatial art, granted, once it has been read from beginning to end, its parts in succession. Its various parts and passages must be related back and forward to other parts and passages for their full implications to be disclosed: meaning is not disclosed sequentially, is not 'unfolded in time'. At times the writer/narrator helps us to this understanding by repeating passages at appropriate times. The text in many ways signals reversibility of reading, as it simultaneously addresses reversibility of time, coexistence of time.

Just as the writer/narrator (and Berger) have 'little sense of unfolding time', G. is presented as a consciousness that thrives on moments that transcend the

linear progression of time. In Another Way of Telling Berger talks about "summit moments" that are "intrinsic to the relation imagination/time":

> The human imagination which grasps and unifies time... has always had the capacity of undoing time. This capacity is closely connected with the faculty of memory. Yet time is undone not only by being remembered but also by the living of certain moments which defy the passing of time, not so much by becoming unforgettable but because, within the experience of such moments there is an imperviousness to time... Moments of achievement, trance, dream, passion, crucial ethical decision, prowess, near-death, sacrifice, mourning, music, the visitation of duende. To name some of them. (106)

He writes that "people differ... in the confidence with which they credit importance" to these 'summit moments'. G. is particularly structured according to a Sartre-like "pattern of moments" in its tracing of G's 'summit moments', to which he credits great importance.

G's sexual encounter with Beatrice constitutes the last episode in the chapters of his youth: it provides him with what he will adopt as his strategy of resistance to and his means of transcending time as continual passage and as linear. The time-scale of their desire opposes the time kept by a clock. Together they cross "a threshold beyond which space, distance, and time were meaningless" (117) and enter a state similar to that of G. upon his fall from his pony; afterwards they become aware of the 'pace of time reverting to normal' (117). Beatrice's, not G's, experience is traced, and it is characterized as "the experience of freedom" which

"precludes all that is not itself" (115).

It is significant that during moments of sexual passion or longing in the book, the focus often shifts to the experience of the woman: this is so that we see how G. accesses the subjective self and needs of the woman that are not recognized and met by the world in which she lives. As the receiver of Beatrice's look that expresses freedom, G. is drawn into it and initiated as the liberator of women from time and space. Put another way, G. fulfills different needs in women that arise as a result of their experience of time. The writer/narrator tells of the role of sexuality in wives' and widows' experience of time, of which G. is well aware:

> A wife of a certain age may find herself trapped within the press of time... she considers infidelity in the hope of proving that her husband's gradual accumulation of each hour, day, year, decade of her life is not inexorable... A widow, by contrast, embraces the inexorable. She recognizes her husband's absence as final. She returns to the past. She pretends that time is repetitive... She tries to make her own life timeless. She considers the passing of time a trivial affair. (235)

While a wife "values the time still left her", a widow "despises the time still left her": both orientations in time give rise to a desperation that is receptive to G's mysterious sexuality. In London, particularly, he finds many war widows in whom he hopes to "find further Beatrices" (234): Beatrice is a war widow when she seduces him. Sexual passion, in G. and elsewhere (especially in Berger's letters to the actors of the film

The Middle of the World), is examined primarily as an "imaginative act of totalization" (letters), a 'summit moment' in which time is synthesized or meaningless.

In the same way that a child is aware only of the present, is abandoned to the 'now', G., through sexual desire, is abandoned to the present: "the only poem to be written about sex" is "here, here, here, here-- now" (111). Yet, because it is a question of "how the mind interprets the light" on the experience of the continuing present (AFM 123), such an experience can constitute suffering and torture, as it does for the anguished adult, "who is trapped in the time-scale of childhood without a child's protection" (124). While the here and now of sexual desire offers G. and his women endless possibilities in transcendence of time-flow, the same experience of time offers anguished adults a sense of irrevocable loss and of meaninglessness and absurdity.

In juxtaposing G's sense of time with that of the revolutionaries Berger shows this disparity. As the revolutionaries put up barricades, they are putting them up between their past, "the violence done to them throughout their lives" (72), and their future, which they imagine they are transforming by their present action.[19] To be locked into or stuck in a present can be to be deprived of a future, which, in the case of the oppressed, is to be deprived of hope: "every ruling minority needs to numb and , if possible, to kill the

time-sense of those whom it exploits by proposing a continuous present. This is the authoritarian secret of all methods of imprisonment" (72). But the present to which one is abandoned during moments of sexual passion is one in which all points of time are joined. The totalizing experience of time, which follows a pattern of thesis-antithesis-synthesis, is "one of the dialectics of desire" (AOF 84). And the writer/narrator says: "it is thus that I explain the protagonist of my book to myself":

> Sexual desire, however it is provoked or produced circumstantially, and whatever its objective terms and duration may be, is subjectively fixed to two points in time: our beginning and our end. When analysed, sexual desire has components which are violently nostalgic and lead us as far back as the experience of birth itself: other components are the result of an ineradicable appetite for the unknown, the farthest away, the ultimate of life-- which can finally only be found in its negation-- death. At the moment of orgasm these two points in time, our beginning and our end, may seem to fuse into one. When this happens everything that lies between them, that is to say our whole life, becomes instantaneous. (142)

As G., to others, seems to embody a 'mystery'-- and therein lies much of his appeal to women-- he has an appetite for mystery, for "the unknown, the farthest away, the ultimate of life", which is, to a point, satiated through sexual passion. When young, his body was to him a "burning mystery", to which Jocelyn's house was the "icy complement" (42). As an adult, he accesses and presents to others the 'burning mystery' of sexual passion, a component of which is the alteration of the

experience of time; the 'icy complement' is the world of the husbands of the women he seduces and its obvious, vulgar, ownership, bourgeois values.

Many have discussed the link between sexuality and death. As Berger writes in And Our Faces...:

> If there were no process of aging, if time and its passing were not built into the very code of life, reproduction would be unnecessary and sexuality would not exist. That sexuality is a species leap over death has always been clear; it is one of the truths which precede philosophy... The sexual thrust to reproduce and to fill the future is a thrust against the current of time which is flowing ceaselessly towards the past... The impersonal force of sexuality opposes the impersonal passing of time and is antithetical to it. (40-41)

This connection between sexuality and death runs deeply between the lines of G.:[20] in G. as defier of the oppression of the form of time as subjectively experienced, but also in G. as representing objective need, at this time in history. As the traditional life of the bourgeois is threatened, it seems to be quickly receding into the past, while the proletariat rushes to transform, or to fill, its future. G's encounters with women are linked with his changing perspective on death: certain 'summit moments', which prompt 'crucial ethical decisions' on his part, arise from these intimate encounters. Just previous to his sexual encounter with Beatrice, he is struck with the realization that "what matters is not being dead" (79). The next chapter, in which Beatrice seduces him, begins: "It has begun, the struggle onto death against what is" (80).

But what begins, in his youth as this defying of the inevitability of death, and continues as an opposing of death through sexuality (see 160), turns into, by the end of the book, a conscious making of fatal decisions, which results in the realization: "why not be dead?" (297). The first and last of these realizations frame his life; each is characterized by 'what had been wordless' up until the moment of the realization. Most importantly, each moment of realization is prompted by his encounter (not sexual) with a woman (or girl, as in the first case) who is engaged in the revolutionary struggle. The first realization that "what matters is not being dead" arises from his inadvertent involvement in the uprising on May 6th, 1898 in Milan. He observes and escapes the soldiers' put-down of the revolt in the company of a Roman girl, who takes him, trembling and scared (he is eleven years old), to a yard and splashes water on his face. Her expression at this point represents for him here, and for the rest of his life (though forgotten until he meets Nusa) true intimacy:

> He sees her face, her heavy eyebrows meeting in the middle, her heavy mouth and moustache, a squashed blemished face with slow eyes; he sees her expression; never before has a second person's expression appeared to express what he is feeling. (75)

This is a moment of true intimacy, as opposed to the cold impersonal intimacy of most of his subsequent sexual encounters. Berger writes, in his letters to the actors of <u>The Middle of the World</u>: "There is no companionship in

passion. But passion can confer the same freedom on both lovers. And their shared experience of this freedom--which is astral and cold-- and gives rise to an incomparable tenderness (sic)". Shortly afterwards, sitting with his mother and father (who are arguing) in a garden in Livorno, G. suddenly and vividly has the revelation that the Roman girl's expression has confirmed to him that "what matters is not being dead".

Memory

In Trieste in 1915, G. meets Nuša, who is from a peasant Slovene family; she wants his passport so that her brother, associated with the terrorist Bosnian movement, which opposes the domination of the southern Slavs by the Hapsburg empire, can escape from the draft imposed by the impending war. (G. is in Trieste on a false passport in his father's surname obtained through the British Foreign Office, which wants him to take messages from Italians out of Trieste, a hotbed at this time. G. has agreed to the arrangement through sheer restlessness, because he wants to leave Britain.) In exchange for giving Nuša his passport, he asks her to accompany him to the ball at the Stadttheater. This constitutes his calculated revenge on the von Hartmanns: to arrive and dance with Nuša, when he is expected to meet Marika and confirm their affair according to von Hartmann's plan, is the supreme insult, "a public one,

[which] amounted to declaring: after a plate-licker, your wife" (291). While von Hartmann tries to have G. arrested as conspirator against the Empire, the Chief of Police calls G. 'mad', and we are reminded of Umberto's fear of what he calls outbursts of 'madness'.

As Nuša and G. flee the Stadttheater, with Marika pursuing them with a whip, G's imagination connects the moment with the moment of fleeing from the soldiers in the company of the Roman girl: "yet it was scarcely like a memory. The two moments were continuous; he was still running the same run and in the course of it the Roman girl had grown into the woman..." (296). This is the beginning of G's undoing. As their pursuers and the Austrian police catch up with them, they are taken into custody and separated. The last thing he sees before Nuša is led away is the expression on her face, and time is synthesized:

> ... he found it impossible to make the distinct separation between her face and the face of the Roman girl in the courtyard in Milan when she splashed water on him and told him to drink. Their features were entirely different. It was in their expression that the mysterious continuity resided. (297)

This continuity is oppressive, and in order " to break this continuity so as to make room for all his adult life between the first and the second face", he has to imagine the faces stripped of their personal features, of evidence of their lives as members of the struggling class, and "remember only the meaning of their expression

for him". This mysterious trick of time evoked by their two expressions forces G. to measure the worth of his life, because the past experience, suddenly present, 'comments upon his present experience' (171): where the Roman girl's expression had confirmed that "what mattered then was not being dead", Nuša's confirms that what matters now is "why not be dead?" (297).

At the opening of this chapter the writer/narrator debates the degree to which G. is conscious of how fatal his decision to remain in Trieste is; fatal because he has aroused such suspicion and hostility among those with whom he socializes. The writer/narrator looks back to when G. had 'challenged death' by willingly being shot by Monsieur Hennequin, the irate husband of Camille, with whom he was having an affair, and concludes that G. is no "more suicidal than Chavez" (274). In the episode to which the writer/narrator alludes, Chavez, G's aviator-hero friend, challenges death by attempting to fly over the alps. As he faces Mount Leone in the air, G. faces Leonie (a 'young peasant bride') on the ground: both face a moment of deciding to choose life and to defy time's tyranny. But the occasion of G's deciding to remain in Trieste is different: he is "conscious of the fatality of this decision" (274). He remains to seek revenge on the von Hartmanns, and we are told that such an intention is "the contrary of all he had done since the end of his childhood when he had first kissed Beatrice's breast".

From the time of his encounter with Beatrice to this point, G. had lived in a kind of state of perpetual forgetfulness. He is defined not by what he believes in, but by what he does not believe in: dreams, causes, ideals, faithfulness, and all that suggests continuity and historical consciousness. Figuratively, therefore, he keeps time at bay and defies its passage with his preoccupation with the power of the 'here, now'. But now, as the possibilities of Trieste and Europe narrow towards the inevitability of war, G's own possibilities narrow towards the inevitablity of death, as he recognizes. Such an embracing of inevitability, as occurred with G's fall off his pony, is linked with perception of time. What G. finally shares with Nuša and her class is limited choices and possibilities (see 145). And what he finally shares with the Europe he symbolizes is disclosed by the analysis of how death appears to those in a war zone:

> The finer the day, the greater the confusion death caused on the Western front. Death had been robbed of all significance there; consequently it was easier to accept it as one more condition, like the mud or the cold, in a world fundamentally inhospitable to man, than in a climate and season so full of promise. (301)

Like the chain of events leading to G's disorientation in time upon the fall from his pony, the chain of events triggered by his decision to remain in Trieste results in a violent disorientation in which "time became m[illegible]less" (301). As he is forced to

recognize continuity through Nuša's expression, he is overwhelmed with memories. His imagination suddenly reshapes time, and he experiences a disorienting torture:

> What weighed heavily upon him was the suddenly awakened faculty of memory itself. Or, rather, the prodigious capacity of this faculty. It was the sheer number of memories, their mass, which oppressed him.
>
> He found it impossible to separate one memory from another... It was as if his mind had been turned into a hall of mirrors... The effect was the opposite of what memory normally does. For example, instead of bringing his childhood closer, the sheer mass of his memories since childhood made his childhoood seem absurdly far away. Memories of Beatrice, such as he did not know he possessed, filled his mind, one after the other, each extremely clear, but each inseparable from memories of other women, so that it seemed to him that he must have last seen Beatrice a century ago... The stream of involuntary, precise but concatenating memories which filled his mind appeared to elongate his past life... But it was equally true that,... his remembered life appeared excessively hurried and brief. Memory alternately stretched and compressed his life until, under this form of torture, time became meaningless. (301)

The form of time past now dominates his consciousness. His life, as lived, no longer appears to him as a pattern of separable moments, and none remains outside of the passage of time. He joins the ranks of those abandoned in time, no longer able to abandon himself to the content of the present moment: "he had come to the point of feeling condemned to live even the present in the past tense. What had not yet happened was merely a section of his past not yet revealed... The opportunities before him were illusory. Time refused to face him" (305-306). He is experiencing time as an

irrevocable loss of the present to the past in continuing passage. Previously, the premise on which he had seduced others, particularly Leonie, was that "there is never any time to lose... No chance ever comes twice": this, though, suggested endless possibilites of experience. Now, in his desperate reiteration to Nuša that "we have no time, Nuša" (305; 306), "his desire for Nuša was indistinguishable from his despair" (306) upon running out of time and possibilites.

Throughout the book, until the end, G's memory functions as an associative faculty: triggered by sensory particulars (sights, sounds, smells, looks) of the moment, it summons up previous corresponding sensory particulars.[21] There is a sense of control in this, whereby his memory controls those associations relevant to his sensual drive. And, as such a function, memory is ascribed to imagination: it is part of the 'stuff of imagination'. However, when G's 'faculty of memory suddenly awakens' to overwhelm and debilitate him, there is no sense of control or selection. Memories flood his mind as in reaction to a long-standing repression. There is an implicit correspondence between G's faculty of memory that suddenly awakens and historical memory: subjective memory finds its objective counterpart in the historical consciousness of a society. What happens to G. suggests that if the society, of which he is a product, fully admitted the past into its conscious

memory, the experience would be overwhelming. What happens to G. is a measure of the price potentially payable by late nineteenth-century capitalism for the 'historical and cultural amnesia' (Kaye 44-45) brought on by Progress. A memory so selective as to admit into consciousness only that which serves its own opportunistic purposes carries within it the seed of its own destruction.

G. embodies lived time as a subjective 'pattern of moments' and so forms an opposition to the continuity of those in power, who are epitomized by Monsieur Hennequin. On the continuing domination of men like him, the writer/narrator focusses all his hatred:

> I do not want to live indefinitely in a world which you dominate; life in such a world should be short. Life would choose death rather than your company. And even death is reluctant to take you. You will live long... As soon as one of you disappears, there is another to take his place, and the number of places is increasing. There will be shortages of everything in the world before there is a shortage of you! (181)

Those of the ruling class, such as Hennequin, have little or no historical consciousness. It is significant that only the members of the struggling classes in the book-- the Roman girl, Leonie, Nusa and her brother, those in the crowds-- have wishes, hopes, and dreams for the shape of their future. And their sense of the present and past informs these hopes: they are endowed with historical consciousness. But their historical consciousness operates often at a subjective, personal level; it is not

that of an intellectual. Many who look at Berger's work on historical consciousness see it as expressive of a theoretical concern for general society. It is partly this, but it is mainly a concern for the quality of particular individual lives, especially for those of the culturally disadvantaged. G's encounter with Nusa provokes in him a sense of their continuity, which disorients him by threatening to displace his vision of objective reality.

Conclusion

Though Berger uses modernist techniques in G., his ideological intentions are those of the realist and the historical materialist. Walter Benjamin,[22] in his "Thesis on the Philosophy of History", claims that "history is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogeneous, empty time, but time filled with the presence of the now..." (Illuminations 261). Underlying this series of contemplations on history, in which Benjamin writes about the distinction between historicism and historical materialism, is the assertion that historicism separates the human subject from time in its understanding of time as 'homogeneous', 'empty', and as flowing on and sweeping all before it. This view of time corresponds to what Lukács objects to as apparent in the modernist perspective, and to what Berger objects to as synonomous with the modern understanding of history. Benjamin finds

in historicism a suppressing of the relevance of the past to the present, or a rewriting of history to show that the shape of the present is an inevitable development of the past. Historicism cites history as a continuum in which progress continually sweeps all before it, and in which all developments-- the exploitation of the labour power of the working class, for instance-- are sanctioned in the name of progress.

But the historical materialist, like the revolutionary in G. and like Berger as the writer of G., "blasts open the continuum of history" (Illuminations 262) to see the past as "charged with the time of the now" (261) and to see the present 'not as a transition' but as a moment "in which time stands still and has come to a stop" (262). The present can be charged with the time of the past in that it can offer a flash of recognition of an image of the past: "to articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it 'the way it really was'... It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger" (225). According to Benjamin, such a view of history offers the possibility of redemption for humankind, for it resists conforming to the forces of tradition which have taken over history and turned it into a continuum, thereby legitimizing the present. Where the historicist looks backwards to 'establish causal connections between various moments in history' that have led inevitably to the present, the

historical materialist seizes moments of the past that have relevance to a different orientation in time than that of the dominant classes, and thereby indicts the present as produced by these classes.

For Berger, the present of the time in which G. was written was charged with the time of the past in which G. was set. Harvey J. Kaye traces the changes in Berger's historical perspective, which he sees "reflected in both the content and form of his work". He writes: "the period before 1968 was for Berger (and for many others) a 'time of expectant hopes' and 'revolutionary expectations'... The period after was to be a time of crisis and re-evaluation" (49). Kaye takes his lead from the essay "Between Two Colmars" (AL), in which Berger compares his 1963 understanding of the Grunewald Altarpiece with his 1973 understanding of the same piece, and concludes:

> In a period of revolutionary expectation, I saw a work of art which had survived as evidence of the past's despair; in a period which has to be endured, I see the same work miraculously offering a narrow pass across despair. (AL 133)

Written between 1965 and 1971, G. falls in the period Kaye cites as a transition between hope and despair. But he finds in G. more of a sense of expectation than a sense of despair: "the sense of change-- of becoming-- not yet understood, reflects Berger's own experience at the time of writing" (49). Yet, while there is within the book a tension between

hope and despair, it is permeated with despair and frustration: hopes are more often defeated than fulfilled or even fed. The sense of change and hope is present with the upheavals of the impending war and the threats to the dominant class. But the struggles of the oppressed are brutally defeated,[23] the lives of women are characterized as waiting in quiet desperation for time to offer opportunities (which echoes Doris Lessing's description of 'thousands of women quietly going mad in their houses'), many are 'abandoned in time', and G., an 'Archimedian point', finally embodies self-willed defeat.

The tension between hope and despair can be seen in the presence of the two contradictory impulses of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty:

> For Sartre the body is a vehicle of shame, nausea, and ultimate alienation caught in the trap of the other's look. In Merleau-Ponty the body is the vehicle of the very world and others with whom we labour in love and understanding and the very same ground to which we must appeal to correct error or overcome violence. In Sartre the body is the medium of the world's decomposition, while in Merleau-Ponty the body symbolizes the very composition of the world and society. ("Merleau- Ponty's Critique of Marxist Scientism" _Phenomenology and Marxism_ 293-294)

_G._ documents Sartre's world, a world that, as Marcel says in "The Value of Money", "has left the earth behind it" (_PE_ 86). It is a world, though, within which exist possibilities of redirection; though, at this point in history these possibilities have only a fighting chance. One of the main conveyors of the despair in _G._ is the divergence of subjective human experience and objective

reality, expressed in its treatment of time. It illustrates Lukács's analysis of the novel as the foremost expression of the separation of human life and time, to which both Benjamin (in "The Storyteller"), and Berger (in "Seker Ahmet and the Forest" AL 83) refer in order to underline modern life:

> Time can become constitutive only when the bond with the transcendental home has been severed... Only in the novel, whose very matter is seeking and failing to find the essence, is time posited together with the form: time is the resistance of the organic-- which possesses a mere semblance of life-- to the present meaning, the will of life to remain within its own completely enclosed immanence... In the novel, meaning is separated from life, and hence the essential from the temporal; we might almost say the entire inner action of the novel is nothing but a struggle against the power of time. (Theory of the Novel 122)

Notes

[1] Mendilow quotes Spender, A.C. Ward (Twentieth Century Literature), Henry James, and others, and cites Sterne's Tristram Shandy, Carlyle's Sartor Resartus, Proust's Remembrance of Things Past, Woolf's To the Lighthouse and Orlando, and Wolfe's Of Time and the River to show that the concern about the place of time in writing was common previous to the modern period, but has become extremely important to writers of the modern period.

[2]In Time and Western Man, Wyndham Lewis writes:

> Bergson's doctrine of Time is the creative source of the time-philosophy. It is he more than any other single figure who is responsible for the main intellectual characteristics of the world we live in, and the implicit debt of almost all contemporary philosophy to him is immense. as quoted in "Equal Opposites: Wyndam Lewis, Henri Bergson, and Their Philosophies of Space and Time" Twentieth Century Literature vol 29, no. 3 (Fall 1983) 352

Bergson's Time and Free Will "argued for the recognition of a special kind of subjective logic, found at the deeper levels of the mind, and differing in essence from the conventional logic of the common-sense world of naturalistic time and space". "The Mind of Modernism" Modernism (London: Penguin Books Ltd.) 82.

[3] "Why should I let the toad work/ Squat on my life?" Philip Larkin, "Toads" (1955), lines 1-2.

[4] Ricoeur writes about the different manners in which history and fiction relate to the "split opened up by reflective thinking between phenomenological time

[subjective] and cosmic time [objective]": fiction mixes together "historical characters, dated or datable events... with invented characters, events, and places". But this results in the time of history being drawn into the gravitational field of fictional time, rather than 'the time of fiction being drawn into the gravitational field of historical time'. Examining Mrs. Dalloway, The Magic Mountain, and Remembrance of Things Past, he writes:

> From the mere fact that the narrator and the leading characters are fictional, all references to real historical events are divested of their function of standing for the historical past and are set on a par with the unreal status of the other events. More precisely, the reference to the past, and the very function of standing-for, are preserved but in a neutralized mode... Or... historical events are no longer denotated, they are simply mentioned... It must also be said that World War 1, as a historical event, is in each case fictionalized in a different way, as are all the historical characters included in each novel. So these novels take place within heterogeneous temporal zones. 129

[5]Caute writes: "G. is a work which raises questions of great critical interest. It does not, however, always succeed in fashioning convincing connections, whether causal or structural." "What We Might Be and What We Are: The Art of John Berger" Collisions (London: Quartet Books) 138.

[6] Caute concurs: "So obvious are the social juxtapositions that the reader may feel himself taken for a fool incapable of making connections; at the same time Mr Berger robs his own narrative of homogeneity."

Collisions 140.

[7] Berger has a lot to say about this time period in Europe: see also AL 122 and following, and SFP 62.

> [8] For the nineteenth century European middle classes the state of being in love was characterized by a sense of excessive uncertainty in an otherwise certain world. It was a state exempt from the promise of Progress. Its characteristic uncertainty was the result of considering the beloved as though he or she were free. Nothing that was an expression of the beloved's wishes could be taken for granted. No single decision of the beloved could guarantee the next. Each gesture had to be read for its fresh meaning. Every arrangement became questionable until it had taken place. Doubt produced its own form of erotic stimulation: the lover became the object of the beloved's choice in full liberty. Or so it seemed to the couple in love. In reality, the bestowing of such liberty upon the other, the assumption that the other was so free, was part of the general process of idealizing and making the beloved seem unique. G. 152

[9] Where primitive man "lives within himself", writes Rousseau, "social man lies always outside himself... he knows only how to live in the opinion of others, from their judgements alone he derives the sense of his own existence". A Discourse on Inequality (London: Penguin Books Ltd.) 136. Berger has read Rousseau, and occasionally refers to his work (see SFP 121).

[10] Of the peasants Berger writes about in Pig Earth and Once in Europa, he says: "there is little performing: peasants do not 'play roles' as urban characters do ". PE 10.

> [11] The imaginary mothers he sees through the window are candidates for filling the absence which Laura represents... It is Laura's presence which supplies the necessary sense of absence from which to begin. G. 59

see also 196 on "looks which constitute social absence".

[12]see also Ernst Fischer's "Art and Capitalism" in The Necessity of Art: A Marxist Approach (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd.).

[13]This is another occasion of a kind of experiential disorientation in the book. See 96 and following.

[14]There are other Christian mythic symbols in the novel, particularly the garden. It is in the garden in Livorno that G. is first struck with a realization about mortality (79). He subsequently periodically remembers the moment in the garden (207; 279).

> [15]What he wanted to establish and maintain was administrative control of his wife's appetites. He no more believed in absolute insatiability than he believed in infinity. His wife's appetites had to be encouraged and yet never fully met. In this way her apparent insatiability could be preserved and at the same time be subject to his control. 257

[16]See John O'Neill's "Merleau-Ponty's Critique of Marxist Scientism" Phenomenology and Marxism (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul) 276-304.

[17]See Kaye, Caute, and James. Berger's well-known essay "The Moment of Cubism" (republished in SS) ne best guide for understanding how Cubist techniques and perspective can apply to art. See also SFP.

[18]See "Painting and Time" (SS 205-211), in which Berger addresses the same issue.

[19]Benjamin writes: "The awareness that they are about to make the continuum of history explode is characteristic of the revolutionary classes at the moment

of their action". "Thesis on the Philosophy of History" Illuminations (New York: Schocken Books) 261.

[20] See Pamela McCallum's "Postmodernist Aesthetics and the Historical Novel: John Berger's G." (Minnesota Review N.S. 28 Spring 1987, 68-77). McCallum interprets G. in terms of Rousset's analysis of Le Mythe de Don Juan and finds that G., for the most part, signifies and has an affinity with Death.

> [21] When memory connects one experience with another, the nature of the connection may vary considerably... The experience of watching the Italian shopkeeper breathing into a glove summoned up and commented upon his memory of the mysterious warmth he once found in the clothes of Miss Helen, his last governess. 171

[22] Lukács refers to Benjamin as "one of the finest theoreticians of modernism". The Meaning of Contemporary Realism (London: Merlin Books) 40-41.

> [23] Between 6 May [1898], when martial law was declared in Milan, and 9 May one hundred workers were killed and four hundred and fifty wounded. Those four days marked the end of a phase of Italian history... For the next twenty years in Italy--as in most of the rest of Western Europe--the spectre of revolution was banished from men's minds. G. 77

4

Memory and Experience: Pig Earth and Once in Europa

Continuity

Though Berger is not known for his poetry (at least not in the English-speaking world), his poem "on a Degas bronze of a dancer" (PR 11-12; reprinted in SS 157-158) presents as powerful an argument as any of his prose. It argues for the miraculous organic particularities of the human figure, which "stands the strain" of time and history, and yet is, at the same time, original, balanced, and self-contained. The poem also argues for looking anew at the particularities of the figure, and "light" can be seen as a metaphor for perspective: "Light's the go-between/ Of space and time". The figure embodies both general time and history, and the always surprising new. In it we can see "the bridge the dancer arches for us" over the river of oblivion or forgetfulness ('alethia' is 'truth'; 'lethe' is the opposite, generally understood as that which is forgotten or consigned to oblivion): "Think in terms of bridges/ Over what men once called Lethe".

The violence and drama of Benjamin's 'seizing' of the past as it 'flashes up to "blast open the continuum

of history" is not in Berger's work; nor is the drama of Lukács's 'duration which the instant momentarily dams and holds still in a flash of contemplation' (Theory of the Novel 126). Berger 'thinks in terms of bridges'. In A Seventh Man he measures the quality of the subjective lives of the migrant workers partly by their experience of time, which is distorted by the conditions of their lives as migrant workers. But in their spare time there is some relief:

> To sing... Music takes hold of the present, divides it up and builds a bridge with it, which leads to the life's time. The listener and singer borrow the music's intentionality and find in it a lost amalgam of past, present, and future. Over the bridge for as long as the music lasts, he passes backwards and forwards. (196)

Through music,[1] the continuity between past, present, and future that has been destroyed by the conditions of their lives is restored, and they become reintegrated into that continuity. In "Painting and Time" (SS 205-211), Berger considers "the problem of how time exists (or does not) within painting" (205). He addresses, as often he does in essays and fiction, mid- to late nineteenth century capitalism and the notion of progress as responsible for a crucial change in perspective. Previous to the nineteenth century, "the language of pictorial art" was "the language of...timelessness" (208), in that it referred to "a ground of timelessness", and therefore acted as a bridge over the times of the past, present and future. This is no longer true of pictorial art. The

"culture of progress" does not endorse the bridging of time: time is seen in such a culture as synonomous with the linear progression of history, which does not allow for transcendence. In the 'culture of progress', objective reality does not proffer transcendant possibilities. But previous to this, it did:

> Until the nineteenth century all world cosmologies... conceived of time as being in one way or another surrounded or infiltrated by timelessness. This timelessness constituted a realm of refuge and appeal... It was intimately but invisibly related to the living world of time through ritual, stories, and ethics... Only during the last hundred years... have people lived in a time that contains everything and sweeps everything away, and for which there is no realm of timelessness. (208)

Nineteenth century European capitalism redefined continuity: where "previously, the continuous was thought of as the unchanging or timeless existing outside the flow of history", the continuous is now "deposited... within the flow of history" (209).

In "Painting and Time", Berger claims that "the view of time developed by, and inherited from the culture of nineteenth century European capitalism" has been ignored, and he calls for a radical questioning of it through other than scientific means: "the problem of time has not been, and can not be, solved scientifically" (211). Previous to the writing of this essay, Berger began questioning this himself in _G._ and in other essays (and in _AWT_). But he goes no further with it, in prose fiction, than _G._ After _G._ he becomes more interested in

the view of time of a culture whose perspective predates the culture of progress and capitalism. In Pig Earth he writes about those whose lives are rooted in an older time, and for whom therefore the continuous exists outside of history. For them, the bridging of time is not a sporadic experience provoked only by external phenomena: it is a continual and subjective experience. Living outside the historical and cultural amnesia created by capitalism, they experience time as bridged continually. This experience is informed primarily by the faculty of memory.

In Pig Earth, though, Berger turns the 'bridge' into a circle, or cycle, which is more appropriate to his conviction that time is not linear. (The form of the bridge must rest on a unilinear base.) In the "Historical Afterword" to Pig Earth, he describes the peasant's view of time as cyclical: his ideals and imaginative life are "located in the past" and "his obligations are to the future". And the present is "merely an interlude":

> These two movements, towards the past and the future, are not as contradictory as they might at first appear because basically the peasant has a cyclic view of time. The two movements are different ways of going round a circle... Those who have a cyclic view of time are easily able to accept the convention of historic time, which is simply the trace of the turning wheel. (201)

Because the present is experienced by those with a cyclic view of time as merely an interlude, we could say that part of their experience of time is that of transcending

the present, and that what forms their experience of the present is a merging or 'amalgam' of the past and the future. In "An Explanation" Berger writes, of the stories of Pig Earth:

> I believe the first ones have a sharpness of foreground focus, a sense of the present, such as I could not now achieve. Nevertheless as the stories succeed one another, they become longer and look more deeply into the subjectivity of the lives which they narrate. (13)

Here Berger does not seem to make the connection between looking more deeply into subjectivity and getting away from "a sense of the present". In fact he seems to suggest that his looking more deeply at subjectivity occurs in spite of his getting away from a foregrounding of the present. But the connection is clear: because the present is relatively unimportant to the peasants, Berger is better able to obtain access to and present their subjective experience by downplaying the present in favour of the past and future. When he downplays the present, he creates a truer picture of the peasants' subjective experience of time, in which the past and future are continually filling the present.

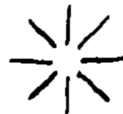
Memory

The stories of Pig Earth do not particularly portray a cyclic view of time. They do show a view of time distinctly different from that of the modern urban world, but we mostly have to take Berger's word that it is a cyclic view of time. The view of time does recognize an

"intractable dimension" (AOF 36), which is that realm of timelessness not recognized by the 'culture of progress'. It is very difficult to give a shape to the view of time portrayed; it does not translate into a diagram, even though Berger would like us to think of it as a circle.

Berger often illustrates subjective experience with diagrams. A Seventh Man includes a series of diagrams illustrating "an awareness of a life's time" (176). "The felt space of a life's time" is represented by a circle within which past, present, and future form different patterns according to the subject's emotional and physical conditions. Diagrams depersonalize and schematize, yet Berger, searching for the clearest possible means of expression, uses them as illustrations of subjective experience.[2] In Pig Earth, though, he uses diagrams only for objective concepts or for objects; by Pig Earth he is able to render, to an extent, human experience without questioning the limitations of narrative, as he has done previously. But he still identifies the peasant view of time as a circle, when it is no more diagrammable than Merleau-Ponty's perception of all times as present in the present. In Pig Earth, the past is ever-present through memory, and the future is present through an imaginative capacity for projection. If any diagram is appropriate to the peasant experience of time, it is the diagram of the "radial memory" in "Uses of Photography" (which was written in

1978, and so worked on at roughly the same time as Pig Earth). Berger writes: "memory is not unilinear at all. Memory works radially, that is to say with an enormous number of associations all leading to the same event. The diagram is like this:"



(AL 60)

In "Uses of Photography" he tells about the "laws of memory"; in Pig Earth he shows. Berger does not specifically address memory in the 'Explanation' or 'Afterword', but the narrative structures are patterned on the 'laws of memory'.

"A Calf Remembered" begins with the calf's end: it is being sold. The narrative then moves backwards to fill in the first days of the calf's 'life's time', beginning with when it was ten days old, then five days old, then two days old. The story ends with the moment of its birth and its first sensations. All these times are present in the present of the calf being sold. Just as the story begins, in its title, with a remembrance, "The Great Whiteness" begins: "All the dead are remembered at La Toussaint" (24). The holiday of La Toussaint is a day of interaction between the dead and the living: the dead are experienced as present, as they

"judge the living" (24). The story opens with the dead as present, and is about conception: after Hélène retrieves flowers from her husband's and father's graves, she takes her goat to be mated, and the times of birth and death symbolically converge. In this story, as in all the others, we are made aware of how the cycles of seasons dictates almost all the actions of the people and establishes a firm, repetitive rhythm of habit to their lives.

The fourth story, "An Independent Woman", begins the pattern of narrative in which the past, present, and future continually flow in and out and around one another. The basic narrative is of the present in which Catherine, helped by her brother Nicholas and a neighbour, is looking for the underground pipe on her property that carries water from the spring to her house. The system was laid many years before by her now dead brother Mathieu, whose presence hangs over their search in the form of his voice, as remembered by Catherine, giving directions for the location of the pipe and the spring. Alternating with, and moving in and out of this narrative are two pasts: one of the time Catherine had worked in Paris, which ended with a return to the village, and the other of "the last time the three of them had sat around the table" (32). Both of these time frames of the past were characterized by illness and threats to lives: Catherine returned to the village from

Paris because her sister-in-law was ill, and the last time the three who are looking for the pipe were together was when Catherine herself was ill. These past times bear on the present for several reasons, primarily because the present situation endangers Catherine's life, as, at seventy-four years old, she is having to fetch water by means of a dangerous route. The two times of the past, and the present form a continuity, and the future is present in Catherine's anticipation of death and her insistence that Death pass through her house and come to meet her on her own ground. These times all run through the present like the water for which they are digging. The narrator in "A Question of Place" says "Life is liquid" (2): the symbolic triangle in "An Independent Woman" is water/life/continuity. Water is the continuity of the generations: "All her father's life and grandfather's life the sound of the water had marked the place below where it was easy to fill the buckets" (36). The pattern of memory embedded in the narrative imitates the fluidity of the water, the essential fluid of life.

"The Wind Howls Too" opens with the narrator's memory provoked by the sound of "the wind howling at night" (43). The story is a remembrance of a period of the narrator's youth that culminated in his sitting on a pile of snow howling. Various frames of the past flow in and out of the narrative. The basic narrative is of the

winter of 1950 in which one of the family's pigs is to be killed, and of the processes and rituals surrounding preparation for the slaughter, the slaughter itself, and the preservation of the pigmeat. The pigmeat lasts a year, like the earth's cycle. Alternating with this basic narrative are stories of the family's past, which the narrator knows through his grandfather's reminiscences. The main story enters the narrative when he talks of the sledge on which they have to put the pig to take him to slaughter: this sledge is the one that killed his father. The story of the narrator's father's death (which occured when he was two years old) flows in and out of the basic narrative so that the two narratives merge at the moment of death for both the pig and the narrator's father. The grandfather's musings reinforce the theme of changelessness and continuity, as he talks of "the thread of knowledge which nature doesn't crush, like a thread of gold in the rock" (56). The grandfather also projects into the future, based on the continuity of knowledge he sees running through the past and present. Such permanence and continuity is symbolized in the story by the stone sabot in the courtyard. "The Wind Howls Too" ends by bridging the time of the basic narrative, which forms the content of the story, with the present in which the narrator, as an adult, is remembering. The last sentence of the story, which has the narrator sitting on a pile of snow howling because his grandfather

has just died, throws us back to the first sentence of the story.

While "Addressed to Survivors" is fairly straightforward chronologically, music plays its part as a bridge. Joseph plays his music to the past and to the future, "to the mountain and to the woman. To the dead and unborn" (71). "The Value of Money" begins with the present, then moves to a year previous to the present to build forward to and merge with it, at which point the present alternates with the future. In other words, the basic narrative is of the present of Marcel's actions. This basic narrative at first alternates with that which happened previous to the present, as it traces what brought Marcel to his present actions. Then, as the narrative past moves forward to meet and merge with the narrative present, the narrative present begins to alternate with that which happened after the narrative present. The point of change of the two narrative patterns occurs when Marcel decides what he must do as a result of being overwhelmed with a sense of continuity, of the past as present in the present. As the past catches up with the present in the narrative, it simultaneously catches up with Marcel. And his subjective experience of the fluid continuity of time is imitated in the run-on sentence narrating this experience:

> He unharnessed Gui-Gui and led her into the stable. The horse's stall, the large table in the kitchen, the ceiling-high cupboard where the

> 'gnole' bottle was kept, the cellar door-- because the bottle was empty and he had to go and fill it from the demijohn-- the wardrobe in the bedroom from which he took his shotgun, the bed on which he sat to change his boots, these wooden things, so solid to the touch, worn and polished, protected from the snow, placed in the house before he was born, built with wood that came from the forest which, through the window, was now no more than a darkness behind the falling snow, reminded him with a force, such as he had never experienced before, of all the dead who were his family and who had lived and worked in the same farm. He poured out a glass of 'gnole' for himself. The feeling came back into his feet. His ancestors were in the house with him. (92)

One of the effects of the story's narrative pattern is to override cause and effect reasoning, on which, according to Berger, the morality of those with a unilinear view of time is based (201). (He again refers to "moral vertigo", this time as that which is created in those with a unilinear view of time by the idea of cyclic time (201).) We see Marcel put in jail, not for his crimes, as those who sentence him believe, but for insisting on continuity in his attempt to 'preserve the knowledge his sons are losing' (75). We see the perversity of bureaucratic 'justice' and the validity of Marcel's form of justice more clearly because of the structure of the narrative. In kidnapping the two tax collectors, Marcel is forcing them to recognize that his work signifies, not money, but the weight and truth of continuity of time. As the narrative places the past within the present, we see the weight of continuity of time within his present actions.

The last, and longest stor "The Three Lives of

Lucie Cabrol", is entirely a first-person remembrance of Lucie from the time of her birth in 1900 to her death in 1968, and beyond in the dreamlife of the narrator. The basic narrative follows her through these years, but the way in which the narrator remembers breaks the chronology of her life up and forms connections among the various periods of her life, revealing laws of memory that "work with an enormous number of associations all leading to the same event" (AL 60). And the story is a combination of the narrator's first-hand experience, what he has heard from others, and what he has been told by Lucie herself. The narrator at one point has an experience not unlike G's, in which a repetition of an earlier experience prompts the compression of time so that the two moments seem continuous. For Jean the narrator, the forty years between the first time Lucie says his name and the second is a mere pause. Also not unlike G., he is forced by this experience to measure the worth of his life; he concludes it has been wasted. Crucial in this story, as in "The Value of Money", is that the past is present not only through memory, but through the felt presence of the dead. Lucie's third 'life' is the narrator's experience of her after she has died.

In the stories of Pig Earth, to remember is to be aware of the 'continuities of meaning', and so memory is synonomous with knowledge or truth in the sense of 'lethe': that which is remembered constitutes truth.

while forgetting gives rise to falsehood. And this does not function only at a personal level, for their individual memories are also a reflection of a "class memory" (200). The people in these stories do not experience the function of memory as separate from perception: they perceive through what they know of the past.

Berger has been influenced in his use of memory in the trilogy by Mircea Eliade's studies of cultural and religious myths. In Myth and Reality Eliade writes about the similarities between the ancient Indian and Greek beliefs surrrounding remembering and forgetting. In both cultures and religions, forgetting is generally equated with ignorance and death, and remembering is generally equated with knowledge and immortality. He finds that one of the 'basic themes of mythical thought, developed by Greek physics and metaphysics, is the determinative role of memory' (112). At a certain point in both India and Greece, "religious patterns of behaviour and mythological expressions" were incorporated into "rudiments of psychology and metaphysics" (119). In Judeo-Christianity, mythological thought, which was concerned with the origin of the nature of being, was assimilated into historiography (113). Eliade is especially concerned with this continuity between "popular beliefs" and "philosophic speculations" as apparent in ancient Greece:

In Greece, then, there are two evaluations of

> memory: (1) that which refers to primordial events (cosmogony, theogony, genealogy), and (2) the memory of former lives, that is, of historical and personal events. Lethe, "forgetfulness", has equal efficacy against the two kinds of memory. But Lethe is powerless in the case of two privileged persons: (1) those who, inspired by the Muses or by virtue of a "power of prophecy in reverse", succeed in recovering the memory of primordial events; (2) those who, like Pythagoras or Empedocles, are able to remember their former lives. These two categories of privileged persons overcome "forgetfulness", which is in some sort equivalent to overcoming death. (123)

The lattor provides the prototype for peasant knowledge, except that the 'former lives' are not literally their own, but their own in so far as they perpetuate the lives of their ancestors and of previous generations. It is to the latter that the peasant memory can be compared, and it is perhaps here that we find out what Berger means by a cyclic view of time. Eliade writes:

> Those... who are able to remember their former lives are above all concerned with discovering their own "history", parceled out as it is among their countless incarnations. They try to unify these isolated fragments, to make them parts of a single pattern, in order to discover the direction and meaning of their destiny. For the unification, through 'anamnesis' [recollection], of these totally unrelated fragments of history also implies 'joining the beginning to the end'... (123-124)

The 'unifying of fragments into a single pattern' stands, in part, behind Berger's understanding of the peasants' perception of life as a story. Eliade goes on to write about how "Plato's theory of ideas and the Platonic 'anamnesis' can be compared with the attitude and behaviour of man in archaic and traditional

societies":

> The man of those societies finds in myth the exemplary models for all his acts. The myths tell him that everything he does or intends to do has already been done, at the beginning of Time, 'in illo tempore'. Hence myths constitute the sum of useful knowledge. An individual life becomes, and remains, a fully human, responsible, and significant life to the extent to which it is inspired by this stock of acts already formulated. Not to know or to forget the contents of the "collective memory" constituted by tradition is equivalent to a retrogression to the "natural" state (the acultural condition of the child), or to a "sin", or to a disaster. (124-125)

In Berger's stories we see this fundamental ontological function of memory in the peasant tradition, not in a direct mythological sense, but in a secularized, class-conscious sense.

One can agree with Eagleton that "there's a rift between the complex speculations of the 'Afterword' and the graphic immediacies of the tales themselves" ("A Sort of Fiction"). But the rift is not a result of the "Afterword' broaching complex issues that are not borne out in the simple realism of the stories, as Eagleton suggests: "[the tales] tend to buy their descriptive fidelity at the cost of emotional complexity and political awareness". It is true that there is not the politically aware, self-conscious narrator of Berger's previous fiction (especially of G.). But, in the two first-person narratives, where the narrator is directly involved in what he narrates, and in the third-person narratives, Berger is engaging in an act of imaginative identification with those about whom he writes, and

taking on the role of the self-forgetful storyteller. And Berger, as a storyteller, is a kind of historiographer,[3] who employs 'anamnesis' that "finds expression in the discovery of our solidarity with... vanished or peripheral peoples" (Myth and Reality 136). The rift between the stories and the 'Afterword' arises partly because they have two different functions: the role Berger plays in each is different, but also, the stories address the particular and the 'Afterword' addresses the general. The particular can represent the general, but the general cannot represent the particular, and so we do not necessarily see the particularities of the stories represented in the 'Afterword'.

The stories show political awareness in, among other things, the way in which they highlight memory as fundamental to a culture that survives outside of the culture of capitalism and progress. Of all Berger's critics, Harvey J. Kaye is the only one to articulate Berger's ideological intention in Pig Earth as an argument "for memory as the basis of historical consciousness" (53). And Kaye, appropriately, quotes "Uses of Photography", in which Berger argues that photographs have replaced memory but have not preserved meaning in the way that memory as historical consciousness does.

The development of photography, and the way photography has been used, Berger argues, corresponds

with the rise of capitalism. It is to the advantage of capitalism to preserve surface meaning, and not to preserve "the continuities of meaning and judgement". The camera preserves appearance, 'spectacle', at the expense of memory: "With the loss of memory the continuities of meaning and judgement are also lost to us. The camera relieves us of the burden of memory" (AL 55). Berger shares with Lukács and Benjamin this conviction that memory offers the possibility of redemption from the condition of modern alienation. Berger writes: "Memory implies a certain act of redemption. What is remembered has been saved from nothingness. What is forgotten has been abandoned" (AL 54). For Lukács, memory is the key to reestablishing links between the human subject and time, to the reintegration of the personality and the world:

> Only in the novel and in certain epic forms resembling the novel does memory occur as a creative force affecting the object and transforming it. The genuinely epic quality of such memory is the affirmative experience of the life process. The duality of interiority and the outside world can be abolished for the subject if he (the subject) glimpses the organic unity of his whole life through the process by which his living present has grown from the stream of his past life dammed up within his memory. (Theory of the Novel 127)

Where the subject of a novel is 'transformed' by a 'glimpse' that unblocks his memory, the subjects of Pig Earth live in a perpetual state of awareness of their living present as 'grown from the stream of past life'.

Metaphor

For Berger, language, as part of "the stuff of imagination", can also function as a mediator between subjective experience and objective reality. He is particularly interested in how metaphor functions: "the Greek word for 'porter' is metaphor. And this is a reminder of how deeply the act of transporting, of despatch and delivery, is intrinsic to the imagination" (AOF 92). Berger's writing, both his fiction and his non-fiction, has always heavily employed metaphor and simile, and has often simultaneously accounted for its reliance on metaphor and attempted to explain the place of metaphor in experience. When writing in England, Berger was made self-conscious about his heavy use of metaphor. I asked him why:

DW: You have a lot to say about metaphor. But you are often apologetic or defensive, which suggests that you feel you have to explain or justify your use of metaphor.

JB: Yes... That's because: I was born in England and brought up in England and for a long while I was writing principally for Britain. And, repeatedly people told me or said about me that I used too many metaphors... continually. And it's a very British reproach... because it's to do with the English version of empiricism, it's to do with positivism, and, finally, (the heavy use of metaphor is considered) 'bad taste'. And so perhaps that's why I have been apologetic. I wouldn't be now, but probably I was so at the time. And (the charge) is very British, because one's only got to think of Spanish or German writing, for example.

DW: Or Classical writing.

JB:Or Classical writing in general, exactly.

DW: None of those assume that anything is 'simply one thing'. The use of metaphor, simile, and metonymy seems essential to capture experience.

JB: And a little fact which goes with that and which explains or illustrates it quite well: the poems I write-- I don't have any illusions of really being a poet. I'm not. I'm a writer who, from time to time, writes poems. Although maybe when I write prose, I write it with quite an intense poetic imagination. In Britain, my poems as such have always been completely dismissed., rather aggressively... And by contrast, a few days ago, a Spanish publisher, a little tiny poetry press publisher, wrote saying could we publish some of your poems in Spanish. And they're published in Turkish... and so it comes back to (simply a British prejudice).

In saying that he writes prose 'with quite an intense poetic imagination' and therefore uses metaphor freely and frequently, Berger is aligning metaphoric expression with poetry. This accords with David Lodge's study of metaphor and metonymy in which Lodge is "concerned with literary language as it has interested Continental structuralist critics influenced by Saussure", and in which he 'draws on the work of Roman Jakobson' ("The Language of Modern Fiction: Metaphor and Metonymy" Modernism 482). Jakobson "categorizes a wide range of artistic and cultural phenomena as either 'Metaphoric' or 'Metonymic' " (483). Jakobson finds that poetry tends towards the metaphoric category, and prose tends towards the metonymic category. According to Jakobson, the distinction between metaphor and metonymy, in writing and speaking, is that metaphor is concerned with the operation of selection (of certain linguistic units) and metonymy is concerned with the operation of a combination of these units into "linguistic units of a higher degree of complexity" (Jakobson, as quoted by Lodge 482). Metaphor is concerned with 'similarity',

while metonymy is concerned with 'contiguity'. In other words, prose moves forward, for the most part, by contiguity, while poetry moves forward, for the most part, through "the possibility of substitution and the perception of similarity" (482).

As the writer/narrator of G. explains why metaphor is essential to his 'way of seeing'-- and this is an occasion on which the writer/narrator and Berger are indistinguishable-- his description of his technique as "likening aspect with aspect, by way of metaphor" supports Jakobson and Lodge. (This passage also demonstrates Berger's felt need to explain and justify his use of metaphor and simile):

> Some say of my writing that it is too overburdened with metaphor and simile: that nothing is ever what it is but is always like something else. That is true, but why is it so? Whatever I perceive or imagine amazes me by its particularity. The qualities it has in common with other things-- leaves, a trunk, branches, if it is a tree: limbs, eyes, hair, if it is a person-- appear to me to be superficial. I am deeply struck by the uniqueness of each event. From this arises my difficulty as a writer-- perhaps the magnificent impossibility of my being a writer. How am I to convey such uniqueness? The obvious way is to establish uniqueness through development... But I have little sense of unfolding time. The relations which I perceive between things... tend to form in my mind a complex synchronic pattern. I see fields where others see chapters. And so I am forced to use another method to try to place and define events. A method which searches for co-ordinates extensively in space, rather than consequentially in time. I write in the spirit of a geometrician. One of the ways in which I establish co-ordinates extensively is by likening aspect with aspect, by way of metaphor. I do not wish to become a prisoner of the nominal, believing that things are what I name them. (136-137)

Lodge agrees with Jakobson that the traditional novel tends toward metonymy, and that "the novel is inherently a metonymic form" (484). This is because the traditional novel is essentially realistic. But the modern novel, claims Lodge, tends toward metaphor, mainly by eschewing realism: "traditionally realistic novelists... usually maintain a clear distinction between what is actually 'there' and what is merely illustrative. Modernism questions such simple positivistic distinctions" (494). Berger's writing combines stark realism with consistent metaphoric expression. This makes it unique and is, perhaps, what some find disturbing, in that it can be seen as pulling two ways or trying to accomplish two potentially incompatible tasks. Berger's imagination forces him to 'place and define things and events by searching for and establishing spatial co-ordinates', which is another way of saying that "nothing is simply one thing": this, Lodge claims, is "the central assertion of the modern novel" (495). But Berger does not write the typical modern novel because his metaphoric expression is employed in the service of realism: he attempts to define the reality of a thing or event or person by describing or narrating its unique aspects.

This is particularly true of the stories of Pig Earth and Once in Europa. While Berger's imagination demands poetic expression, his ideology demands realism.

Because of this last, some see him as a nineteenth century writer (Szanto, Gervais, Peter Kravitz in the editorial of the Special Issue, Edinburgh Review). Just as Jakobson sees metaphor as concerned with the operation of selection, Berger sees realism as concerned with an 'attitude toward experience' that demands selection and "confident inclusion" of events "within a personally constructed but objectively truthful world view":

> Realism is selective and strives toward the typical. Yet what is typical of a situation is only revealed by its development in relation to other developing situations. Thus realism selects in order to construct a totality. (AR 51)

Berger's understanding and employment of realism, unlike traditional realism that proposes a fixed interpretation of the given, 'leaves questions open' (SS 17).

And so Berger's work, both his fiction and his non-fiction, is part poetry and part essay. The best example of a balanced combination of these is A Fortunate Man. When describing the aim of A Fortunate Man, he writes:

> I am very well aware that there is a certain clumsiness in my metaphoric devices. And what do they matter? On the one hand a sociological survey of medical country practice might be more useful: and on the other hand various statistical analyses of the degree of satisfaction expressed among patients after different forms of treatment might be more revealing. I do not for one moment deny the usefulness of such exercises-- and indeed have drawn upon many of their findings whilst preparing this essay. But what I am trying to define here are relations which cannot yet be reached by a question-and-answer analysis. (110)

If, as Berger believes, the imagination is the seat of humans' social conscience, metaphor is needed, as it most

directly appeals to the imagination in a way that other kinds of language do not. Berger makes the same point (and the same defence of his use of metaphor) in <u>A Seventh Man</u>:

> Economic theory can show how [neocolonialism], creating underdevelopment, produces the conditions which lead to immigration: it can also show why the system needs the special labour power which the migrant workers have to sell. Yet necessarily the language of economic theory is abstract. And so, if the forces which determine the migrant's life are to be grasped and realized as part of his personal destiny, a less abstract formulation is needed. Metaphor is needed. Metaphor is temporary. It does not replace theory. (41)

Metaphor has a place in Berger's writing as that which brings home, like no other 'device', the essential quality in need of describing; as that which helps to make sense of the experience in question by making connections among phenomena that other kinds of language cannot; and as that which makes the object, event, or experience in question resound with significance not normally apparent. The particularities of subjective experience, which are complex and subject to constant shifts according to place and time, can be best grasped through metaphor. The question is, why does Berger believe this is so? The more he becomes interested in ontology, essence, and 'interiority', the more he endorses the significance of metaphor as a fundamental and direct means of conveying significance. It is inherent in the nature of human experience to take the same paths, to forge the same patterns, as does metaphor.

Experience <u>uses</u> metaphor to 'continually compare like with unlike, what is small with what is large, what is near with what is distant'(<u>SS</u> 14; <u>PE</u> 6). He finds, therefore, that language and experience are engaged in a dialectic, and mutually inform one another.

In "The Accordion Player", for example, the narrator links Felix's experience with the word for the music he plays: as Felix, alone and lonely, plays his accordion, his experience is linked with the original experience of the music that prompted the coining of its name: "He played a gavotte in quadruple time. Gavotte, which comes from gavot, meaning mountain dweller, meaning goitre, meaning throat, meaning cry" (<u>OE</u> 32). In order to examine the 'interiority', or the "experience of the body" in Neizvestny's sculptures, he finds it necessary to explain the significance of metaphor:

> The difficulty of definition arises when we ask what this interiority of Neizvestny's work means. To try to answer the question we must first digress.
>
> 'A broken heart', 'a wave of tenderness', 'a splitting pain', 'a man of iron nerve', a person 'eaten up with jealousy', 'a mind's eye', 'to know in one's bones'-- all such turns of phrase, and there are many more in all languages, modify the substance or workings of the human body in order to describe the spirit of a quality or experience. They are the original metaphor. (<u>AR</u> 109).

As metaphor serves the "two-way traffic between the human body and exterior nature" (<u>AR</u> 109)-- as it was employed in classical mythology by way of metamorphosis-- it supplies the writer with a means of mediating between the

subject and the object and with a means of accessing subjective experience.

By the 1980s, Berger is studying and employing metaphor and simile increasingly as a means of pointing to primacy[4] and as standing at "the origin of language" (SS 14; PE 6). Once in Europa moves forward by 'likening aspect with aspect' by way of similes: animals, people, organic life, the elements of the sky, are all linked together in aspect, essence, and impulse as the sensuous relations among them are displayed. Metaphor and simile can contain a 'quality of firstness' of experience through their display of sensuous likeness. Berger writes in About Looking:

> ... the first metaphor was animal. Rousseau, in his Essay on the Origins of Language, maintained that language itself began with metaphor: "As emotions were the first motives which induced man to speak, his first utterances were tropes (metaphors). Figurative language was the first to be born, proper meanings were the last to be found". (5)

Berger has clearly discovered that the people he studies and writes about in Pig Earth and Once in Europa make sense of the world primarily in a figurative way: he concentrates on their subjective experience as based on the fluid interchangeability of the terms of human subject and nature. This does not automatically mean, as some hold, an abandonment of Marxist principles. For, though Once in Europa is concerned with "the disappearance or 'modernization' of village life" (Note to OE), the people retain their traditional way of

perceiving, and in this they share with older societies what Marx observed of feudal societies: "metabolic exchange between men and nature". Lukács writes that Marx "urged us to understand 'the sensuous world', the object, reality, as human sensuous activity" (History and Class Consciousness 19). Since capitalism has dominated human relations, people have 'become conscious of themselves as social beings' and so the site of their relations with others constitutes 'human sensuous activity'. But before society and the concept of society had "control over the totality of relations between men", people were less conscious of themselves in relation to each other and more conscious of themselves in relation with nature: human sensuous activity was engaged with nature.

While the people of Once in Europa are certainly aware of themselves as social beings, their imaginations dictate their engagement with objective reality as based on their relation with nature. And so the 'language' of their human sensuous activity blurs the distinctions between human, animal, rock, sky, rain, plants, air, and so on. Their way of perceiving stands outside of capitalism's destruction of "both the spatio-temporal barriers between different lands and territories and also the legal partitions between different 'estates' " (History and Class Consciousness 19). Even the writer of these stories, who makes his appearance from time to

time, finds the significance of his own activity in similes and metaphors from the natural world: "his hearing is as unimpaired as is mine now, registering the noise of my pen on paper-- a noise which resembles that of a mouse at night earnestly eating what its little pointed muzzle has discovered between its paws" (72).[5] There is a 'two-way traffic' between the natural world and humans, as the people make sense of their experiences by way of reference to the natural world as having human qualities, and by way of reference to the human world as having qualities of the natural world.

It is worth listing some of the similes, which represent a small percentage of those to be found in <u>Once in Europa</u>: when the snowed thawed in the Spring, "the earth everywhere was like an animal whose fur was falling out" (5); when the potato sacks are full of gathered potatoes, "they looked like praying drunks in white shirts" (7); when the dog cuts short the cow Myrtille's charging, Myrtille freezes: "Immobile, her muzzle, her neck, her haunches and her tail in one straight line, she was like the first statue ever made of a cow" (25); to Boris, the blond's laughter "was like a promise... Of something big, of the unknown, of a kind of Canada" (44); Pasquale was told that his father "disappeared into America like a tear into a well" (96); when Pasquale is talking to Danielle about her father, he talks "as if each of his words were a button he was pushing through a

buttonhole" (103); the "noise of men talking" is "like the sound of the fermentation of fruit in a barrel" (134).

In "Once in Europa", Odile's family makes sense of the factory that threatens to take over their land by way of reference to what they know. They translate its features into thoughts they can think: the tallest chimney stack, with "flames flicking out the top" is "like a black viper standing on its tail-- can you see its tongue?" (114); the factory grounds 'surround all [of their land] as a floor surrounds a cat's saucer' (115); the great furnaces in the factory in which molybdenum and manganese are produced are like loaves of 'bread with hats on' (125), and when the 'hats' are taken off, the 'white-hot underneath dribbles like ripe cheese' (126).

Berger is making a claim, through these stories, that the figurative language of imagination is 'at the origin of language' but is also close to the metaphysics of the creation and nature of being. Meaning is inherent within it and is transmitted through it, but is not translatable. This is at the heart of storytelling narrative. The art of storytelling, claims De Certeau, constitutes both theory and practice as one, which was Lavin's dream as the goal of revolutionary thinking: to live as one thinks or sees. As De Certeau says of historian and anthropologist Detienne's study of Greek tales:

> Tales, stories, poems, treatises, are for him

> essentially already practices; they say exactly what they do; they are the gesture they themselves signify... and in order to tell what they say [he] can only use their own language. You want to know what they mean...? All right, I'll tell them all over again. Questioned about the meaning of a particular sonata, Beethoven is supposed to have sat down and replayed it. (35, 36)

And this is where phenomenology, which is "generally considered to be concerned with the analysis of consciousness and with the investigation of subjectively intended sense" (Dallmayr, "Phenomenology and Marxism in Historical Perspective" Waldenfels 4) comes in. In "The Sight of a Man", Berger looks at Cézanne's vision, as embodied in his paintings, through Merleau-Ponty's analysis of it, which 'revealed more (to Berger) about Cézanne's painting than anything else he had ever read' (LT 193). We can see an equivalent of Cézanne's painting, as seen by Berger through Merleau-Ponty, in Berger's stories in Once in Europa. Cézanne questioned and overturned the traditional view in art that "to make a likeness was to constitute truth" (191), that to realistically imitate nature in art was to paint truth. Cézanne destroyed this tradition by 'consciously striving toward a new synthesis between art and nature', wherein this synthesis occured not by resemblance of appearance but by positing that "visibility is as much an extension of ourselves as it is a quality-in-itself of things" (192). Berger asks: "At what moment can art and nature converge and become the same?":

> Never by way of representation, for nature cannot by definition be represented... The more

> consistently imitative art is, the more artificial it is. Metaphoric arts are the most natural. But what is a purely visual metaphor? At what moment is green, in equal measure, a perceived concentration of colour and an attribute of grass...?
>
> The answer is: at the moment of perception: at the moment when the subject of perception can admit no discontinuity between himself and the objects and space before him; at the moment at which he is an irremoveable part of the totality of which he is the consciousness. (194)

Cézanne is held up by Berger as the painter who is most "faithful to the actual processes by which we all see", even though, like Berger himself, Cézanne constantly worried that he was distorting through his own subjectivity. Berger quotes Merleau-Ponty on the significance of Cézanne's way of seeing:

> ... He makes a basic distinction not between 'the senses' and 'the understanding' but rather between the spontaneous organization of things we perceive and the human organization of ideas and sciences. We see things; we agree about them; we are anchored in them; and it is with 'nature' as our base that we construct our sciences. Cézanne wanted to paint this primordial world... He wished, as he said, to confront the sciences with the nature 'from which they came'. (The Primacy of Perception, as quoted LT 195)

Cézanne's way of seeing and the phenomenological way of seeing propose that 'visibility is recognition', that to see is to order and make sense of things, and such a way of seeing therefore proposes that there is little distinction between subjectivity and objectivity:

> We must take literally what vision teaches us: namely, that through it we come in contact with the sun and stars, that we are everywhere all at once, and that even our power to imagine ourselves elsewhere... borrows from vision and employs means we owe to it. Vision alone makes us learn that beings that are different, 'exterior', foreign to one another yet absolutely together, are

> 'simultaneity'... (The Primacy of Perception, as quoted 196)

Berger claims that the phenomenological way of seeing corresponds with his 'vision. which he has always had, of what is right there in front of you. Phenomenology strips away extraneous noises and influences'[6] (Interview May 1988) so that the perceiver 'merges' with the perceived object in a direct and instantaneous perception. In the stories in Once in Europa, all of the senses, not just the sense of sight, are employed in this way.

Experience

In 1985, Berger writes of his method:

> I try to describe as accurately as possible the experience in question; my starting point is phenomenological, not deductive; its form, perceived as such, becomes a message that one receives but cannot translate because in it, all is instantaneous. For an instant, the energy of one's perception becomes inseparable from the energy of the creation. (SS 9)

By Once in Europa, Berger is refusing to translate, and if asked to do so, might well simply repeat the stories. And stories also prevent the distinction between the subjective and the objective: "...by definition, a story whether lived or heard has a meaning. To ask whether this meaning is objective or subjective is already to move outside of the circle of listeners. To ask what the meaning is is to ask for the unsayable" (SS 242). We can find the beginning of this approach in G. with statements

like: "What happens happens like an undescribed natural event" (81) and "For him his experiencing it was its explanation" (82).

Robbins tells us how reverence for experience in and for itself has been described as a weakness of Marxist-humanist historiography of late: Perry Anderson finds such a weakness in E.P. Thompson, and Eagleton finds it in Raymond Williams ("Feeling Global: Experience and John Berger" 294-295). And Robbins finds that Walter Benjamin, while also guilty of this "retreat into 'experience'", can be forgiven. But, he asks, can Berger? By first studying the cause and not the result of Berger's study of experience, Robbins argues that Berger is only able to raise the peasants' experience to the level of worthiness that he does because of his own experience of difference, because he is "structurally a cosmopolitan" (296-7). It is hard to understand how this makes Berger suspect, given that an aim is to set the nature of peasant experience against the nature of experience he knows of outside of this culture, which is that of most of his readers. Robbins has two main problems with Berger's focus on 'lived experience': the first is that in Pig Earth one cannot tell whose experience Berger is addressing, his own or those about whom he writes. And in Another Way of Telling, "the text is strangely fuzzy on the point of whose experience the narrative is faithful to" (300). The other problem

Robbins has is that it is unclear whether Berger means 'experience' in the limited sense of 'subjective reaction to what one lives through' or in the more obscure sense of 'knowledge'.

Neither of these need be problems. Robbins's first complaint is reminiscent of Gervais's contention that Berger does not clearly define as distinct from himself the living subjects about whom he writes. But on this point, Berger deliberately obscures such distinction. He often merges with those about whom he writes, as in G. and "The Time of the Cosmonauts" (OE) so that third and first-person narration alternate in a full identification of consciousness. This first criticism of Berger's writing is essentially the old complaint that the writer must distinguish between what is invention and what is really there. Berger does not believe, in the case of the writer's consciousness, that such distinctions should be made, especially if one's aim is to render some truth about social reality. As to the second charge of what Berger means by 'experience', in some cultures, such as that of the peasants, the line between subjective experience and knowledge cannot easily be drawn, as we have seen by looking at Berger's treatment of memory and by looking at phenomenological understanding.

Robbins does, however, make a most important point: for all of Berger's assertions, in his later work, of the need to lay bare 'lived experience', "he does not

actually <u>record</u> experience at all" (305). This is accurate enough, but then Berger does not intend to, as he makes clear in the opening of "The Time of the Cosmonauts": "If every event could be given a name, there would be no need for stories. As things are here, life outstrips our vocabulary" (<u>OE</u> 77). "The Time of the Cosmonauts" addresses the question "What was the relation between the old shepherd Marius and the baby in Danielle's womb when she left the village? " (77). The story then provides a figuration of the relationship between Marius and Danielle: it does not translate it into a fixed meaning which would provide an explicit answer to the question. "The Accordion Player" shows how the experience of sounds is of their melding with other sounds, and how one sound and form of expression gives birth to another, so that there is a direct interrelationship in our experience between natural and human phenomena. Felix's mother, with whom he has lived, dies, and all he hears and sees embodies and confirms her absence and his acute sense of loneliness. When he is trying to domesticate a swarm of bees, he finds that "It was then that he heard his mother's voice calling him by name. The sound the bees were making gave birth to her voice, and at the same time muffled it. The voice went on repeating his name as if the solitude of his days were now in the name itself" (21). We can see, as he turns to his music and his accordion, how the music is 'an

extension' of his experience: music "demands obedience of the imagination", but "in exchange it offers its own freedom" (35). "With music you can say anything" (4), and Felix makes a "cascade of sound" (24), and fits tunes "together like one pipe into another till the chimney was so high it was lost in the sky" (35).

If Berger does not directly record experience, he does, in an attempt to 'get close to the _face_ of experience', record an attitude toward, and perception of, experience (as, in his early days of calling for a return to realism in art, he claimed that realism is an attitude toward experience). Berger has never abandoned his deep interest-- probably his deepest interest-- in 'ways of seeing': _Once in Europa_ can be seen as a study of the peasant's way of seeing or as a study of perception in a traditional peasant culture. If he "manages to politicize" experience, as Robbins says he does (305), it is because he maintains the idea of perspective--he 'does not believe that things are what he names them' (_G._ 137), but he does believe in the possibility of writing about how things are seen-- and perspective is, for him, as it is for Lukacs, latent ideology.[7] We should remember that "Far from [his] dragging politics into art, art... dragged [him] into politics" (_New Statesman_ 4 April 1953: 399-400).

"Once in Europa", the longest and most complex story in _Once in Europa_, shows how Odile perceives and reads

her own experience: it is about perceiving as a process of learning. The framework is metaphoric: Odile is briefly told that St. Odile, after whom she was named, was born blind, and "saw with her eyes for the first time when she was grown up" (12). "Once in Europa" is a first-person account of Odile's life, told as she is flying with her son Christian. She periodically addresses him, and in the last third, addresses her daughter. Christian is her son by Stepan, a Swedish/Ukrainian with whom she lived in shed "A" at the factory where he worked until he was killed in a factory accident. She subsequently married Michel, a local man whom she had known from childhood, who lost both legs in a factory accident, and with whom she had a daughter Marie-Noelle. Odile 'learns' much as she is growing up, but by instinctive perception: "watching [the men] I knew how the world was made" (123), she says of watching the men at the factory. All the men she is closest to work at the factory, and she spends much time observing their physiques, movements, the way their clothes hang on their bodies. Odile attributes to these men, as Berger does in his writing, "the production of the world": in themselves, and in their work they are the substance of the world. She says: "Everything about men is so obvious that even I, at seventeen, could understand" (146). She also 'knows', through intuitive perception, that pity precedes and is as deep or deeper than love. (According

to Dostoevski, "sympathy is stronger, deeper, and more human than love" (Hauser 757).) Odile first loves both Stepan and Michel through pity (137, 146, 167). And Odile 'knows', through intuitive perception, after Christian is born, "how the womb in my belly is the opposite of all I could see and touch" in the factory (155). We can see by this last that she does not need rational, descriptive words to name which qualities or features of the factory define it and which words define the love and pity she feels for Stepan and her child. She merely sets them against each other, and knows they are opposite.

When flying with Christian, Odile tells the story of all she has experienced, which includes how she understood the meaning of all she has experienced for the first time when she was 'grown up'. The metaphor for this 'meaning' is the heron's message. When she and Stepan are out walking, they see a heron and Stepan tells her that the "name of the heron was 'tzaplia', a creature from far away with a message". She says, when telling of this: "Of its message I was ignorant" (156). But, as an adult, she finds that the recounting of her life experience stands for its own message: living stands for its own secret. Once she has recounted her life up to the point when she is flying in the air with Christian, she again sees a heron:

> Look, look down there-- can you see?-- there's a heron flying. 'Tzaplia', the last message before nightfall.

> Tell them, Christian, tell them when we land on earth that there's nothing more to know. (180)

As she flies, like the heron, with Christian, her lived experience embodies the heron's message, and the flying stands for the perspective she can now take on her lived experience. And as she approaches what she wants to tell her daughter about living, she says: "From the sky I can talk to you" (176).

Storytelling

Berger's concern with the art of storytelling in both theory and practice is an attempt to find a language that speaks through and to the unfettered imagination and the universal human being; he seeks a language that speaks of and from lived experience in opposition to that which reflects and perpetuates the constraints and limitations of bourgeois society. As we have seen, this concern can be applied in retrospect to much of his previous writing. As an 'all-embracing and diffuse concern in Berger's life' (Spencer, introduction to SS), storytelling answers the need for a new "mode of narration":

> We hear a lot about the crisis of the modern novel. What this involves, fundamentally, is a change in the mode of narration. It is scarcely any longer possible to tell a straight story sequentially unfolding in time. And this is because we are too aware of what is continually traversing the storyline laterally. That is to say, instead of being aware of a point in an infinitely small part of a straight line, we are aware of it as an infinitely small part of an infinite number of lines, as a centre of a star of lines. Such awareness is the result of our

> constantly having to take into account the simultaneity of events and possibilities. (LT 40).

We can see that Berger still thinks geometrically. The geometric image that, for Berger, corresponds most closely to imaginative experience is that of a web of intersecting lines. This image recurs throughout most of his work, but, in storytelling, this image is meant to be reflected in the language and between the lines of narrative as a spatial, metaphysical figuration of the 'corridors' of experience.[8]

Berger's interest in the art of storytelling constitutes one form of combat against the way things are. He elucidates what he means by the 'art of storytelling' in several essays from the latest collections and in the opening and closing of Pig Earth. Scattered relevant points are made in Another Way of Telling. In this art, as practised most directly in Pig Earth and Once in Europa, are crystallized some of the concerns that are the mainstay of all his work: the nature of individual experience; memory and social memory; the relation between general and particular; historical continuity; and the roots of value and meaning in individual and collective life. Berger values the art of storytelling for its ability to situate people, individually and collectively, in history, and as a kind of language which feeds and answers to our imaginative experience.

"This century, for all its wealth and with all its communication systems, is a century of banishment" (AOF 67): what we understand as 'communication' does not address our actual experience. Where much about present life isolates and alienates most people, stories (as Berger understands them) can act as one of the "substitute[s] for the shelter of a home". Storytelling re-places people, collectively and individually, in historic time: it reconnects them or perpetuates their connection with lasting and permanent centers of value, or, with "the heart of the real". For Berger, 'the real' is linked with the original idea of 'home', even though, he notes, the term 'home' has been co-opted by those who wield power, for their own purposes:

> Originally home meant the center of the world-- not in a geographic, but in an ontological sense. Mircea Eliade has demonstrated how home was the place from which the world could be founded. A home was established, as he says, "at the heart of the real". In traditional societies, everything that made sense of the world was real: the surrounding chaos existed and was threatening, but it was threatening because it was unreal. Without a home at the center of the real, one was not only shelterless, but also lost in non-being, in unreality. Without a home everything was fragmentation. (AOF 55-56)

"Home", in this sense, is a site of intersecting lines, a site where one is in touch with one's history, beliefs, and experience: "home was the center of the world because it was the place where a vertical line crossed a horizontal one" (AOF 56). Berger explains further how Eliade has influenced him on this count:

> A man whose thinking has very deeply influenced me

> during the time of the trilogy and who also uses some of these geometric models is Mircea Eliade... What he was really interested in were 'primitive', almost prehistoric, beliefs, and how, across the world, under the hegemony of very different religions, there were constants, at this level. And he often expresses these constants in rather geometric terms. And his most important cross-- and this is about 'home'-- is the vertical line being with the dead and the unborn and the horizontal line being with the traffic of the living, as it were. (Interview, May 1988)

Here we should remember the view of time in the stories. In "Addressed to Survivors", Joseph plays his music to the past and to the future, "to the mountain and to the woman. To the dead and unborn" (PE 71). The past and the future of the dead and the unborn constitute the vertical line that crosses the horizontal line of Joseph's living, and his music offers recognition of this crossing. For Berger, "home" is the metaphysical place where all aspects of one's life reinforce and reflect one's history, beliefs and experience in a way that current society does not. 'The reassurance that the intersection of the two lines promises' is now only theoretical for most people in this century, as it is for Corker, who longs for "a world where we could all be ourselves. Free. A world in which we could all feel at home" (CF 191). Berger claims that "vestiges of the reassurance still remain in the unarticulated feelings of many millions of displaced people" (AOF 56) in spite of the threats to this reassurance by the structures and systems of the world as it is. A Seventh Man is entirely about how masses of migrant workers from traditional

societies have been forced into a kind of 'non-being' and 'unreality' by such structures and systems, but yet how these workers carry "home" within them.

In "Boris is Buying Horses" it is shown how Boris's actions for and attachment to the blond woman from outside the village are due to his finding in her the shelter of a 'home'. Throughout his life, Boris had been plagued by the awareness of his difference from others, and he believes in the fundamental inhospitality of life on earth: "here the earth is peopled by those whom God threw out as flawed" (OE 70). But "On this inhospitable earth he had found, at the age of forty-one, a shelter. The blond was like a place: one where the law of inhospitality did not apply" (62-63). The stories of Once in Europa are identified by Berger as love stories, but the nature of the love in each story varies according to the characters' experiential orientation: Odile's love is driven by sympathy and pity, Boris's is driven by his discovering in the blond a 'home'. "Romantic love", Berger writes in And Our Faces..., "remembers beginnings and origins. Its primacy pre-dates experience" (66).

Many of Berger's thoughts on the art of storytelling are influenced by Walter Benjamin's essay "The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov". Certainly the "sets of antitheses which form the methodological basis" (Wolin 225) of both examinations are similar: "story and novel, community and society,

tradition and modernity". Wolin claims that such antitheses in Benjamin's essay 'compel the reader to choose between past and present' since Benjamin has 'sought to establish an abstract opposition between the two', but that this is flawed because such a choice is neither realistic nor possible. But while a similar vein of romanticism can be found in some of Berger's discussions of storytelling, the nostalgia is not present. Nostalgia sets in when there is no hope for the future. It is therefore antithetical to Berger's vision of possibilities for the future and to his faith in the imagination. He explains his writing about certain contemporary phenomena that have been covered by so many others (like Marx) by rebuffing the possible charge of nostalgia: "Why add more words? To whisper for that which has been lost. Not out of nostalgia, but because it is on the site of loss that hopes are born" (AOF 55).

Berger does not compel the reader to choose between past and present, rather he exposes power structures and examines centers of value, and roots his examination of storytelling in a particular context of faith, thereby asserting the need for faith. Though, like Benjamin, he condemns the present, he does not want a return to the past: the alternative he wants for what he sees wrong with the present is an alternative present and future. What endures, endures to be looked at with new eyes, not with nostalgia or superiority, which acts to dissociate

the past from the present and the present from the future, thereby inviting discontinuity. This point is illustrated in Berger's comments on an enduring work of art:

> It is commonplace that the significance of a work of art changes as it survives, Usually however, this knowledge is used to distinguish between "them" (in the past) and "us" (now). There is a tendency to picture them and their reactions to art as being embedded in history, and at the same time to credit ourselves with an overview, looking across from what we treat as the summit of history. The surviving work of art then seems to confirm our superior position. The aim of its survival was us. This is an illusion. There is no exemption from history. (SS 133)

Storytelling is a form of resistance to ways of seeing and telling that exempt us from history. The past is important in so far as it constitutes history on both a private and a public level, a history into which all should be reintegrated and united in awareness, a history which provides the experience and insight necessary to know the world and its workings as it is. In order to struggle effectively one must know exactly what one is struggling against. An awareness of the different shaping historical forces provides some meaning and continuity to life, but one must also place oneself historically and determine connections with the past. Continuity is recognized and upheld by those who see the past, present, and future as a web of intersecting lines; it can be salvaged through, among other things, storytelling:

> The task of the storyteller is to know [the common aspirations of both characters and reader] and to

> turn them into the very strides of his own story. If he does this, the story can continue to play an important role wherever the harshness of life is such that people come together to try to change it. Then in the silent spaces of his story both past and future will combine to indict the present. (SS xviii-xix)

In this, Berger looks at Benjamin's points with new eyes.

Where Berger, in full faith in the notion of shared experience, assumes the existence of "common aspirations", Benjamin, in 1936, announced that "the art of storytelling is coming to an end" precisely because of the loss of "the ability to exchange experiences" (Illuminations 83). This ability, "the securest of our possessions", is the raw material of the storyteller. In order for this innate ability to thrive and persist, the societal context for such exchange must be present: "meaning has to be shareable" (SS 242), and there must be faith in the fact that meaning is shareable. Critics of Modernism have long cited the breakup of "shared values of a community culture, in which meaning derives from communal symbols and belief" as responsible for the styles of language that "seem to replace the broad language of shared culture" (Bradbury, The Social Context of Modern English Literature 79). Bradbury notes that 'stylistic contortions' in literature derive from this loss: "to a considerable degree it is the loss of that culturally central language, of a shared and common reality with and through which the writer can speak, that explains" the 'basic oscillation between the language of

science and the language of private artistic symbol', (neither of which fully addresses or reflects lived experience) which has occurred since the end of the nineteenth century.

According to Benjamin, 'the ability to exchange experience' deteriorates when "experience has fallen in value": for this last, World War 1 is largely responsible:

> ... our picture, not only of the external world but of the moral world as well, overnight has undergone changes which were never thought possible... For never has experience been contradicted more thoroughly than strategic experience by tactical warfare, economic experience by inflation, bodily experience by mechanical warfare, moral experience by those in power. (Illuminations 83-84)

Language in the form of 'information' is also responsible for the demise of the ability to exchange experience, and therefore for the demise of storytelling. The proliferation of information, made possible by the press ("one of [the] most important instruments in fully developed capitalism" (88)), 'confronts storytelling in a menacing way', and is "incompatible with the spirit of storytelling". This is because information is "shot through with explanation" whereas "it is half the art of storytelling to keep a story free from explanation as one reproduces it" (89). Benjamin sees this relatively new form of communication as both determined by and a product of the growing power of the middle class and capitalist elements of society. The interpretation and explanation

with which information is "shot through" springs directly from this context and impresses with its "claim to prompt verifiability". The value of events and occurrences temporally and spatially distant is undermined or ignored by readers and listeners, because it is not so readily apparent and verifiable, in favour of that which is readily at hand and made clear by authoritative information.

Where information packages and explains all, storytelling has an "amplitude" in its relating of the extraordinary and the marvellous, according to Benjamin. It 'can arouse astonishment and thoughtfulness', and 'is capable of releasing its strength even after a long time', as opposed to information, whose value "does not survive the moment in which it is new. It lives only at that moment; it has to surrender to it completely and explain itself to it without losing any time" (90). "Amplitude" in stories takes the form of an openness. Meaning is not made explicit, but is left open: "indeed the mystery [of what is told] is more openly acknowledged" (SS 15) Berger concurs. As if endorsing Benjamin's statement that in stories the "psychological connection of events is not forced upon the reader. It is left up to him to interpret things the way he understands them" (Illuminations 89), Berger in his essays and fiction asserts the importance of 'mystery' in this context.

'Mystery' has to do with the background of stories consisting "of the most open, general, and never entirely answerable questions" (SS 18). It involves a 'silence' Berger often refers to in his own narratives, such as that he finds in original paintings: "Original paintings are silent and still in a sense that information never is" (WS 31). I talked to Berger about storytelling provoking a response in the reader of being before a mystery:

JB: I think it's quite important to emphasize what this 'mystery' is about... Why is it necessary to preserve the mystery? Out of accuracy. Not out of a love of something which is fuzzy. On the contrary: out of an accuracy to the experience narrated, which is not just my experience, but which is, or which can be, anybody's or everybody's experience. Because everybody, under certain circumstances, is often aware of a mysterious element in what is happening to them. But then it is suppressed, and they're not able to articulate it. But it's still there in their experience. And that's why it's out of accuracy that one has to preserve mystery.

DW: Is it also out of respect for individual imaginative life, in the sense that we have to begin by assuming that people, whether consciously or not, have a deep memory or sense of connections among phenomena, connections not apparent in objective reality?

JB: Yes, in the context we're talking about, precision, accuracy, is the same thing as respect. Because, to simplify, to cut corners, is always disrespectful to what it's being done to. And so, in a certain sense for me that kind of precision or accuracy is synonomous with respect.

The 'silence ' of Berger's stories is not a result of 'falling silent', as it is in Modernism. The 'falling silent' of Modernist fiction

> ... is a result of fear and disgust in the face of the apparent collapse of the social and individual order. It is a failure of words in the face of the terrible, a fear of calling it by its name, a sign of desperation which can only be pointed to

by lack of speech. (Hauser 756).

As Bradbury and Fletcher point out, Beckett's work most clearly illustrates this kind of silence: "Samuel Beckett has achieved the feat of composing novels which disintegrate into silence as they unfold, crucified on the paradox that 'you must either lie or hold your peace'..." ("The Introverted Novel" Modernism 412). Essentially, the silence of Berger's stories has to do with allowing choice, with not packaging and determining a fixed interpretation of the given. Berger finds, for example, that Neizvestny's "profoundest works defy explanation by resort to any established concept. They remain-- like the experience which they express-- mysterious. (Dependence upon established concepts causes the failure of all overliterary works-- the failure of overexplicitness)" (AR 125). 'Mystery' and 'silence' in a work of art resist systemazation of thought and prevent the work from being co-opted as propaganda. In stories they "testify to the always slightly surprising range of the possible" (SS 15), allude to a kind of play in temporal and spatial dimensions, address imaginative experience, and allow for amplitude, dialectic, and alternatives to conditioned ways of understanding: "The story invites comment. Indeed it creates it, for even total silence is taken as a comment" (SS 16). Comments and response to what is told, allowed for in the gaps of mystery and in the silences--likely vestiges of the oral

origin of storytelling in which there is silent interplay of the teller's and the listener's imaginations-- testify to the richness of experience, to "the riddle of existence".

Berger seems to ascribe to the quality of 'mystery' that kind of reflection, and therefore consciousness, discussed by Merleau-Ponty:

> Reflection does not withdraw from the world towards the unity of consciousness as the world's basis; it steps back to watch the forms of transcendance fly up like sparks from a fire; it slackens the intentional threads which attach us to the world and thus brings them to our notice; it alone is consciousness of the world because it reveals that world as strange and paradoxical. (Phenomenology of Perception xiii)

Berger believes that most people's consciousnesses are fettered to false social values and relations, those born mainly of the 'forms of development of the productive forces'. As Marx states, "it is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness" (1859 Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy). Inscribed in the language of storytelling are the social values and relations that help to formulate and speak of an alternative type of reflection, and therefore consciousness, to that which predominates in modern society. Since "social life which once offered an example of relative permanence is now the guarantor of impermanence", it is increasingly less able 'to propose an understanding of the time of

consciousness, of the relations of past to fiture realized as such" (AOF 12, 9). But works and certain forms of art-- cultural forces not so fettered to material forces--can propose such an understanding; they can delimit experience and imagination, and provide a grounding of amplitude. (Wilful mystification is entirely different. Like obscurantism, it is a tool for duping.) And so Berger finds in the work of Marquez, his "colleague in the art of storytelling" (SS 240), a consciousness which acknowledges 'mystery':

> ... with all his short, slender petals of inquiry, what is it that Garcia Marquez hopes to find out? Never psychological motivation. Never legal guilt or innocence. Never a process of cause and effect. Never the pathology of drunkenness or sexuality. Never a story of success or failure. He simply wants to establish what may have happened... because if he establishes this and he allows us, his listeners, to grasp what may have happened, it is possible that the destiny of all those involved--... will be mounted (like a stone in a ring) in all its mystery. (SS 239)

If any work of art can "provoke at least a momentary sense of being before a mystery" (6), then it frees the reader, listener, or observer from the strictures of proscribed ideological binds, and offers independent perception of possibilities.

Since "writing", writes Berger, "has no territory of its own", and since its task is to "struggle to give meaning to experience", it must attempt to render in language that web of intersecting and interconnecting lines which constitutes experience:

> The act of writing is nothing except the act of approaching the experience written about...

> Experience is indivisible and continuous, at least within a single lifetime and perhaps over many lifetimes... experience folds upon itself, refers backwards and forwards to itself through the referents of hope and fear... it is continually comparing like with unlike, what is small with what is large, what is near with what is distant. And so the act of approaching a given moment of experience involves both scrutiny (closeness) and the capacity to connect (distance). The movement of writing resembles that of a shuttlecock: repeatedly it approaches and withdraws, closes in and takes its distance. Unlike a shuttlecock, however, it is not fixed to a static frame. As the movement of writing repeats itself, its nearness to, its intimacy with the experience increases. Finally, if one is fortunate, meaning is the fruit of this intimacy. (SS 14-15)

The openness and amplitude of the background of stories is also a recognition of the continuity and connection between moments of experience, on both a collective and individual level. Where Berger uses the image of a shuttle to tell of the amplitude of experience a true story encompasses, Benjamin uses the image of a ladder:

> All great storytellers have in common the freedom with which they move up and down the rungs of their experience as on a ladder. A ladder extending downward to the interior of the earth and disappearing into the clouds is the image of a collective experience to which even the deepest shock of every individual experience... constitutes no impediment or barrier. (Illuminations 102)

It is this vertical line of Benjamin's that Berger adopts and to which he adds a horizontal, in keeping with Eliade, when he speaks of 'home' as the metaphoric center of the world, to be found at the intersection of the two lines:

> The vertical line was a path leading upwards to the sky and downwards to the underworld. The

> horizontal line represented the traffic of the world, all the possible roads leading across the earth to other places. Thus, at home, one was nearest to the gods in the sky and to the dead in the underworld. (AOF 6)

This "nearness" is kindred to the 'intimacy with a given moment of experience' one can gain through the act of a certain kind of telling. And so, in this age of alienation, Berger highlights language as a stronghold of experience:

> The boon of langauge is that potentially it is complete, it has the potentiality of holding with words the totality of human experience--everything that has occured and everything that may occur. It even allows space for the unspeakable. In this sense one can say of language that it is potentially the only human home, the only dwelling place that cannot be hostile to man. For prose this home is a vast territory, a country which it crosses through a network of tracks, paths, highways... (AOF 95)

In A Painter of Our Time, Lavin is concerned with the diamonds produced between a series of cross-hatched lines:

> If you draw a series of parallel lines closely together, and then another series across them at an angle, you have the simplest visual example of the dialectical process. Cross-hatching as they call it. You have the first series of lines, then you have the second series in opposition to the first. But out of the two you get a series of diamonds.
>
> Now, if you look at these diamonds, remembering that every one has had to be drawn, you are overwhelmed by the length and complexity of the task. The diamonds are the future we work for.... The first series of lines is there. All we have to do is cross them. (47)

Where, in his first work of fiction, Berger uses language to describe an objective image of a revolutionary process, in his latest stories, he uses language as that

which can contain and answer to the needs similar to those which revolution would attempt to answer.

Berger's movement towards the art of storytelling coincides with what some mourn as his departure from the spirit of revolutionary socialism. But this move constitutes an evolution rather than a departure. We can see this evolving in, among other things, his views on the notion of 'contradiction'. In early criticism and writing, spurred on by the belief that "a revolutionary is sustained by the contradictions in the system he attacks" ("The Idealist's Progress", New Statesman 8 March 1958), and abiding quite strictly by the views of critical and socialist realism, he roots out and attacks the contradictions inherent in the social values and structures of capitalist society. The exposure of contradictions, in itself, is a weapon against the way things are.

Berger's later work, though, speaks of acceptance of contradiction as part of the positive recognition of the mystery of life; as an inevitable condition of life which, once accepted, adds greater dimension to experience and potential for development. And the word "contradiction" is used in a different way, not as a loaded political term, but as a philosophical term. This is the discovery that not merely societal values and structures are contradictory, but that reality is, or the experience of reality is.[9] (Also, this broader

perspective on 'contradiction' reflects "the fundamental principle of dialectical thinking, [which] rests on the understanding that contradictory determinations and attitudes are not mutually exclusive; on the contrary-- just like the individual and society, or form and content-- they are indissolubly linked and reveal their nature only through their antagonism" (Hauser 333).) What is then to be opposed is the notion that life-- experienced, heard, written of and observed-- should be explicable and clear of contradictions: such a notion speaks of 'false ideology' and 'relies on facile optimism' (AR 149).

This evolution in Berger's perspective can be traced to, in part, his changing of ground: where he early focussed on false ideological structures, deconstructed them and made them his foreground, he later makes exploration of alternative consciousness his foreground. This puts him in the position of observing a distinct difference between the consciousnesses and approaches to life of those who would have it clear of contradictions-- including and especially some of those on the left-- and the peasants among whom he lives and among whom storytelling thrives. Peasants "can live with contradictions easily: they do not think that contradictions have to be resolved" ("Ways of Witnessing"). From their acceptance of contradiction

> ... comes truthfulness (an absence of simple self-justification), forgiveness, pity, humour, and-- perhaps most notably of all-- the capacity to

> reflect upon contradictions and their mystery. These reflections, unlike abstractions, are living thought. (_SS_ 267)

Contradiction, also, is inherent in the language of stories as a reflection of the contradictoriness of reality.[10] In contrast to the perspective of peasants and storytellers,

> ... one of the great illusions of the left is the belief that everything can always be resolved, that one doesn't actually often have to _live_ perhaps a whole lifetime with contradictions... With the left's impatience about this-- from which many things spring, including sometimes absolutely disastrous things-- there is a tendency to think that when those contradictions are allowed to exist in a story, one is talking about absurdity.

Berger doesn't "think one is talking about absurdity", he thinks "one is often just talking realistically and maturely about life" ("Screenwriter as Collaborator" 16).

Where Benjamin bemoans the demise of storytelling, Berger focusses on those places and contexts in which, and the people among whom, storytelling persists in spite of the threats to it: peasant and rural communities, and certain writers (this is only with regard to those writings that have to do directly with the art of storytelling). In this way he attempts to combat the inevitability of the decline of shareable meaning and experience, and the decline of imagination. While Benjamin discusses the demise of storytelling as a "concomitant symptom of the secular productive forces of history, a concomitant that has quite gradually removed narrative from the realm of living speech" (_Illuminations_

87), Berger discusses the persistence of the notion of life as story among those who resist the "threat of historical elimination" (PE 213). In "Sicilian Lives", an essay on Danilo Dolci's book of the same title, Berger discusses the nature of the stories from the Sicilian peasants that Dolci has recorded. His basic premise, as with his general views on narration, is that "privilege or the lack of privilege gives a very different perspective to the narrating of events" (SS 263). As with the people Berger lives among, Danilo's Sicilian peasants engage in the art of storytelling "which predates literature" (261):

> In all preindustrial societies people have believed that living is a way of living a story. In this story one is always the protagonist and occasionally the teller, but the inventor of the story, the designer of the plot, is elsewhere. People who believe this, and who lead the story of their life in this way, are often natural storytellers. (261-262)

For natural storytellers, between the actual words of their story lies recognition of elements of destiny and fate similar to those elements at work within their lives. They do not believe that all is controllable by or dictated by present or merely human forces. This has to do, according to Berger, with their perception of Time. And, in part, it defines that quality of 'mystery' discussed earlier in the stories of natural storytellers. And so, Marquez's Chronicle of a Death Foretold "is a story about people and told to people who still believe that life is a story" (SS 242): the characters in the

story have "another dimension, a dignity which has nothing to do with power, but with the way they live their fate". There is always the dimension of living with metaphysical factors in the perspective of storytellers and those about whom they tell.

Death has a distinct and important role in this perspective, according to both Benjamin and Berger. What distinguishes the peasant attitude to death, for Berger (and therefore the perspective on death in stories), and the perspective on death in stories for Benjamin, is how acceptance of it as authoritative and how thought of it as 'omnipresent and vivid', perpetuates the belief in continuity and eternity. Benjamin cites "the decline of the idea of eternity" as bound up with the changing "face of death". Because "in the course of modern times dying has been pushed further and further out of the perceptual world of the living" (Illuminations 93-94), people are less in touch with their natural cycles, with their natural history, and therefore less inclined to think in terms of integrating the event of death into a larger picture of eternity and continuity. Berger concurs: peasants, for whom this is not true, 'accept, from a very early age, that death is part of the natural cycle of life which allows the continuity of life" (Willis 27).

Death is the authority which stands in the background of all stories. Benjamin writes: "Death is the sanction of everything that the storyteller can tell"

(Illuminations 94). Just as those who perceive 'life as story' accept contradictions as a condition of life, and do not claim to entirely control their destiny, the storyteller, though he has "the power of knowing the whole" of a character's fate, is 'powerless to control' the character: the character is in the hands of Time, destiny, and ultimately, Death. The storyteller is not the creator, but rather the observer and shaper of what he tells. Hence, according to Berger, storytellers are "Death's secretaries"[11]:they provide for the listener or reader an access to , a perspective on, what has been and is being played out according to the unwritten rules of Time and Death:

> Those who read or listen to our stories see everything as through a lens. This lens is the secret of narration, and it is ground anew in every story, ground between the temporal and the timeless... we are grinders of these lenses. (AOF 31-32)

Since, essentially, alienation is displacement from home (in its original sense), and since one of Berger's tasks is to expose the roots and mechanics of alienation, in his later work-- And Our Faces..., The Sense of Sight, Once in Europa particularly-- he has arrived at a kind of solution to alienation in the form of transcendence. Increasingly he addresses 'timelessness', takes a global view, broadens his perspective, employs speculative philosophy, and asserts the need for 'worldwide solidarity' ("Only worldwide solidarity can transcend modern homelessness" (AOF 67)). This is the

significance of the factory grounds where the factory workers from different parts of Europe as well as from the local village live. Each shed has a letter over it: together they spell out IN EUROPA.[12] One of the workers had painted over the original designations of the sheds, which were simply identified by the letters A to H. Stepan lives in shed A, and the other men in the shed convert a corner of it into a private space for Stepan and Odile, while he makes them a bed. The sheds can be seen as a microcosm of a Europe in which men are united in work, in the 'production of the world', but in this case the factory and their work represent the destruction of the traditional French peasant way of life. The title of the trilogy--Pig Earth, Once in Europa, and the as yet unpublished An Old Wives' Tale of a City-- is Into Their Labours, which Berger has taken from John 4:38: "Others have laboured and ye are entered into their labours".

Conclusion

Berger's move toward transcendence represents a change only in terms of reference and in strategy. His aim remains the same: to point to possibilities of disalienation. Spencer notes that A Seventh Man "reminded Marxism of its claim to be a universal outlook invested with the hopes of all mankind" (introduction, SS xvi). In the guise of transcendentalism, Berger is lately restating a tenet of the political left, for

which, up until World War 1, "conviction of promise was expressed in a fundamental belief in internationalism" (AL 122). His perspective is one of "striving towards the universal" (FM 72); his vision, like Marx's, is of 'the universal man'. Storytelling, he believes, conforms to the need for transcendentalism because philosophy is "the urge to be at home everywhere" (Novalis, as quoted AOF 54), and philosophical speculation is inherent within the perspectives of those who perceive 'life as story' in either its living, its hearing, or its telling. Stories are addressed to the universal: more than that of other forms of prose, the language of storytelling can transcend the boundaries of Time and Space to counteract alienation by confirming a metaphysical home. Hence, "the traffic between storytelling and metaphysics is continuous" AOF 30). Berger's theories on storytelling contain little that is original, except in the way that he interprets what others have said, and in the way that he has applied these theories to his neighbours. His strength, since he has been involved with the art of storytelling, is in the application of these theories, in the practice of storytelling: there is a sense that he is gradually abandoning theory for practice. And he is polishing this practice as he goes. Once in Europa contains some of his finest writing so far.

Notes

[1]Music is used several times in the stories of the trilogy in a similar way: see OE 13. 32-33. and especially 128.

[2] The writer/narrator of G. 'makes two rough drawings' of sexual organs to show how drawings 'distort less than words'. and transmit more effectively "a quality of firstness" than words because. "being visual. they are closer to physical perception". Drawings are also. he writes. "still relatively open for the spectator's exclusive appropriation". G. 113. Drawings. though. are different from diagrams.

[3]Benjamin writes:

> Mnemosyne. the remembrancer. was the Muse of the epic art among the Greeks. This name takes the observer back to a parting of the ways in world history. For if the record kept by memory--historiography-- constitutes the great creative matrix of the various epic forms (as great prose is the creative matrix of the various metrical forms). its oldest form. the epic. by virtue of being a kind of common denominator includes the story and the novel. Illuminations (New York: Schocken Books) 97.

[4]See Hauser on the phenomenological view of primacy versus the Marxist view of primacy. The Sociology of Art (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press) 188-189.

[5]See also 114. 118. 123 for figurative references to the activity of the writer.

[6]Berger is here alluding to the phenomenological reduction. Sartre says: "...I think that. as Merleau-Ponty says in connection with the Visible. the 'see-er'.

the person-who-sees, _is_ visible and there is a relationship of being between seeing and visibility: it's the same thing." "The Writer and His Language" (An interview with Pierre Verstraeten) _Politics and Literature_ (London: Calder and Boyars) 89.

[7] 'Perspective' is the basis on which Lukács compares critical and socialist realism. _The Meaning of Contemporary Realism_ (London: Merlin Press) 93-135.

[8] I talked to Berger about the 'silence' between the lines of narrative:

> Perhaps when the lines become 'white', as you say, to do with space, maybe a better word for them is 'corridors'. Because corridors are, as it were, empty. At least one can imagine them as empty. Interview May 1988

[9] In "Sicilian Lives", Berger writes:

> The poor estimate that life is a trial: that pleasure is a gift and a mystery, perhaps the deepest mystery of all; that there are no final solutions; that all men are fallible; that events are more powerful than choices. The idea that life bestows a _right_ to satisfaction and happiness is to them naive, and furthermore, because somewhere such an idea implies an unrealizable promise, profoundly dishonest. _SS_ 266

[10] That there is a connection between this way of experiencing and this way of writing is explored by literary critics who are influenced by phenomenology, who also claim that consistency and harmony are illusions that spring solely from the desire for the same. 'Indeterminate gaps' in narratives disturb the reader because they seem to reflect mystery and contradiction in the world:

> We may be annoyed by all these gaps... but this

would be like a confession on our part, for it would mean that we prefer to be pinned down by texts, foregoing our own judgement. In this case, we obviously expect literature to present us with a world that has been cleared of contradictions. If we try to break down the areas of indeterminacy in the text, the picture that we draw for ourselves will then be, to a large extent, illusory, precisely because it is so determinate. The illusion arises from a desire for harmony, and it is solely the product of the reader. Wolfgang Iser, "Indeterminacy and the Reader's Response in Prose Fiction" Aspects of Narrative (New York and London: Columbia University Press) 40.

[11] Berger has since revised this somewhat:

I once referred to story-tellers as Death's Secretaries. This was because all stories, before they are narrated, begin with the end. Walter Benjamin said: 'Death is the sanction of everything that the story-teller can tell. He has borrowed his authority from death.' Yet my phrase was too romantic, not contradictory enough. "A Story For Aesop" Granta 21 Spring 1987:16.

[12] Robbins writes, about the letters over the sheds:

What's so nice about the word is that you don't know how to pronounce it; you don't even know what language it's in. German, Italian, Spanish? Or is it just a "mistake" of mistranslation? No matter; all you know and all you need to know is that it's neither French-- the language of the characters-- nor English, the language of the reader. There is no visible connection to the nationality of any character in the story. "John Berger's Disappearing Peasants" The Minnesota Review N.S. 28 Spring 1987:66.

Conclusion

From his ten years as art critic for New Statesman (1952-1962), through to his present storytelling narratives of French peasant life, Berger has been constantly experimenting with various perspectives, voices, and kinds of writing. The experimental nature of Berger's work should be emphasized because there is a tendency of some to see his statements as declarations written in stone. His deepening interest in the power of different kinds of language, for instance, has resulted in his elevation of poetry over prose (see AOF, particularly 21 and 95), and this has been taken by some as a statement of permanent conviction (see Harkness, Edinburgh Review), when it is really an example of Berger's active exploratory thinking. Berger has said his discussion of poetry as 'making language care because it renders everything intimate' (97) is intended, in part, as provocative and challenging (Interview May 1988). He reserves the right to explore possibilities, experiment, and change his mind. Lukács writes that "there can be no standstill in a writer's subjective development; to stand still, particularly in an age of crisis, is to retreat" (The Meaning of Contemporary Realism 110). Berger is not an entirely systematic thinker because he writes against the systematization of

thought and of experience; hence his belief that there is a certain antagonism between creative writing and acąademia (Interview May 1988). He 'draws to the moment', historical and perceptual, and often repeats in essays and fiction alike Cézanne's words (which he claims 'often come back to him'): "One minute in the life of the world is going by. Paint it as it is" (WS 31; G. 15; SS 146).

Berger's general evolution can be seen in the difference between his treatment of the individual in an early work of fiction and his treatment of the individual in a later work of fiction. In Corker's Freedom he objectively describes Alec's desire to challenge 'Office Day', the system Alec has devised to categorize all the routines of his and Corker's daily life in the office. Alec is preoccupied with this system because he wants to 'vindicate his own experience' and "to feel a closer connexion between daily life and his being alive" (CF 10). Beginning in G. and dominating Once in Europa, Berger narrates individual experience, from the inside out, which recognizes no distinction between daily life and being alive. In early fiction he examines how 'the stuff of imagination'-- memory, language, dreams-- is often disengaged from daily life, and in later fiction he uses this 'stuff' to show his characters' engagement with their experience of living: Corker's dream of 'Pan-Europe' can be compared in this sense with the sheds of IN EUROPA in which Stepan and Odile live. Similarly, the

writer of the early fiction is more objective and less engaged with the experience he is examining; beginning in G. the writer merges with the consciousness and imagination of his subjects. In doing so, he shows that individual subjective experience is as rich and resonant as he had previously objectively claimed.

Clearly, as Berger shows, the culture in which the individual lives is partly responsible for the degree to which he or she experiences cohesion between his or her subjective experience and objective reality and between his or her daily life and his or her being alive. But Berger's own shift in perspective on the nature and definition of the particular and the general is also responsible for the way in which the relationship between the general and the particular is portrayed. In his works of fiction written from 'inside the wall', he examines the particular as it contains the material general. In Pig Earth and Once in Europa he examines the particular as it contains the metaphysical general as well as the material general. In these later works, he shows more clearly an understanding of 'individuality' as a Hegelian metaphysics of spirit. In Another Way of Telling, published between Pig Earth and Once in Europa, Berger quotes Hegel's Philosophy of Right:

> Every self-consciousness knows itself (1) as universal, as the potentiality of abstracting from everything determinate, and (2) as particular, with a determinate object, content and aim. Still, both these moments are only abstractions; what is concrete and true (and everything true is concrete) is the universality which has the

> particular as its opposite, but the particular which by its reflection into itself has been equalised with the universal. This unity is individuality. (as quoted 122)

"Everything true is concrete" finds its counterpart in Berger's storytelling assertions about, for instance, the concrete reality of the presence of the dead among the living. In <u>And Our Faces...</u> he claims there is no opposition between the real and the imaginary: "One is taught to oppose the real to the imaginary, as though the first were always at hand and the second distant, far away. This opposition is false" (72). In this work of 1984, Berger defines reality as 'an imaginative construction of the coherence of events' (74).

The individual, therefore, 'makes' reality in his or her daily life through imagination. In the early fiction, where the totality of relations portrayed includes all those between the individual and material society, the individual is often thwarted, as he or she has little power to change or control the forces of material society. In <u>Pig Earth</u> and <u>Once in Europa</u>, the totality of relations portrayed includes those between the individual and spiritual or metaphysical forces as <u>contained within social practice</u>: the production or creation of reality therefore is part of individual subjective experience. In this later work, the writer also 'makes' reality, rather than observing it. And so Berger uses the power of narration in a similar way to Marquez in <u>One Hundred Years of Solitude</u>, in which, as

shown by Ricardo Gullon, Marquez is 'technically a realist in the presentation of both the real and the unreal':

> Garcia Marquez intuitively grasped the vital relationship that exists between space and tone when he noticed that tone could serve as the main unifying force in the novel. Tone belongs by all rights to the narrator's voice, and the narrator is the Narrator: someone who is removed from his narrative; who knows all there is to know about the events; who reports them as a reporter would, calm and untouched, without comment, and without passing moral judgements on what has happened. He does not doubt or question events or facts. For him there is no difference between what is likely and what is not; he fulfills his mission-- his duty-- of telling all, speaking as naturally of the dead as he does of the living, associating with the greatest of ease the tangible with the intangible. ("Gabriel Garcia Marquez and the Lost Art of Storytelling" Critical Essays on Gabriel Garcia Marquez 129-130)

In An Old Wives' Tale of a City, Berger associates even more directly with the intangible than he has in the first two books of the trilogy, as the main narrator is Death, portrayed as an old woman.

Though each of Berger's works has been different from the next, there are constants, such as the seriousness of tone and attitude toward human life, which, in his fiction written from 'inside the wall', reflects Peter Jenkins's conclusion about factors contributing to the series of disasters at British football stadiums: "It is appropriate to conclude... that human life in modern Britain is held cheap" (column in The Independent). Other constants in Berger's work are: the conviction that "seeing comes before words" (WS 7),

the determination to show how the ways of the modern capitalist world distort and destroy lives and imaginations, and a belief in the faith and hope offered by socialism.

His intense seriousness of late about lived experience, rather than about what is wrong, and his move away from Britain cause some to assume he has lost the fighting edge, the toughness and hostility towards those who keep the dispossessed dispossessed. But it is not, as some suggest, that Berger has retreated into religiousness and become increasingly apolitical (e.g. Harkness, Edinburgh Review; McTernan, Edinburgh Review; Robbins, Minnesota Review). The key to the tone that some see as religious is his intensity of conviction about the worth of human life: the site of his previous concern was more often objective structures, whereas the site of his concern is now the individual heart, defined by him as containing what is "sacred" (AOF 63). He uses the terminology of religion-- possibly that which shows the least indifference towards human experience-- such as 'evil', to intensify certain aspects of secular life. Berger claims that, though he is agnostic, he has always had a sense of religion, of certain things being sacred. He links religion with ethics, and says that if Marxism had allowed for this, maybe the world would be a different place today: he believes that within Marxism there should be a forum for ethics (Interview May 1988).

It is true, however, that Berger is at his best, up until Once in Europa, when he is explicitly showing what is wrong with a particular society, when he is using the language of criticism, and defining a flaw in the world as it has been made by people. When he can set up and display a tension, a clash of ideologies, his work is powerful and seductive. In other words, when, in his fiction, Berger shows people 'up against it', up against a system, he is among the best of the British Critical Realists: his fiction up until the trilogy can be seen as what he calls "social realism", which is when "the content of a realist work has clear social implications" (New Statesman 30 July 1955, 133-134). (This characteristic, however, still falls within the capabilites of what is identified as Critical Realism.) In A Painter of Our Time, for instance, the examination of Janos as exile, emigre and socialist in the midst of the capitalist bourgeois art world makes for the powerful tension between values in the book. In Corker's Freedom, the tension arises as Corker attempts to break away from societal conditioning, and his struggle to do this inside British society makes for the tension. G. contains implicit criticism of the forces with which women and lower classes, at the time of its setting, have to contend.

Since he has moved outside of British society, wherein exists this obvious tension, Berger's writing has

not been based so much on this clash as on the experience of those inside one particular culture and way of seeing. This has taken the edge of tension produced by direct assault out of his writing, for the most part. The people he examines are seldom individually up against it in their daily lives, for there is solidarity and cohesion among them: they are up against it as a culture and as a class. The finest story in Pig Earth is "The Value of Money" because it employs this tension between the capitalist evaluation of the worth of work and money and the peasant's. "The Three Lives of Lucie Cabrol" also contains some of this tension as it sets the narrator, who has been outside of the peasant culture and evaluates in part from the perspective of those outside the culture, and his way of seeing, against that of Lucie and the others who function inside the culture. It takes Lucie outside of the culture as well.

Pig Earth, "so descriptive, so factual" as Berger says (Interview May 1988), shares with The Foot of Clive the weakness of too descriptive a technique, which "provides no true poetry of things but transforms people into conditions, into components of still lives" (Lukács, Writer and Critic 139). There is also too little context provided for a dialectic between the subjective and the objective. Once in Europa, on the other hand, works entirely on its own terms as a narrative that appeals to different co-ordinates and philosophical

perceptions than those of his previous fiction. Berger's voice has changed in this book, and while it is no longer the angry, strident voice, it is one that is equally powerful. In _Pig Earth_, Berger has not yet found the voice which proves the worth of the disalienated way of seeing so apparent in _Once in Europa_. In _Once in Europa_ Berger successfully challenges literary positivism.

In _An Old Wives' Tale of a City_, we may again see the fundamental tension and clash between two ideologies, as Berger's peasants move into the city to look for work. The book is set in a symbolic conglomerate of large metropolitan cities: the characters tangle with capitalist values and with the city's values of justice. One young couple in particular is forced into habits and behaviour that is shown as a warping of their potential by the influence of the city. This book reverts to the longer narrative form, though it is as yet unclear whether it is a long short story or a novel. The trilogy's 'wider application' should become clear once this third book is published. The trilogy's 'wider application', according to Berger, is that "the very simple story about traditional villages changing, disintegrating, people leaving--being forced to leave villages and go to the metropolis-- is a theme which is happening all over the world at the end of our century" (reading, Geneva May 1988). So with the trilogy, Berger has not retreated into a portrayal of an isolated

particular: he is writing about a process that has universal significance.

Berger's infamous humourlessness, or, as Dyer writes, "its corollary, the unrelieved seriousness of tone" (148) is partly responsible for the criticism of him as "pulpiteering" in his work (Beloff, Edinburgh Review 114) and of his writing as "laborious and ponderous" (Randall, Edinburgh Review 126). Those of his critical readers who expect him to remain their socialist conscience are most confused and disapproving of his latest writing (in the trilogy), and scoff at its "immense burden of meaningfulness" (Randall, Edinburgh Review 126), which is actually what Lukács identifies as the "epic significance" of narration mostly obscure to the consciousness of those who live in modern capitalist societies ("Narrate or Describe", Writer and Critic). (It is also not strictly true that Berger's writing is devoid of playfulness and humour: at times there is present a subtle, biting humour, such as when Jocelyn says to G. after he has fallen off his horse: "You've the making of a real thruster my boy... A thruster, my boy, a hard-bitten thruster" (54). And in Pig Earth and Once in Europa peasant humour is frequently introduced as that which prevents the writer from taking himself too seriously.)

Berger's seriousness of tone comes from his determination that writing be seen as a form of social

action addressed to the future: it therefore lacks irony and any sense of undercutting or minimalizing the human experience it addresses:

> ...all works should be addressed to that possible future, because mostly inarticulated, often with a sense of great political importance, little bits of that future actually exist within everybody who is trapped within the wall [which, as Berger has previously explained in this interview: 'surrounds our world and cuts us off from any very different past: it is the political function of the writer to describe what is happening inside that wall so that those in the future, those outside the wall, can know'].
> I think one of the reasons that so much 20th century literature is ironic is because writers so frequently felt something like what I am describing, although they feel it perhaps less clearly. Irony actually douses the hope. What is left is a kind of coming to terms in an ironic way with disappointment.
> One has to have a much longer view--endurance actually. It is simply to keep hope alive. It is a question of putting hands around that flame. ("Seeing Red: The Vision of John Berger" 14)

Berger's tone and language are intended to counteract indifference towards human experience, as he refuses disillusionment and the abandonment of hope. A.R. Bras charges that, in addressing the future, Berger fails to provide a solution, a model: that 'potentiality' and a concrete future are not depicted in his work. Yet, as we have seen, potentiality and solutions are implicit in the critical perspective of Berger's early fiction, and in the trilogy the same is implicit in his choice of subject. Bras claims that while 'showing the real and exposing its abominable shortcomings', he "systematically fails to outline the potential" (134). Berger does not

"systematically fail to outline the potential": he deliberately fails to systematically outline potential. Where he does outline potential is in his concern to "locate those human qualities which make for the creation of a new social order" (Lukács, The Meaning of Contemporary Realism 94), such as the individual's capacity to offer 'recognition' and to act on the dictates of imagination. Berger's comments on Baudelaire are applicable to his own works: "What he understood and where he laid his plans for the New State was in the workings of the creative imagination" (review of Baudelaire's The Mirror of Art: "The Ideal State of Art" New Statesman 8 Oct. 1955, 448-450).

As the editors of the Minnesota Review's special issue on Berger point out, Berger's writings have fairly recently "passed into channels of distribution for large-scale commercial publishing" by Pantheon Books (42). This will help make apparent the importance and continuity of Berger's work and thought. Up until this point Berger's early novels, and some works of non-fiction, were either out of print or virtually impossible to find. It will now also be more apparent that his most recent fiction is as much a social act of engagement with the public sphere as his previous fiction, and that Berger is still a "co-explorer of the problematic of alienation and disalienation" (Baxandall, A Dictionary of Marxist Thought 286).

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