

EXISTENTIALISM AND SELECTED CONTEMPORARY NOVELS  
IN ENGLISH

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by

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## ABSTRACT

As "an attitude and outlook that emphasises human existence"<sup>1</sup>, Existentialism can clearly be related to the concerns of the novel as a genre. This thesis investigates that relationship, suggesting that the contemporary novel contains ideas which are also expressed in existential thought; it also suggests that a knowledge of existential ideas is an important tool for the critic of modern fiction. It has been suggested that this similarity of thought may be explained as "The whole mind of the times...inclining in one direction."<sup>2</sup>. Both Existentialism and the contemporary novel can be seen as manifestations of the world viewed in a certain manner. Existentialism is not considered to be separate from modern fiction; concern for the individual forms the essence of both movements.

The contemporary novel offers many examples of existential thought. This thesis could not, of course, hope to include all these examples. Certain novels have been referred to on several occasions because they illustrate more than one existential idea. My contention that Existentialism helps towards an understanding of the contemporary novel is

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<sup>1</sup> H.H. Titus, Living Issues in Philosophy (New York, 1964), p. 296.

<sup>2</sup> W. Barrett, Irrational Man, (New York, 1962), p. 4.

substantiated by this approach. A majority of the novels cited appear on the graduate course which covers contemporary fiction. The following chapters were written with this course in mind; the contemporary novel is linked in this manner because I believe that Existentialism clarifies the thoughts expressed in the novels.

The form which the thesis takes is a brief exposition of Existentialism followed by examples of this thought in selected novels. Four of the following chapters deal with ideas in the contemporary novel and the first chapter is a description of Existentialism. Rather than select a few works I have chosen to use many novels in the belief that it exposes more clearly the main argument of this thesis. The presence of existential thought in so many novels is proof, I believe, that a knowledge of Existentialism is necessary for the reader of the contemporary novel. The final section of the work concludes that Existentialism and the contemporary novel should be considered together when the subject is the individual in the present society.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### CONCEPTS ARISING FROM EXISTENTIAL THOUGHT

It is quite clear that existential philosophers stress ideas which are common to all existential thinkers. What they have in common is more than the subjectivity stressed by Kierkegaard,<sup>1</sup> or the attempt to put philosophy back on the track of the individual rather than of the external world. The development of existential thought since the early 19th century re-iterates certain themes, confirming the statement by William Barrett about those reluctant to accept the philosophy of Existentialism:

Philosophers who dismissed Existentialism as "merely mood" or "a postwar mood" betrayed a curious blindness to the concerns of the human spirit, in taking the view that philosophic truth can be found only in those areas of experience in which human moods are not present.<sup>2</sup>

Modern Existentialism is not a post-war phenomenon but something which has been steadily growing since Kierkegaard. The ideas found in contemporary existential philosophers were formulated, perhaps somewhat differently, by those who first retaliated against impersonal science

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<sup>1</sup>J. H. Blackham, Reality, Man and Existence (New York, 1971), p. 22.

<sup>2</sup>W. Barrett, Irrational Man, p. 10.

in the 19th century. The ideas of Sartre, for example, share a common ground with those of Heidegger and Nietzsche.

Kierkegaard's thoughts on subjectivity were re-emphasised by each existential philosopher that followed him. Although the subjective and the objective may take a different form, as in Buber's argument for the validity of human relationships, the subjective was re-vitalised by Kierkegaard and took precedence over the objective. The subjective also formed the essence in Nietzsche's concept of the Superman as well as the personal Dasein of Heidegger. Success in Nietzsche's world required arriving at the state of Superman, and the state of Superman was arrived at through subjective introspection. The Will to Power, a subjective response to happenings in the external world, also depended on the subjective rather than the objective. Nietzsche's claim that "God is dead" threw existence back on to the subjectivity of the individual; from Nietzsche's point of view there were no longer any props in the external world to support man, he must be prepared to live in his own subjectivity.

Heidegger states in Being and Time that Dasein is always "my own personal Dasein". Being is thus tied to the individual and cannot be shared, i.e. Dasein is subjective. Heidegger's whole analysis of Being presupposes subjectivity; the only being that we know is our own being,

not the being of anyone else or of objects. His emphasis on "authentic" being as opposed to "inauthentic" being stresses again the priority of the subjective. "Authentic" being depends on the subjective response to "being-in-the-world": "authentic" or "inauthentic" existence is judged through the subjective response to what it experiences. Buber's belief that existential existence was precipitated by the "I-Thou" relationship also implies that it is the subjective which differentiates between the "Thou" and the "It". The "I-Thou" relationship is a description of the subjective state in its correct function. Although dependent upon the relationship with another person, the relationship itself is gauged through the response of the subjective being.

Sartre's negation of the self, and his idea that there are two different types of being, relies once again on subjectivity. Like Heidegger, the kind of being is determined in relationship to what it means to the individual Self. Subjectivity is the final judge as to whether the individual is leading an existential life. The idea of being "engagé", as well as Sartre's concept of man being "condemned to be free", also depends on subjectivity. Engagement, for Sartre, is the right kind of existential existence, and like Heidegger's "authentic" being it depends upon the individual. The state of condemnation which Sartre

posited for man relates directly to each person's own subjectivity. To be "condemned to be free" is, according to Sartre, a manifestation of the subjective condition of each individual. It is the subjective base from which the "Will to Action" operates.

Kierkegaard argued that the individual must be in a state of "persistent striving" in order to attain existential being. The tension between the subjective and the objective provided an environment in which the individual must constantly seek and re-seek subjective truth. The idea of repetition, in a temporal sense, lies at the heart of existentialism and provides it with the crucial difference between it and speculative philosophy. Whatever the reasons for existence, and they are clearly different in the case of Kierkegaard and Sartre, it is not, as Kierkegaard suggested, the "What" that matters. What matters is "How" one, in Kierkegaard's case, pursues Christianity; the "How" involves repetition which takes place in the face of a meaningless Universe.

Nietzsche felt that God must be replaced in the world by man. Nietzsche's superman is precisely that which may take his place. The state of the superman, however, is not permanent: it is a condition to which the individual must continually "overcome". One way of describing the condition of the superman is as a transcendent state; the

ordinary world of everyday events and objects may be left behind through the motivation of the Will to Power .

This simplification of Nietzsche's superman does indicate that it required something comparable to Kierkegaard's "persistent striving" in order to be attained. Nietzsche's belief in "the eternal return of the same" clearly suggests the repetition Kierkegaard saw in "persistent striving".

It was, however, a source of disgust for Nietzsche, "And the eternal return also of the smallest man! that was my disgust at all existence!"<sup>3</sup>

For many existential thinkers this repetition took place in the face of meaninglessness. In fact, the idea of repetition was as important as the existential experience itself.

The notion of "persistent striving" also plays an essential part in the philosophies of Heidegger, Buber and Sartre. For Heidegger there was the continual attempt of the "inauthentic" being to become "authentic" as there was for Sartre's "en-soi" to become a "pour-soi". The fact that, according to Buber, the "I-Thou" relationship becomes an "I-It" relationship further suggests "persistent striving". The self must continually seek the "I-Thou" relationship although it may be aware that this is only a temporary condition. The similarity here is with existential existence

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<sup>3</sup>F. W. Nietzsche, Thus Spake Zarathustra (New York, 1964), p. 268.

in the face of the void; from Buber's point of view the "I-Thou" relationship must be continually sought after although it slips back into the "I-It" relationship, and this gives no meaning to existential being. As the term "existential" suggests, the existential state is not static but moving; time presents existence with new possibilities on which it must act. Unlike a closed speculative system there is always possibility in the existential.

Existentialism is commonly accused of presenting a meaningless and absurd view of the world. That is, outside of the Self's existence, except in the case of Sartre, there is no meaning to anything. In later existential philosophy, particularly that of Sartre, this has been expanded to present a completely nihilistic view of the Universe. Even for the Self, in Sartre's world, there is no meaning at all. It is true that such concepts as "meaninglessness" and "the absurd" were formed by the early existential philosophers; "meaninglessness" and "the absurd", however, played an integral part in the early philosophies which attempted to explicate existential being. It is not until the philosophy of Sartre that "meaninglessness" is given to everything: in later existential philosophy "meaninglessness" and "the absurd" project the awful prospect with which they are attributed.

For Kierkegaard it was the absurd which provided the possibility of faith. Thus, the absurd had meaning for the pursuit of Christian existence. The absurd was described by Kierkegaard as, "Faith is the objective uncertainty due to the repulsion of the absurd held fast by the passion of inwardness, which in this instance is intensified to the utmost degree."<sup>4</sup> The meaning of absurd in the conventional sense was not exactly what Kierkegaard intended, it was the name given to an important function of existential being. The conventional sense of meaninglessness is more apparent in the philosophies of Nietzsche and Heidegger. Both philosophers suggest that it is only in the face of meaninglessness that existential being can be achieved. Nietzsche's Will to Power and Heidegger's "authentic" being constantly bring the individual into contact with meaninglessness. It is from this meaninglessness that the individual must continually return to seek the Will to Power and "authentic" being. Again it can be argued that meaninglessness plays an essential part in existential existence; without a sense of meaninglessness there would be no Will to Power or "authentic" existence.

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4. H.J.Blackham, Reality, Man and Existence. (New York, 1971), p. 51.

Buber's claim that the "I-Thou" relationship is destined to become an "I-It" relationship gives a meaningless status to existential being. In terms of permanence there can be no "I-Thou" relationship and the self must always return to the meaninglessness of the "I-It" relationship. In Buber's argument for the necessity of human relationships, the concept of meaninglessness is not as evident as in other existential philosophies. Buber felt that there was a positive side in man which ran counter to the ideas of meaninglessness and the absurd. It is precisely this positive side of the self which is negated by Sartre. The assertion that the being of the self is completely meaningless suggests an entirely nihilistic universe. In Sartre's world there is no meaning to anything; man's existence is meaningless. Even in this attempt to lead an existential existence man is "absurd. As William Barrett has put it has put it, "man is an alien in the universe, unjustified and unjustifiable, absurd in the simple sense that there is no Leibnitzian reason sufficient to explain why he or his universe exists."<sup>5</sup>.

Two similar ideas which appear in existential philosophy are those of "the void" and "the abyss". The void and the abyss refer to a negation of meaning much like the idea of meaninglessness and the absurd. Kierkegaard, in

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<sup>5</sup>. W.Barrett, Irrational Man. (New York, 1962), p.262.

describing the essence of his idea of paradox, had already implied the notion of the abyss when he suggested that in experiencing the paradox one is "out upon the deep, over 70,000 fathoms of water". The idea that one was faced with uncertainty in the confrontation with existential experience was, as both Heidegger and Sartre suggested, an integral part of the experience. The Void, according to Nietzsche, was that to which the Will to Power led the individual. It was from the void that the individual must continually seek the Will to Power .

In Sartre's negative philosophy the void and the abyss play important roles. Representative of meaninglessness, they represent, for Sartre, important conditions. Meaninglessness, Sartre suggests, may be gained by the "free project" which the individual "launches out of his own nothingness".<sup>6</sup> What this means is that through a correct existential existence the self, by being "engagé", learns the true meaning of the universe, and his self. The void and the abyss are the world in which man lives; it takes the correct kind of existence for him to realise this. In fact, the concept of the void becomes the all important factor in the philosophy of Sartre. Where Kierke-

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<sup>6</sup>W. Barrett, Irrational Man, p. 247.

gaard had used it in his existential "system", it was, for Sartre, the ultimate statement of his philosophy.

One of the most devastating statements made in the formulation of existential thought was Nietzsche's assertion "God is dead". Nietzsche's denial of the existence of a Christian god, and the emphasis put by this assertion on the individual, are crucial to the existential argument. It was not necessary, however, to make this claim in order to justify existential being. Kierkegaard had argued for belief in Christianity; what Kierkegaard suggested was that there was a different way in which Christianity may be experienced. The fact that all existential philosophers stressed the importance of the self did not mean that Christianity was completely rejected. Only with Nietzsche, in early existential thought, was man entirely alone without a God in the Christian sense.

The philosophies of Heidegger and Buber do not deal specifically with Christianity or the possibility of religious belief. There is no attempt to provide an alternative system to Christianity or suggestion of how the Christian life may be led. Although Heidegger and Buber advocated the predominance of the self, this did not deny that they were religious men. Indeed, Buber's "I-Thou" relationship echoes the Christian dictum of "love thy neighbour." The "I-Thou" relationship comes into being

through the essentially Christian concept of love. The religious experience, according to Buber, was to be found <sup>in</sup> in the "I-Thou" relationship, and not anything exterior to man:

Men do not find God if they stay in the world.  
They do not find Him if they leave the world.  
He who goes out with his whole being to meet  
his Thou and carries to it all being that is <sup>7</sup>  
in the world, finds him who cannot be sought.

The atheistic statement of Nietzsche was reflected in the philosophy of Sartre. God existed no more for Sartre than he did for Nietzsche. Sartre's concern is exclusively with what it means to be a human being. William Barrett has pointed out Sartre's affinity with the earlier French philosopher Descartes. He shows the difference between the two philosophers in the following manner:

The next step after the certitude of the Cogito, the "I Think", thus turns out to be a proof of the existence of God; and with God as guarantee the whole word of nature, the multitude of things with their fixed nature or essences that the mind may now know, is re-established around Descartes. Sartre, however, is the Cartesian doubter at a different place and time: God is dead, and no longer guarantees to this passionate and principled atheist that vast structure of essences, the world, to which his freedom must give assent.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>H. J. Blackham, Reality, Man and Existence, p. 218.

<sup>8</sup>W. Barrett, Irrational Man, p. 243.

With the increasing emphasis on the self in existential philosophy the possibility of there being an external God is remote. It was only certain philosophers, however, who explicitly denied the existence of a Christian God. Neither Heidegger or Buber were concerned with destroying the Christianity which had existed in Europe for many centuries.

In his analysis of Dasein, Heidegger introduces an unconventional view of time. This definition of time is also one of the major changes brought about by existential philosophy. Time was not considered by Heidegger in the way that it had previously been analysed. For Heidegger, time included the past, present and the future. The temporality of Dasein was not merely concerned with the present now but rather with the existence of Dasein in the past, present and future. As one critic has pointed out, "it may be said that all the dominant characteristics of Dasein gain their fuller significance in the interpretation of its temporality."<sup>9</sup> This concept of time was adopted by Heidegger because it allowed for the necessary possibility of Dasein in the future; the conventional sense of time, which defined time

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<sup>9</sup>H.J.Blackham, Reality, Man and Existence. (New York,1971), p.244.

as a series of events in the present, did not accommodate the future which was essential to human being.

For Kierkegaard time was inextricably connected with the absurd. In one sense Kierkegaard was also challenging the conventional sense of time. The assertion that "the eternal truth has come into being in time", thus precipitating the absurd, suggests that conventional time, i.e. the now, is not adequate. For Kierkegaard, as for other existential philosophers, the future was necessary for the possibilities in existential being. The conventional view of Time allowed only for the now, it did not provide for possibility.

The root of Nietzsche's philosophy was founded in human fear. The "Will to Power" is activated by human fear. This suggests that value is something which the individual must frequently experience, if he does not already live in a state of fear. Heidegger suggested much the same thing when he asserted that "Being-in-the-World" was a source of dread for the individual. Both fear and dread were ideas presented by Nietzsche and Heidegger in order to describe the immediacy in the existential experience. It was also suggested by Buber's "suffering" in the "I-Thou" relationship and Sartre's concept of "anxiety". Unlike speculative philosophy, Existentialism was both passive and active. The active element was attributed to an

experience that made Existentialism immediate.

The concepts arising from existential thought, and which contribute significantly to the contemporary novel, may be categorised in the following manner:

- (a) Subjectivity
- (b) Persistent Striving
- (c) Meaninglessness and the Absurd
- (d) The Death of God
- (e) Time
- (f) Fear and Dread.

My contention is that the modern novel is permeated by existential thought. Hemingway once said that a writer should write "when he has something to say, not before, and not too damn much after". What contemporary novelists have to say, I want to suggest, is a response to the age that they live in. Not a social comment or observation as in previous centuries, but rather an outcry against the dehumanisation taking place in the 20th century. It is not surprising therefore that the thoughts of existential philosophers should appear in contemporary fiction.

Existentialism is a philosophy that deals precisely with the impersonal world that technology has produced. Indeed, the formation of existential thought by Kierkegaard in the 19th century was precipitated by the decline of religion under scientific advance.

This thesis does not suggest that the contemporary novel lacks any reference to tradition. There are clearly many contemporary novels which rely heavily on traditional

structure and traditional themes. On the other hand there are contemporary novels which do not adhere to any tradition at all. That is, some modern novels defy interpretation in the conventional sense. My belief is that these novels illustrate existential thought at the expense of tradition; what the novels are primarily concerned with is an exposition of existential ideas and not the production of a novel which may be analysed in a conventional way. What one is reading, in fact, is an expression of existential thought rather than a work of literature. The distinction between literature as a form of existential "engagement", to use Sartre's terminology, and existential ideas in literature, is drawn once again. Whether in a traditional structure or not, the contemporary novel does contain many thoughts and ideas expounded by existential philosophers.

The attempt will be made then to see to what extent the concepts mentioned above are evident in contemporary fiction. The difference between those novels which refer to tradition and those which seem to be exclusively representative of existential thought will, of course, be noted. One point which must be made is that novels which deal primarily with existential thought rather than literary achievement are very different from novels that preceded them. What I am suggesting here is that a new type of novel

has appeared in contemporary fiction and one for which an explanation needs to be given.

## CHAPTER TWO

### SUBJECTIVITY IN THE CONTEMPORARY NOVEL

In his book The Structure of the Novel, Edwin Muir draws the distinction between the "character" novel and the "dramatic" novel. The essential difference is that the "dramatic" novel moves in time, whereas the "character" novel moves in space. In the "character" novel, Muir suggests, "The characters are changeless, and the scene changing"; in the "dramatic" novel, "The scene is changeless and the characters change by their interaction on one another".<sup>1</sup> In the attempt to illustrate subjectivity in the modern novel this distinction clearly applies. Novels that deal with subjectivity fall into Muir's category of the "dramatic" novel; subjectivity is concerned with the response of a character, i.e. how the external world is seen through the eyes of an individual person and not a static individual.

Muir further suggests:

These two types of the novel are neither opposites, then, nor in any important sense complements of each other; they are rather two distinct modes of seeing life; in TIME, personally, and in SPACE, socially.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>E. Muir, The Structure of the Novel (London, 1960), p. 60.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 63.

and:

to say that a plot is spatial does not deny a temporal movement to it, any more, indeed, than to say that a plot is temporal means that it has no setting in space. Here again it is all a question of the predominating element.<sup>3</sup>

Complying with his earlier analogy Muir suggests that the "dramatic" starts on the periphery and works toward the centre. Conversely the "character" novel works from the centre to the outside. The "dramatic" novel is oblivious of the outside as it proceeds towards the centre, not along or over a series of spatially separated events, but in a temporal train, i.e. action. The action is dominated by the characters and the temporal progression of their minds provides the denouement. It is upon the temporal action of their thought processes then that the whole plot or imaginative process of the novel is enacted.

In his definition of the "dramatic" novel Muir uses the conventional sense of  $t$ ime. Some contemporary fiction, however, does not subscribe to the conventional sense of  $t$ ime. I shall discuss later in the thesis Muir's opinion that the novel is either "predominantly" character or dramatic; it depends on the way in which  $t$ ime is used. Durrell's Alexandria Quartet seems to cancel the idea of predominance. That is, the characters seem to be as important as the

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<sup>3</sup>Op. cit., p. 64.

action. In spite of this difficulty with time, Muir's distinction is a valid one. Subjectivity in the contemporary novel may often be shown where there is a strong emphasis on action, when the novel may be classified as "dramatic" rather than "character". Paradoxically the character of the protagonist is revealed more in the "dramatic" novel than the novel of "character". The "inner man", to use Karl's terminology<sup>1</sup>, may best be shown in contemporary fiction through the novels of action. The subjectivity resides in the responsive action of the protagonist to the events and happenings which take place in the external world.

The world for which Existentialism seeks to provide an alternative is presented early in Norman Mailer's Why Are We In Vietnam? The world in which Rusty seeks his identity is really an existential one:

Go go, Dr Jek tell the folk, we're here to rock,  
the world is going shazam, hahray, harout, fart  
in my toot, air we breathe is the prez, present  
dent, and God has always wanted more from man than  
man has wished to give him. Zig a zig a zig.  
That is why we live in dread of God. (p.7)

Mailer combines the tradition of the american hunt with a contemporary statement about the world of the present. Contrasted with the solidity of the "american" tradition is the state of the individual, "The fact of the matter is that you're up tight with a mystery, me, and this mystery can't be solved because I'm the centre of it and I don't comprehend".  
p.22.

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<sup>1</sup> Karl, F. The Contemporary English Novel. (New York, 1972),  
p.56.

The conflict in the novel is between the world of Rusty and the world of his father. Rusty can find no points of reference in his father's world. What he reveals is that it is impossible to try and accommodate an existential existence in a traditional setting. This is precisely why there is a Viet Nam for Rusty to go to after the disappointing relationship with his father. The world is going "shazam" because it fails to recognise the "prez"; it continues to construct things outside the individual.

Why Are We In Vietnam? makes a particular use of language. The incompatibility of Rusty's world with that of his father is expressed in obscenity and crudity of language. The protestation against tradition is not conducted quietly. Margaret Atwood suggests in Surfacing that "Language divides us into fragments" (p. 146), and it is precisely a fragmentary world that Rusty experiences. There is no unity and no wholeness. Rusty's subjectivity is occupied with events out of which he cannot make any sense or understanding out of his father's world. The essential difference is between the existential way in which Rusty looks at the world, together with his subjective response, and the traditional ways of his father.

By way of contrast John Williams' novel Stoner is a quiet manifestation of subjective inability. Stoner's tedious existence is the result of his looking at the world

from the standpoint of tradition rather than an existential manner. Stoner is unable to exist in the present and, as his name implies, he is a methodical plodder. The novel shows the subjective response of Stoner to the events which take place in his life, and when he is confronted by Archer Sloane's statement that "Mr. Shakespeare speaks to you across three hundred years . . ." (p. 9) he is unable to respond. What has the potential of an existential experience for Stoner is not realised because of his subjective response. The reason that he chose English rather than Agriculture remains a mystery for Stoner; he knows that he has responded to a particular poem but he does not know why. The inability to recognise is what makes Stoner appear a tedious figure.

Muir's distinction between the "dramatic" and the "character" novel is exemplified in Stoner and Why Are We In Viet Nam?. Rusty's search in the action of Mailer's novel is for his own identity in a world that does not make sense to him. Stoner passes through a series of events which do not make him any different at the end of the novel than at the beginning. What Rusty learns through a painful initiation is that his father's world is not his world. Stoner's failing is that he does not learn or develop through experience. In one case the subjectivity of the individual responds to the external world, and in the other it does

not.

The novels of William Golding are essentially concerned with the subjectivity of the individual. One critic has suggested that:

He is not simply a social novelist attempting to see man's response to a given society, but a metaphysical writer interested in states of being and aspects of survival. In a broad sense, his work is existential, and the similarities of his last novel, *Free Fall*, to Camus' *The Fall* is not fortuitous.<sup>4</sup>

According to David Anderson, "Golding is primarily concerned to trace back the travails of human existence to their source . . .",<sup>5</sup> a comparison is drawn between Golding and Jean-Paul Sartre. Where Sartre finds "nothing" at the centre of the universe and the self, Golding finds evil. In either case the world is potentially negative. Golding's response to this situation was to suggest that each individual has a confrontation with evil which he must overcome. All the major characters in Golding's novels experience this confrontation and Sammy Mountjoy and Dean Jocelin are two examples. The fact that some of Golding's characters do not overcome evil does not negate the task of the individual. What this means is that Golding is essentially concerned with

<sup>4</sup>F. R. Karl, The Contemporary English Novel (New York, 1972), p. 254.

<sup>5</sup>D. Anderson, The Tragic Protest (London, 1969), p. 155.

the individual and his subjective response to the external world.

With the exception of Lord of the Flies Golding's novels have one clear protagonist. There is one sensibility against which the external world is measured. Perhaps the best example of subjectivity in the work of Golding is his novel Pincher Martin. The novel is an account of a subjective response to a second of consciousness. The prolonged time over which the novel takes place results from the subjective mental workings of Pincher Martin.

The tedium of Oliver's existence and the environment of Stilbourne in The Pyramid, is similar to the slow and methodical nature of Stoner. One wonders again if the author is not deliberately projecting this image in order to illustrate an "inauthentic" existence. Oliver's three stages of experience in Stilbourne are basically uneventful. That is, they do not seem to have any impact on Oliver's being. The only image which completely takes the attention of Oliver is that of Bounce. Golding suggests, as he had previously done in Egypt from my Inside, that the image was "seared" onto the mind of Oliver. This existential awareness remains a mystery in the book; how can such an image contribute to the development of Oliver? The answer seems to be that Oliver does not develop. Somewhat like Stoner he does not learn from experience. From earlier

works and statements the seriousness of Golding cannot, of course, be doubted, and The Pyramid, in one sense, is a manifestation of what it means to lead an "inauthentic" life.

The subjectivity evident in Golding's novels is also an integral part of the novels of Graham Greene. In spite of the fact that Greene is working within a religious framework, and wanting to give validity to the existence of God, the subjective response of the protagonist is as important as the existence of God. What Greene shows is how the external world affects the "inner man" and how this subjectivity may develop. A clear example of this may be seen in the character of Henry Pulling in Travels with My Aunt. This novel is essentially a statement about existence; the novel is concerned with the development of Henry Pulling from one of the colourless suburban masses to the individual of existential experience. In short the protagonist is made aware of the present rather than the future. Aunt Augusta's statement to Henry that "You are wrong to be so confident in the existence of another time" suggests clearly that the only valid time, for Aunt Augusta, is the present, (p.184).

The character of Aunt Augusta provides a contrast to the traditional life of Henry Pulling. As she points out "I've always been interested in human nature. . . .



The character of Henry Pulling develops to what may be described as an existential experience. Through contact with his Aunt, Henry Pulling becomes an individual like her. The life of Southwood is left behind and Henry enters the world of Aunt Augusta:

"My darling boy," she said, "all that is over now",  
 . . . I was sunk in my middle age. All the  
 same I laid my head against her breast. I  
 had been so happy, I said, but I have been  
 bored for so long. (p. 297)

Perhaps the most comical statement describing Aunt Augusta's mode of existence comes at the very end of the novel.

Announcing the death of her beloved Wordsworth, Henry is greeted by complete indifference:

I took a few steps farther into the room as they returned towards me, calling to her a second time, "Mother, Wordsworth is dead". She only looked over her partner's shoulder and said, "Yes, dear, all in good time, but can't you see that now I am dancing with Mr. Visconti?" (p.307)

Aunt Augusta lives for the present and not the past; the loss of Wordsworth is insignificant compared with what is actually happening at the moment. The relationship between Henry and Aunt Augusta has also changed from Aunt to Mother. The suggestion here seems to be that Henry has accepted the way of life of his Aunt rather than his previous life in Southwood.

Mordecai Richler has been described as a writer who wants "to get at the prime meanings of experience -- to

drive life into a corner and see whether it is a good thing or bad".<sup>6</sup> Richler's work also asks "piercing questions on issues which involve the self. . . .".<sup>7</sup> The preoccupation with the subjective response forms a major part of his novel St Urbain's Horseman. Apart from Jake's exile, the novel is concerned with his character in relation to his idol Joey. Richler has stated "No matter how long I continue to live abroad, I do feel forever rooted in St Urbain Street. This was my time, my place, and I have elected to get it exactly right".<sup>8</sup> As a representative of St Urbain Street, Joey is that to which Jake wants to aspire. The novel deals with the success and the failure of the protagonist to live up to his image. In short St Urbain Street and its environment provided the reality which Jake attempted to reach.

In The Fire Dwellers, Margaret Laurence is also concerned with the subjectivity of the protagonist. The novel is essentially a dialogue in the mind of Stacey. What takes place is Stacey's subjective response to events and happenings in the external world. The repetitive dialogue

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<sup>6</sup>C. F. Klinck, ed, Literary History of Canada (Toronto, 1965), p. 712

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 715.

<sup>8</sup>G. Woodcock, ed., The Canadian Novel in the Twentieth Century (Toronto, 1975), p. 275.

with God is Stacey's uncertainty about herself and her basic problem is that she does not know how to respond in an existential way to events of the outside world. It leads her to state, "What should I do? I am not really sure that I want to go on living at all. I can't cope. I do cope. Not well, though. Not with anyone. Jesus I get tired sometimes."(p.141). The uncertainty which Stacey exhibits throughout the novel is not resolved. The final line of the novel, "Will it return tomorrow?", shows that the uncertainty of Stacey remains with her. What she is unable to do is to see happenings and events in the present. Her subjectivity is continually leading her to think of the past and what will happen in the future.

One of the clearest presentations of subjectivity in contemporary Canadian fiction appears in Leonard Cohen's Beautiful Losers. Like Mailer, Cohen relies heavily on sensationalism. Underneath this obsession with sex and violent language, however, the author deals with the issue of subjectivity. The common feature of the novel is that all events and experiences eventually refer back to the narrator. As one critic has pointed out, the problem is basically an existential one, "However, as in most modern ironic literature, the poles are no longer moral ones of good and evil, but existential ones of identity and alienation<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>L.Hutcheon, "All the Polarities", The Canadian Novel in the Twentieth Century, G.Woodcock, ed. (Toronto,1975), p.299.

A major issue in Beautiful Losers is the subjectivity of the individual faced with isolation. The fictions and the fantasies created by the narrator are essentially a subjective way of dealing with the present.

Two contemporary novels which deal exclusively with the subjectivity of the narrators are Margaret Atwood's Surfacing and The Bell Jar by Sylvia Plath. Both novels are, in fact, attempts by their authors to overcome a particular view of the world; for the protagonist of The Bell Jar there is always the possibility that the bell jar may descend again; "But I wasn't sure. I wasn't sure at all. How did I know that some day -- at college, in Europe, somewhere, anywhere -- the bell jar, with its stifling distortions, wouldn't descend again?"(p.254) For Margaret Atwood to "surface" is to enter into the conscious world which includes events and people. The greater part of Surfacing deals with the subjective introspection of the narrator. In both novels the reader finds images of physical disease and sickness which are analagous to to the mental condition of the protagonists.

Both novels deal with insanity. The Bell Jar is an autobiographical account of approaching madness, and the one reason why insanity prevails is that the protagonist is unable to discriminate:

I saw myself sitting in the crotch of this fig-tree, starving to death, just because I couldn't make up my mind which of the figs I would choose. I wanted each and every one of them, but choosing meant losing all the rest, and, as I sat there, unable to decide, the figs began to wrinkle and go black, and, one by one, they plopped to the ground at my feet. (p. 80)

The move from mental fertility to frigidity, suggested by the heat of summer in the opening of the novel and the intense cold of winter at the close, is also due to a very specific view of time:

I saw the years of my life spaced along the road in the form of telephone poles, threaded together by wires. I counted one, two, three . . . nineteen telephone poles, and then the wires dangled into space, and try as I would, I couldn't see a single pole beyond the nineteenth. (p. 129)

The problem manifested in The Bell Jar deals with poetry in what is essentially a Sartrean universe. The prospect of "nothing" negated the purpose of poetry:

People were made of nothing so much as dust, and I couldn't see that doctoring all that dust was a bit better than writing poems people would remember and repeat to themselves when they were unhappy or sick and couldn't sleep. (p. 59)

The bell jar which eventually descended permanently for Sylvia Plath caused her own suicide, a central theme of The Bell Jar, and the novel is a record of the growth of insanity in the subjective mind of the individual.

It is suggested in Surfacing that "madness is only an amplification of what you already are" (p. 101). The novel deals with the attempt to suppress this amplification.

The focus in Surfacing is on the subjective response of the self-imposed exile who has gone to the wilderness in order to find out what she really is. The obsession with language and language games suggests that civilization is quite different from the Canadian North. That is, there is one set of "rules" for the North and one for civilization. The difficulty in communication, in which language obviously plays a large part, is that which exists between the three major characters. This communication is essentially contact with the external world. The fluidity of subjective introspection in the work does not exist for the protagonist in her relationships with Joe, Anne and David.

The central issue of Doris Lessing's Briefing for a Descent into Hell is stated by the author in her "After-wood or End-Paper":

This story was the result of a close relationship with a man whose senses were different from the normal person's.

Blake asks:

How do you know but every Bird that cuts the airy way  
Is an immense world of delight, closed by your sense five?

Bearing a great similarity to Pincher Martin, Charles Watkins, in his loss of memory, provides an alternative view of the world from the manner in which it is normally perceived. Through his illness Doris Lessing is able to examine and comment upon the human situation. The departure

of Charles Watkins from "the good ship "Why" does seem to be symbolic. Cast adrift on his raft the question "Why" seems to be no longer applicable; the view that Charles presents through his illness is essentially an existential one where the question "Why" is not valid.

What Charles Watkins experiences in his illness is precisely that which he promotes in other people. In her letter to him Rosemary Baines states:

But I was remembering. It was as if, in any moment of the day that I chose to revive it, there was a bridge across from that heightened moment when you were saying things about the children, about all of us, and the pulse of the time I was in . . . it was another, flash of recognition, of joy, of "yes thats it", and again, this quality of matching, or ringing together, of substances being in tune. (p. 154)

In his reply Watkin's suggests that the lecture which had caused this existential experience for Rosemary Baines was "but a routine occurrence for me". The two views of the world which Watkins experiences are completely separate. His illness is a departure from the conventional way of looking at things to one in which the conventional world, represented by the doctors, can find no sanity. What is central to the novel, as in Pincher Martin, is the subjectivity of the protagonist. Briefing for a Descent into Hell deals explicitly with the mental operations of Charles Watkins and his varying response to the external world. The subjectivity of Charles Watkins provides the author with the framework in which to examine a sensibility

"different from the normal person's"; it is in this different view that the ideas of existentialism emerge.

The traditional method of teaching is disposed with to allow for the prime of Miss Jean Brodie. In The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie, Muriel Spark deals with the subjectivity of Jean Brodie; what Jean Brodie wants to teach is basically a result of her own subjective response and not adherence to any conventional method. The fact that Jean Brodie is guided by her subjectivity rather than conventional traditions makes her an outsider in the society in which she lives. Education, the novel suggests, is expected to be formal and not subjective. Through her emphasis on subjectivity Jean Brodie appears quite different from her contemporaries. Whether one's sympathy is for the individual or the conventional they clearly do not go together. The tragedy attached to Jean Brodie, together with her difficult love relationships, seem to suggest that her subjectivity is not rewarding. Her betrayal by Sandy appears as a protest against Jean Brodie's view of the world.

The contemporary novels briefly analysed above do suggest that subjectivity is essentially the manner in which the world is viewed. This subjectivity, however, is not merely an interest in the individual or in human being but rather is concerned with the response and development

of the human mind. Many of the novels cited deal with the attempt of the individual to seek self-identity; whether this comes in the form of existential existence or not is, in many cases, a matter of conjecture. What does seem apparent is that many contemporary novels, with their focus on subjectivity, do present existential ideas. Existentialism provides another view of the world which might be more acceptable than the environment precipitated by science and technology.

Because the novels mentioned use, sometimes only partially, the conventional sense of time the distinction which Muir draws between the "character" novel and the "dramatic" novel may be applied. Through their subjectivity we learn about the characters of Rusty, Henry Pulling, Charles Watkins, Jake and the protagonist of Surfacing. That is, their effort to seek an identity is shared by the reader of these dramatic novels. But, characters such as Stoner, Stacey, Oliver, Jean Brodie and the protagonist of The Bell Jar, despite their subjective response, react in a predictable way to the external world. In fact, they are essentially the same and not really very different at the end of the novel than they were at the beginning. Although these characters may not develop through their subjectivity, the response to their environment is significant. They seem unable to envisage or accept an existential

alternative to life in the 20th century. What they represent is one particular static view of the world in which the frustrations of the modern world are evident. In contrast to existential possibility they illustrate the restrictions and monotony precipitated by the mechanisation and scientific progress of the contemporary world.

## CHAPTER THREE

### PERSISTENT STRIVING IN A MEANINGLESS UNIVERSE

In his work An Existential System is Impossible,

Kierkegaard states:

then it will be evident that the ideal of persistent striving is the only view of life that does not carry with it an inevitable disillusionment . . . persistent striving represents the consciousness of being an existing individual. (p. 19)

Here Kierkegaard states the repetition necessary for producing the existential experience. The idea of "persistent striving" is also evident in later existential philosophy, although not always expressed in the same manner. It is accommodated by Nietzsche's "overcoming" and Heidegger's movement from "inauthentic" to "authentic" being. For Sartre, "to become" was the result of "persistent striving", and in Buber's case it was the continual tension between the "I-Thou" and the "I-It" relationship. Such emphasis on this essential part of existential thought inevitably raises the following question: what is persistent striving for? i.e. why is this fundamental of existential thought necessary at all?

The goal towards which "persistent striving" proceeds is clearly stated in Kierkegaard. In later existential philosophy "persistent striving" brings the

individual into contact with meaninglessness; at the end of "persistent striving" the individual experiences the void and meaninglessness of existence. Persistent striving is necessary because it allows the individual to return from the void. That is, the meaninglessness of existence does not become a permanent feature. Thus two concepts arise from this crucial element of existential thought. As well as "persistent striving" the idea of a meaningless universe, and in some cases meaningless human being, also becomes apparent. These two concepts, I want to suggest, appear frequently in contemporary literature.

One of the major issues in Thomas Pynchon's The Crying of Lot 49 is the insanity of Oedipa Maas. The mental condition of the protagonist is clearly stated early in the work, "You're so sick, Oedipa, she told herself, or the room, which knew." (p.2.)

The Crying of Lot 49 combines both meaninglessness and persistent striving; the Trystero complex is Oedipa's attempt to re-establish some belief in human communication. The credibility of the complex is, however, continually questioned, "Either Trystero did exist, in its own right, or it was being presumed, perhaps fantasied by Oedipa, so hung up on and interpenetrated with the dead man's estate." (p.80). Oedipa's understanding of the Trystero is quite clear: rather than a fantasy of her mind the

Trystero is a substitute for external reality:

Now here was Oedipa, faced with a metaphor of  
God knew how many parts; more than two, anyway.  
With coincidences blossoming these days wherever  
she looked, she had nothing but a sound, a word,  
Trystero, to hold them together. (p. 80)

The obsession to seek out the Trystero complex continually leads Oedipa into frustration and disappointment. Whether the Trystero mystery is, in fact, real or a fantasy of Oedipa's imagination is never disclosed. In existential terms the Trystero must remain a possibility in the future; to disclose the identity of Trystero would be to terminate its validity. The reason that it consumes Oedipa's life and becomes part of her reality is precisely because it remains a possibility. The novel ends before Oedipa can obtain Lot 49 and attempt to understand the secret of the Trystero.

The meaninglessness of the universe, the reason why Oedipa is originally "sick", stands behind Oedipa's search for the Trystero. Her persistent striving leads her to experience the void, "That night she sat for hours too numb even to drink, teaching herself to breathe in a vacuum. For this, oh God, was the void. There was nobody who could help her. Nobody in the world." (p.128).

At the end of the novel the Trystero complex becomes more than a means of communication. Oedipa ponders:

For there either was some Tristero beyond the appearance of the legacy of America, or there was just America and if there was just America then it seemed the only way she could continue, and manage to be at all relevant to it, was as an alien, unfurrowed, assumed a full circle into some paranoia. (p. 137)

From this statement it becomes clear that the Trysterero is more than "the legacy of America". The Trysterero this suggests, is applicable on a universal level rather than a particular level; considered on the particular level of America the only way Oedipa could respond was as an "alien". The fact that the Trysterero is a secret form of human communication suggests that Oedipa, in her search, is presenting two possibilities: the possibility of human communication in America, or, the non-existential being which existed previously. The previous existence of the Trysterero complex may be explained by the exclusiveness of its clientele. Trysterero communication <sup>is</sup> recognised by very few and used by even less.

Whether the Trysterero complex is valid or whether it is merely a fantasy in the mind of Oedipa Maas is never revealed. The reply of Dr. Hilarius to Oedipa does seem to favour the imaginative process:

"I came" she said, "hoping you could talk me out of a fantasy".

"Cherish it!" cried Hilarius, fiercely. "What else do any of you have? Hold it tightly by its little tentacle, don't let the Freudians coax it away or the pharmacists poison it out of you. Whatever it is, hold it dear, for when you lose it you go over by that much to the others. You begin to cease to be." (p. 103)

This statement suggests that imagination is the essence of being. What Dr. Hilarius is suggesting is that the present, considered without reference to possibility in the future negates the individual "to the others". The distinction being drawn here is between existential and non-existential being.

The existence eventually suggested by the Trystero complex is analagous to the "Jes Grew" of Mumbo Jumbo. In this novel Ishmael Reed is attempting to show a way of life, or what he considered life should, in fact, be. At one point he suggests that "Jes Grew is life"; this concept which is often tied to creativity in the individual is, after all, the correct mode of human being. The salient point of "Jes Grew" is that it repeatedly appears. From the beginning of civilisation this spirit "which cannot be explained" has appeared periodically. The necessary condition for its appearance, Reed suggests, was the right conditions for expression, "Jes Grew was an influence which sought its text....." (p.241).

In contrast to "Jes Grew" the author poses the "Wallflower Order" and its affiliate the "Atonist" movement. The manner of existence suggested by "Jes Grew" is contrasted with this rival force; what is suggested by the "Wallflower Order" is a static approach to existence, i.e. the "Wallflower Order" and the "Atonist" movement oppose the existen-

tial nature of "Jes Grew". Reed suggests that the religious convictions of Milton serve as a paradigm for the "Atonist" movement and also run contrary to the spirit of "Jes Grew":

John Milton, Atonist apologist extraordinary himself, saw the coming of the minor geek and sorcerer Jesus Christ as a way of ending the cult of Osiris and Isis forever. (p. 195)

The significant feature in the current expression of "Jes Grew", according to Reed, is that it is "pandemic" and not merely an "epidemic". In the 20th century it has been transmitted more easily on a universal level by communications. The attempt to define "Jes Grew" on page 233 does show that is essentially existential in nature; it is a way of existence for the individual being. "Jes Grew" then may be described as a form of human expression. For Ishmael Reed the right kind of existence is "Jes Grew"; the fact that it cannot be explained and is life itself suggests that "Jes Grew" is essentially a part of existential existence. The "Wallflower Order" and the "Atonist" movement which seek to eliminate "Jes Grew" are modes of "inauthentic" existence. In his comparison between contemporary America and the "Jes Grew" manifested in the ancient Egyptian cult of Osiris and Isis, Reed suggests that in this ancient cult "there was peace". The ideas of progress and invasion, rejected by the Egyptians, are precisely those for which America is criticised. Without the existence of "Jes Grew" the world would indeed seem meaningless. The futility of

of American destruction is contrasted here with creativity manifested in the individual who experiences "Jes Grew".

The meaninglessness of the Universe is also echoed in John Gardner's novel Grendel. Grendel states:

I understand that the world was nothing: a mechanical chaos of casual, brute enmity on which we stupidly impose our hopes and fears. I understood that, finally and absolutely, I alone exist. All the rest, I saw, is merely what pushes me, or what I push against blindly -- as blindly as all that is not myself pushes back. I create the whole universe, blink by blink. -- An ugly god pitifully dying in a tree! (p. 16)

He also suggests that "Nihil ex nihilio", nothing comes from nothing. Against a background of meaninglessness Grendel continually represents evil to the warriors of Hrothgar and the meadhall. As the dragon points out to him:

You are, so to speak, the brute existent by which they learn to define themselves. . . . You are mankind, or man's condition: inseparable as the mountain-climber and the mountain. (p. 62)

As well as describing a particular kind of existence, Grendel is also the personification of evil; that which is inextricably a part of man's nature.

The re-telling of the Grendel legend from the monster's point of view establishes a double perspective. In Grendel an opposite is given to the conventional version recorded in the Beowulf. This contrast given by the monster is another way of viewing the world; the monster's version

is essentially an explication of existential thought. Through his conversations with the dragon and his teasing of Ork, Grendel reveals the elements of existential thought. The dragon states:

"Illusion", he said. He half smiled, then let it go as if infinitely weary, sick of Time. "I know everything, you see," the old voice wheedled. "The beginning, the present, the end. Everything. You now, you see the past and present, like other low creatures: no higher faculties than memory and perception. But dragons, my boy, have a whole different kind of mind." (p. 53)

When Grendel asks Ork to speculate about the "King of the Gods" Ork replies, "The ultimate evil is that Time is perpetual perishing, and being actual involves elimination." (p.115).

Ork further suggests that:

"The King of Gods is the ultimate limitation . . . and his existence the ultimate irrationality. . . . The King of Gods is not concrete, but He is the ground for concrete actuality. No reason can be given for the nature of God because that nature is the ground of rationality." (p. 114)

Contemplating whether to destroy the meadhall, Grendel echoes the essence of Sartrian philosophy, "'Am I not free? -- free as a bird?' I have seen -- I embody -- the vision of the dragon: absolute final waste.....Yet I exist, I knew. The I alone exist, I said.. It's me or it." (p.138). The conflict between these two opposing views is settled, Grendel suggests, by trickery. Beowulf prevails over Grendel by "accident". The humour and irony

attached to the eventual battle between Grendel and Beowulf appears to undercut any serious statement by the author. What it does show is that the Beowulf story has been related for centuries in a non-existential manner. Grendel's version ultimately points to the animalistic instinct in man's nature, although it must be noted that Grendel himself represents evil. The difference is that Grendel pursues his "engagement" in the light of a meaningless universe; as Kierkegaard would suggest, it is the "How" and not the "What". Grendel is well aware of the stupidity and futility attached to violence and his "idiotic war". For Hrothgar and his warriors this was a way of life. The ultimate suggestion made by Grendel, the existential being, is that the violent and destructive nature of man is due to his animal instinct.

A meaningless universe, and the existence of the individual in that universe, forms a major part of the novels by Kurt Vonnegut. It has been suggested, in fact, that Vonnegut is providing "an analgesic for the temporary relief of existential pain".<sup>1</sup> Throughout his novels Vonnegut is concerned with the effect of science and technology on the human being. Each novel that he has written suggests

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<sup>1</sup>J. Klinkowitz and J. Somers, eds., The Vonnegut Statement (New York, 1973), p. 108.

that humanitarian principles are suffering at the expense of progress; each protagonist in his novels is the victim of alienation and exile in his own environment. The world that Vonnegut sees as the result of science is essentially meaningless; scientific progress increases the meaninglessness of the universe as it progresses. His protagonists, however, do strive to exist for humanitarian principles in this meaningless universe.

The label of Existentialism which has been attached to Vonnegut results from the existential ideas so often found in his writing. The imaginative side of the "radical juxtaposition" in Vonnegut's novels is permeated with existential thought. The Sartrean idea of "becoming" is clearly indicated in The Sirens of Titan:

His ship was powered, and the Martian war effort was powered, by a phenomenon known as UWTB, or the Universal Will to Become. UWTB is what makes universes out of nothingness -- that makes nothingness insist on becoming somethingness. (p. 138)

The Bokonist view of the world, suggested in Cat's Cradle, is also essentially existential. There is a great similarity here with the view of Tralfamadore, a later expression which manifests existential thought. In order to emphasise what he considers to be the failings of science, as well as man himself, Vonnegut presents another view of the world. The manner in which this is done in Slaughterhouse Five is definitely suggestive of existential-

ism. The Tralfamadorian view of the universe is clearly different from the human view of the universe. The difference between the two views is stated when Billy Pilgrim is addressed by the Tralfamadorians:

"That is a very Earthling question to ask, Mr Pilgrim. Why you? Why us for that matter? Why anything? Because the moment simply is. Have you ever seen bugs trapped in amber?"  
 . . . "Well, here we are, Mr Pilgrim, trapped in the amber of the moment. There is no why" (p. 77)

The existential tendencies in the imaginative thought of Kurt Vonnegut are manifested in each of his novels. The idea that the universe is meaningless is also repeatedly stated. Vonnegut himself suggests that the universe is derived from "nothing":

In the beginning and in the end there was Nothingness. Nothingness implied the possibility of Somethingness. It is impossible to make something from nothing. Therefore, Nothingness could only imply Somethingness. That implication is the Universe -- as straight as a string . . . except for a loop at either end.<sup>2</sup>

All the protagonists in Vonnegut's novels exist in an environment which is basically without meaning. The ultimate statement of this meaninglessness is manifested in Slaughterhouse Five. The existential, suggested by Billy Pilgrim's concept of time and the view presented by the Tralfamadorians, is accompanied by an environment out of

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<sup>2</sup>K. Vonnegut, Wampeters, Foma and Granfallons (New York, 1965), p. xxii.

which the protagonist can make no sense. The bombing of Dresden epitomises the meaninglessness of the Universe from a humanitarian point of view. Despite his inability to understand the universe, Billy Pilgrim continually seeks to play a part in his environment. One of the significant features of Slaughterhouse Five is the persistence of Billy Pilgrim. Although he may be a "listless plaything of enormous forces" Billy Pilgrim does not relinquish his role. What he shows is the individual who continually experiences meaninglessness in a universe which is beyond comprehension.

It is stated in Mr Sammler's Planet that Arthur Sammler is "not a man of the times" (p. 125). His confrontation with death in the Second World War seems to have given him a different perspective. In this novel Bellow examines, through Sammler, the ills of contemporary society. It is made quite clear that modern society is proceeding in the wrong direction:

They stressed too hard the disintegrated assurances; what was formerly believed, trusted, was now bitterly circled in black irony. . . . People justifying idleness, silliness, shallowness, distemper, lust -- turning former respectability inside out. (p. 12)

From Sammler's point of view the emphasis on sex in the contemporary world is incorrect. The "madness" which existed in modern society was largely due to the concentration on this phenomenon. What had disappeared in the modern world for Sammler was order. Govinda Lal suggests to

Sammler that behind any individual creativity there is a "chemical order which is fundamental to life". In this order there is also a certain beauty to be appreciated.

Mr Sammler's Planet, then is basically a critique of the society in which Mr Sammler finds himself. What takes place in the novel is a debate about modern society. Sammler's criticism of modern society, and the discussion of what might be the alternative, lead Sammler to express existential ideas. The Planet which Mr Sammler constructs in opposition to the problematic life of the 20th century very often contains reference to existential thought. Like Vonnegut, Sammler is not suggesting an existential alternative; existential thought seems to appear automatically in this different view of the world.

One problem with contemporary man, according to Sammler, is the way in which he views time and space, "This is not the way to get out of the spatial-temporal prison. Distant is still finite. Finite is still feeling through a veil examining the naked inner reality with a gloved hand."(p.52). It is further suggested that:

Things met with in this world are tied to the forms of our perception in space and time and to the forms of our thinking. We see what is before us, the present, the objective. Eternal being makes its temporal appearance in this way. The only way out of captivity in the forms, out of the confinement in the prison of projections, the only contact with the eternal, is through freedom. (p. 55)

Sammler's complaint is that "it should be possible still to follow truth on the inward track". Mechanism, associated with a technological society, was not necessary for the inward search of the individual. Pondering over the nature of the "main thing", which may well be consciousness, Sammler's difficulty is to make a coherent statement about the meaning or structure of existence. As he states himself:

Oh, what a wretched, itching, bleeding, needing, idiot, genius of a creature we were dealing with here! And how queerly it was playing (he, she) with all the strange properties of existence, with all varieties of possibility, with antics of all types, with the soul of the world, with death. Could it be condensed into a statement or two? Humankind could not endure futurelessness. As of now, death, was the sole visible future. (p. 71)

The change in the society of the 20th century is juxtaposed with science. Sammler's approach towards the definition of human being is often scientific, "The equations preceded the actual observations. So what we need is a similar system of signs for human beings. In this system, what is One? What is the human integer like?" (p.96) The search for Sammler in this alien environment is characterised by two statements: the "fixed point" manner in which Feffer had regarded Sammler and the statement by Sammler that he does not "care for the illimitable", (p.168). Sammler is seeking in contemporary society is, indeed, a "fixed point", to him the prospects which are arising in

modern society are "illimitable".

It is made quite clear that Mr Sammler does not offer his "planet" as an alternative. As he states, "... I have not stated my arguments, for I argue nothing." (p.215) For Sammler the "liberation into individuality has not been a great success" (p.208); the desire to seek some external point of reference is again obvious when Sammler states; "The Self may think it wears a gay new ornament, delightfully painted, but from the outside we see that it is a millstone." (p.213). Sammler further suggests that "individualism is of no interest whatever if it does not extend in truth"(p.214). This criticism is taken up again when Sammler states that the individual has the "peculiar longing for nonbeing." (p.214).

The search which Sammler conducts for meaning in the contemporary world is not resolved. Like Billy Pilgrim, Arthur Sammler finds it very difficult to attach any meaning to the environment in which he exists. And yet, despite the inability to find a "fixed point", Sammler keeps trying; "it was the Sammlers who kept on vainly trying to perform some kind of symbolic task."(p.86). The notion of "persistent striving" is also suggested by Sammler when he remarks that "one always, and so powerfully. so persuasively, drawn back to human conditions" (p.109). The speculative nature of Sammler's non-argument does not provide a positive alternative to the alienation and

isolation experienced by Sammler in the modern world. He does, however, make a positive statement about existence, "Then it struck him that what united everybody was a beautitude of presence....yes - blessed are the present." (p.263). This statement does not automatically make Sammler into an existential thinker. What it does show is that existential thought plays a large part in his different view of the world.

The idea that permeates Bruno's Dream is that Bruno's world is a dream world. Towards the end of the novel it is the conclusion that Bruno arrives at:

But there was no God. I am at the centre of the great orb of my life, thought Bruno, until some blind hand snaps the thread. . . . The spider spins out its web, it can no other. I spin out my consciousness, this compulsive chatterer, this ideal rambling voice that will soon be mute. But its all a dream. Reality is too hard. I have lived my life in a dream and now it is too late to wake up. (p. 266)

This statement, which it has taken Bruno 90 years to arrive at, is contrasted with the character of Nigel. Nigel lives in the present and not the past. The reason why Miles cannot re-establish communication with his father is that it involves the past; Bruno's dream world is unlike Nigel's existential present:

Nigel has fallen upon his knees. Kneeling upright he sways to its noiseless rhythm song. In the beginning was Om, Omphalos, Om Phallos, black undivided round devoid of consciousness or self. Out of the dreamless womb of time creeps in the moment which is no beginning at the end which is no end. (p. 27)

Nigel further suggests, "If by eternity is understood not endless temporal duration but timelessness, he lives eternally who lives in the present." (p.81).

Later in the novel Nigel suggests that he is a "God".

Nietzsche's existential idea that man himself must replace God is expressed in this statement by Nigel. In Bruno's Dream the existential and the non-existential are contrasted; like Mr Sammler, Bruno can find no concrete "fixed point" against which to measure his life. The suggestion in the novel is that this dream world of Bruno is a source of illusion.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RELIGION IN THE CONTEMPORARY NOVEL

The emphasis on the self in existential thought is not in agreement with the reality of an external God. Even in Kierkegaard's case the ultimate truth remained with the individual and not any form external to the mind. Nietzsche's statement "God is dead" completely cancelled any possibility of external reality. In Nietzsche's case there was only the Self. Contemporary fiction does not always show this complete rejection suggested by Nietzsche. Although the concept of external reality is clearly absent from many contemporary novels, a suggestion that Nietzsche's idea has been accepted, other novels continue to debate the possibility of religious belief. Some authors, it seems, are not as eager to put the total responsibility of existence on the self; the issue in some contemporary fiction is whether man still needs some form of external reality by which to live. The implication here is that Nietzsche's statement cannot eliminate something which has been an integral part of man's existence for 2,000 years.

Contemporary fiction does appear to fall into one of two categories regarding the question of religion: contemporary novels either debate the possibility of external reality or they disregard God completely. Novels that are

preoccupied with an exposition of existential ideas have little use for God or religion; authors less keen to give up metaphysical reality still ponder over the existence of God. The import of Nietzsche's statement, indeed its success, is not a continuing debate over religious possibility. The absence of God and Christianity in many contemporary novels is proof that for many authors God is, indeed, dead.

Margaret Laurence's novel The Fire Dwellers represents one attitude towards religion taken by the contemporary novel. The Fire Dwellers is a novel in which the relationship of the protagonist with God is a major issue. Stacey is a person who lives very much in the presence of God and there is continual reference throughout the work to religion. The relationship between Stacey and God forms an essential part of her life; there is a continuous dialogue between Stacey and God which operates on a personal level. The concept of God in this novel is conventional. God is the all-powerful, all-seeing, all-knowing being who mysteriously lurks in the background and to whom the protagonist appeals in her uncertainty. The confusion in Stacey's life, and her inability to set things in perspective, makes her an extremely erratic person. It is this erratic nature which is the source of her dependence on God. The uncertainty expressed at the

end of the novel when Stacey wonders "Will it return tomorrow" shows that God and religion have not provided an answer for her doubt.

Stacey's continual dialogue with God reveals more than her interest in religious belief. Her constant appeal to God reveals that Stacey is basically a paranoid person; it also comments upon what God and Christianity actually are. Stacey seems obsessed with the idea of God, When asked to remember a joke at Thor's party she can only remember a joke about Thor "The great God" (p. 109). In contrast she advises her son "that it is not a good idea to rely on external props . . ." (p. 246). Although the reference is not specifically to religion or God here, the idea of there being an "external prop" is central to religious belief. The conflict which exists for Stacy is between the conventional support which she thinks God should provide and her inability to live as an independent human being. The reason why Stacey continually turns to God is that she cannot justify her actions to herself. What leads her to God is a feeling of guilt. In this sense we learn more about the inner nature of the protagonist than we do about external Christianity. The manner in which she conducts her relationship with God suggests that Stacey has a very unstable mind as well as being paranoid.

Stacey's relationship with God also provides an

insight into Nietzsche's claim that "God is dead". Stacey is repeatedly frustrated in her relationship with God; God does not provide the concreteness sought by the individual. As Ork states to Grendel "His existence is the ultimate irrationality" (p. 114). Irrationality is the key to Stacey's existence and God is of little help. The fact that the Christian God must always remain metaphysical is indicated through Stacey's relationship with him. What is revealed, in reality, is the workings of Stacey's mind; God remains mysterious behind the events of the external world and serves as a "prop" to Stacey's mind.

The idea of God as inexplicable appears early in Vonnegut's novel Cat's Cradle. The Bokonist definition of a fool is "anyone who thinks he sees what God is Doing" (p. 15). Vonnegut also suggests, "Anyone unable to understand how useful a religion can be founded on lies will not understand this book either." (p.16).

As the workings of God and his existence remain inexplicable Vonnegut treats the universe as meaningless. The religious figures in Vonnegut's novels provide a satirical thrust against Christianity; the Shah of Bratphur in Player Piano and Bokonon in Cat's Cradle are clear examples. The nature of God is exposed by Vonnegut in The Sirens of Titan. In founding "The Church of God the Utterley

Indifferent", Winston Niles Rumfoord expresses the idea that the relationship between God and man is an illusion. God as "Indifferent" means that religion is passive and man cannot expect to obtain meaning from this source.

The satirical approach towards God and religion is extended in Slaughterhouse Five. Linking religion to the Tralfamadorian view Eliot Rosewater tells about the "Gospel from Outer Space":

So Rosewater told him. It was the Gospel from Outer Space, by Kilgore Trout. It was about a visitor from outer space, shaped very much like a Tralfamadorian, by the way. The visitor from outer space made a serious study of Christianity, to learn, if he could, why Christians found it so easy to be cruel. He concluded that at least part of the trouble was slipshod storytelling in the New Testament. He supposed that the intent of the Gospels was to teach people, among other things, to be merciful, even to the lowest of the low.

But the Gospel actually taught this:  
Before you kill somebody, make absolutely sure he isn't well connected. . . . (p. 109)

Later in the novel Billy Pilgrim examines the body of Christ. What he finds is that "The Son of God was dead as a doornail" (p. 203). This statement, reminiscent of Nietzsche, and Vonnegut's satire on religion suggests that the possibility of an external reality for Vonnegut is an illusion. What he is saying is that our inability to know God or religion invalidates our placing belief in the external world. The characters in Vonnegut's novels suggest that reality is in the human mind; the attempt to attach reality to the mystical is the cause of frustration.

Two contemporary novelists for whom the metaphysical still maintains credibility are Graham Greene and Saul Bellow. The novels of Graham Greene are full of religious speculation, and the outcome of this speculation is Greene's belief in the metaphysical. Although his novels often satirise God and religious ceremony they do affirm religious belief. In Travels with my Aunt, Curran suggests to Aunt Augusta that religion is necessary for all kinds of human life as well as animal life:

"It proves our point", Curran said, "Whoremongers and murderers and the rest -- they all have souls, don't they? They only have to repent, and it's the same with dogs. The dogs who come to our church have repented." (p. 49)

The sentiment of Graham Greene is expressed in this comical statement by Curran and the later suggestion, "let each pray after his own fashion", is essentially Greene's idea of religion. The religious question is raised in Travels with my Aunt with reference to Kierkegaard; what is at issue is not the "What" of religion but the "How". Greene does not seem to doubt the existence of God but rather the way in which an external God is worshipped. The idea of a metaphysical reality which lurks in the background of the novel, and which Henry Pulling questions, receives affirmation at the end of the work. The final statement, "God's in heaven -- All's right with the world" suggests that the actions and adventures of Henry Pulling have all

been viewed by a far greater power. Henry's entrance into the different world of Aunt Augusta makes him, like Billy Pilgrim, the "plaything of enormous forces".

The religious affirmation that often appears at the end of Greene's novels is not as obvious in the work of Saul Bellow. The enquiry in Mr Sammler's Planet is not so much concerned with orthodox religion as it is with metaphysical speculation. In Mr Sammler's world the conflict is revealed in his discussion about the manner of Christian faith suggested by Kierkegaard:

This could not interest Kierkegaard. He was looking for the Knight of Faith, the real prodigy. . . . He (Sammler) was concerned about the test of crime which the Knight of Faith had to meet. Should the Knight of Faith have the strength to break humanly appointed laws in obedience to God? (p. 60)

Sammler is unable to decide here between the human being and external reality; whether or not man can break his own laws to accommodate external reality. The metaphysical, Sammler states, is clearly real, there can be no doubt about external reality:

It was in Poland, in wartime, . . . that he first began to turn to the external world for curious ciphers and portents. The dead life of that summer and into autumn when he had been a portent watcher, and very childish, for many forms of meaning had been stamped out, and a straw, or a spider thread or a stain, a beetle or a sparrow had to be interpreted. Symbols everywhere, and metaphysical messages. (p. 84)

Sammler also suggests that "God's entertainment" can be

seen in the patterns which manifest themselves in the external world. What Sammler is searching for is a similar pattern which he can attach to the mental life of the individual. Arthur Sammler's analysis of mental life, does not negate the external world. There is as much reality in the external world as in the mind of the individual. Sammler's sympathy for Kant on page 55 suggests reality in both spheres, and the difficulty for Mr Sammler is that he cannot give one preference over the other.

The attitude of Jewish writers towards God in the contemporary novel is varied. Leonard Cohen, even more than Saul Bellow, searches for a metaphysical reality. On the other hand Mordecai Richler, in his novel St Urbain's Horseman, does not question religion at all. Although the pursuits of Jake and his associates are secular, the novel contains a heavy Jewish emphasis on religion and God. Indeed, the basis on which the novel is written presupposes religion and an external God. Joey's image of the Horseman is based on the image of the individual who is alone and searching, essentially the situation of Jake. This novel makes no attempt to debate the existence of God or the possibility of religion, it is written within a religious frame of reference. The focus in the work is on the secular happenings to an "alienated Jew" and does not question the existence of God.

Beautiful Losers is a novel which deals with the search for external reality. The work is permeated with references to God, religion and Sainthood. The frustration of the narrator, unable to find any external reality, is expressed in the violent and often obscene form which the book takes. It is the inability to find God, in a physical sense, which leads the narrator to connect God and magic; the only way that Cohen can argue for the existence of God isto suggest that "Magic is alive", i.e. the mysterious existence and workings of God may only be described as magic. The suggestion that God exists by magic is only a consolation for the author. Cohen's statement about Beautiful Losers reveals his disillusionment:

I was writing about a model of sainthood. . . . Any saint is a kind of con man in the fact that he puts himself across . . . he somehow understands that there is nothing. . . . He's got to give some answer . . . it really doesn't matter what the answer is so long as it is delivered with the right kind of music and compassion.

The attempt to contact God directly in a physical sense is responsible for the author's preoccupation with saints. The enquiry is not limited to Catherine Tekakwitha but takes into account many S aints in the last 500 years (pp. 160-1). The distinction drawn by F between "clear light" and "symbols", is also applicable to the narrator. All that Cohen has to convince him of God and external

reality are "symbols"; the "Clear light" which he seeks for metaphysical reality remains elusive.

The existence of God and the possibility of religious belief are examined by Alice Munro in Lives of Girls and Women. It forms one stage in the development of Del Jordan. Metaphysical reality is not, however, as real as physical reality, "I never had a picture of God so clear and uncomplicated as my picture of the burglars." (p.78).

The "Age of Faith" is something which Del Jordan enters and is soon disillusioned with. The attraction of Christianity lay in its religious ceremony and not with the existence of God. Del Jordan was attracted by what Christianity meant to her and not what it meant to God. Mr Sammler's conviction about external reality is not what Del's mother finds. Under pressure she can only state that "there must be something -- some design". (p.84). What this design may be or who originated it is beyond the understanding of Del's mother. The attitude taken by Munro towards God in this novel is perhaps the most popular in contemporary society. The reality of God and religion is only a temporary stage in the development of the human being. For many individuals Nietzsche's statement is not one which can be accepted without proof.

The disillusionment with God is dealt with in Bruno's

Dream. Beyond belief in God, Bruno declares at the end of the novel, "But there was no God. I am the centre of the great orb of my life....until some blind hand snaps the thread." (p.266). The reason for Bruno's disillusionment, as for many other characters in the contemporary novel, is the non-physical quality of God. Bruno's loss of faith is a result of his not finding God in a physical sense. This is evident when he makes the connection between God and death, "But you don't understand about death. Do you know what I think?" said Bruno, staring hard at the dressing gown in the dim light. I think God is death. That's it. God is death."(p.93.) Earlier in the novel Iris Murdoch had expressed Wittgenstein's view that "Death is not an event in life"(p.80). If God is death, and as death obviously cannot be experienced by the individual, then God must remain outside of experience. This is precisely the reason for the protagonist's movement from "safeness" and "happiness", and "taking religion for granted", to declaring that there is no God. The mystical way in which God is depicted in the Christian religion leads Bruno to realise that consciousness, the "compulsive chatterer", is the only reality, and "the centre of the great orb" is his own self. The tragedy is that this experience of the self is a dream world. The development towards shedding religious belief is accompanied by the recognition that this has been an illusion. That

is, what he has experienced has not been reality at all. Not only is religious belief questioned but also the distinction between illusion and reality of the self is made.

The religious disappointment of Bruno is contrasted to the figure of Nigel. The view of God and religious worship taken by Nigel is opposite to that which is experienced by Bruno. In conversation with Nigel he ironically states, "There are people with whom one always talks about sex. And there are people with whom one always talks about God. I always talk to you about God. The others wouldn't understand" (p. 92). The manner in which Nigel pursues religion is beyond the understanding of the protagonist. It does not occur to Bruno that God may be the source of existential experience as He is for Nigel; the search is for a metaphysical reality to attach to God. The "Noiseless rhythm song" contained in Nigel's religious experience is reminiscent of "Jes Grew" in Mumbo Jumbo. The importance of religion to the self rather than external reality is implied in Nigel's assertion that he is a God:

Because I am God. Maybe this is how God appears now in the world, a little unregarded crazy person whom everyone pushes aside and knocks down and steps upon. Or can it be that I am the false God, or one of the million million false gods that there are. It matters very little. The false god is the true God. Up any religion a man may climb. (p. 210)

There is a flexibility contained in this last statement which is not specifically relevant to the Christian religion. What Nigel is suggesting is Kierkegaard's "How" and not the "What". The important point is "How" one worships external reality and not "What" that external reality is.

Earlier in this thesis I ventured to suggest that a new type of novel was appearing in contemporary literature. Novels that deal primarily with the existence of the individual, by the very fact that they deal solely with human consciousness, lack the frame of reference which may be applied to the traditional novel. The element missing in the contemporary novel often appears to be order. This apparent lack of order continues into the imagery, symbolism and structure of the work. That is, the novels may be seen as chaotic rather than organised. Somewhat as in James's "Stream of Consciousness", there is no logical pattern in the thought process and perceptions of the protagonist. The idea that disorder is, in fact, a different kind of order, a departure from the conventional which may be more difficult to recognise, may be applicable here. What emerges from the disorder in the contemporary novel may be, in fact, a new kind of order. Chaos, like order, is a recognizable but different pattern.

The crucial difference in earlier novels which used this method is that a logical pattern could eventually be

formed; perceptions which initially appeared random eventually presented a coherent view of the world. In the contemporary novel all that exist are the random perceptions of the individual, there is no logical pattern. Proof of this may be briefly cited by the inclusion in some cases of the visual as well as the written word. The examples of Cohen, Reed, Vonnegut and Pynchon suggest that some contemporary writers are trying to appeal to more than one of the senses. That is, the sensibility of the individual mind may be understood more completely if the visual is included in the novel. The inclusion of the visual breaks down the structure and rhythm which applies in earlier novels; visual images isolate and comment on the written word rather than on each other. Structure cannot be applied in the conventional sense to visual imagery and the use of this in some contemporary fiction has a separating effect rather than a unifying one.

It was also suggested that some explanation must be given for contemporary novels which do not conform to traditional methods. The reason I feel is clearly found in the absence of God in the contemporary novel and the outright rejection of metaphysical reality. The concentration in some contemporary novels on the individual, denying the possibility of external reality, has produced a novel which is very different from its predecessors. The exclusive

attention to the mental operations and development of the individual, has produced such novels as Mumbo Jumbo, Grendel and The Crying of Lot 49 and it is the rejection of Christianity that makes these novels different from those which debate the existence of God. The situation has been summarised in one way by Norman Mailer in Intro Beep No7 of Why Are We In Vietnam?: "Church is out, LSD is in". (p.116).

Mailer's aphoristic statement about religion suggests that drugs have filled the gap left by religion and an altered state of human consciousness has taken over. This simplifies the absence of God in the contemporary novel. An altered state of human consciousness does not eliminate the possibility of God or religious experience. The loss of external reality is more than simply a substitution of human experience and this may well be the reason why some novelists choose to avoid the subject and concentrate on the individual. It is only in the last century that external reality has been seen by some as invalid and the existence of God completely rejected. Although drugs may fill the gap left by the absence of God in contemporary society they do not provide an answer to the loss of external reality. Contemporary man is faced with his own consciousness in an environment which is not sympathetic to the acceptance of external reality and any temporary alteration of consciousness does not solve the

problem.

The exclusive concern with human consciousness is evident in many modern novels. The Bell Jar is concerned with the disintegration and eventual madness of Esther; no reference is made to God or religious belief as a possible solution to her situation. The environment in which Esther Greenwood finds herself is not unlike the environment of Charles Watkins in Briefing for a Descent into Hell. In the only discussion of God, Charles Watkins asks the inevitable question why?; "But here is a thought and not for the first time - of course not, there is no thought for the first time - why God?"(p.106). In his state of amnesia Charles Watkins declares that the Sun is the real God, "But why Father? Why Father of Gods and Men? For who is our Father? Who? None other than the Sun, whose name is the deep chord underlying all others."(p.106). This suggestion does give a certain metaphysical reality to God, but like the amnesia of Charles Watkins it is temporary. The author is not questioning the "senses five" but showing how they may be arranged in a different manner. The view of the world presented by this re-arrangement concentrates on the individual and does not include God in the Christian sense.

The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie and Surfacing also

deal with the mind of the individual. Both novels present a secular environment and there is no speculation about God or religion. On two occasions (pp. 35 and 128), Jean Brodie is compared to religion as an influence on her pupils. The influence on the young Sandy was not religion, i.e. Calvinism, but rather a Miss Jean Brodie "in her prime". What is suggested here is that the mind of the individual can be as powerful and important as religion. Miss Jean Brodie appears as a God in her prime. The Christian God is seen by Margaret Atwood as "the wrong God". The absence of physical proof of God deters the protagonist of Surfacing from any religious belief (p. 73). For both authors there is little issue with Nietzsche's claim for the death of God.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### TIME AND DEATH IN THE CONTEMPORARY NOVEL

In his essay "The English Novel and Three Kinds of Time", John Raleigh distinguishes between cosmic, historic and existential time. He further suggests that:

Upon this primordial fulcrum, which leans, in one direction . . . toward the private, the individual, the subjective and, in another and opposite direction, toward the public, the collective, the objective, the novel rests, achieving grandeur, like all art, only insofar as it maintains an equivocal synthesis, constantly breaking down and knitting together, between these two diametrically different but interacting areas of human experience.<sup>1</sup>

The major point in Raleigh's argument is that time, in the 20th century, "has been in great part extentionalised" (p. 251); and existential time, in which "there is no objective reality" (p. 249), has become the concept of time accepted by most authors. Existential time is defined by Raleigh as the "continuous present" (p. 251); existential time "denies the validity of time-history" which was the conception of 19th century authors. As Raleigh sees it existential time is basically an "escaping from history" (p. 249).

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<sup>1</sup>R. M. Davis, ed., The Novel: Modern Essays in Criticism (New York, 1969), p. 242.

The increasing use of existential time in the contemporary novel suggests that Raleigh's theory about "equivocal synthesis" of the subjective and the objective is not strictly true. The concentration on an "extreme form of individualism", and the novel becoming more concerned with the psychological aspects of character, puts a greater emphasis on the subjective. If, as Raleigh suggests, there is "no real time outside the mind of the individual" then the idea of "synthesis" is called into question. The modern novel does suggest that existential time is commonly accepted and that the concern with the individual makes the theory of "synthesis" no longer applicable.

The idea of time expressed by Heidegger in Being and Time put stress on the "now". However, the composition of this "now" included the past and the future. Past and future are external phases of the "now" because they are perpetually repeated. H. J. Blackham has summarised Heidegger's idea of time in the following way:

[it] is a succession of presents, for there is always something present which indicates that it is now the time for something, by which past and future are determined as extended backwards or forwards. The absolute, although finite, temporal process is realised in the resolved personal existence, for then the three phases of the process, past, present, and future, which rigidly exclude one another, are constantly held in the indissolubility of their union in interpenetration. (p. 99)

The importance of Heidegger's statement about time is that it includes the past and the future in the present; it also requires a "resolved personal existence". Thus, Heidegger's time is essentially the time of human being; historic time is not valid because it does not recognise the future and cosmic time considers the future in a manner which is predetermined. The pervasive use of existential time in contemporary fiction is the result of what Raleigh terms "the individual becoming more and more a purely psychic entity" (p. 243). The psychological concern for major characters has necessitated a use of time which is able to accommodate the mental operations of a human being; as Heidegger suggested in Being and Time, human being requires the past and the future as well as the present.

The Alexandria Quartet by Lawrence Durrell is written according to the concept of existential time. It is only in the fourth work, Clea, that a temporal sense is given in an historical sense. The author's intention is given in the statement which precedes Balthazar, "The first three parts, are to be deployed spatially (Hence the use of "sibling" not "sequel") and are not linked in any serial form. Time is stayed", (Preface to Balthazar). Existential time is illustrated through the subjectivity of Darley. As Durrell further suggests, the first three novels "interlap, interweave, in a purely spatial relation".

Thus, the existential use of time in Justine, Balthazar and Mountolive allows the author to relate events which occur simultaneously. The happenings in the first three novels, in both past and future, are absorbed into the mind of Darley through whom the work is narrated. The presence of existential time exists in the subjectivity of Darley and, as Karl suggests, "Durrell is obviously interested, then, in the inner man, as Snow is in the outer, social man" (p. 56).

Historical time is the subject of satire in The Weekend Man. The implication in this novel is that time cannot be separated into such events as weekends; existence is more important, and this takes place in the present. Against this satire Wes Wakeham presents the contrast of existential time. The meaninglessness of historical time culminates when Wes contrasts the ludicrousness of Mrs Brown and the seriousness implied by the news of Walter Cronkite, "After a couple of million years we had reached this point in time and I was standing in Mrs Brown's hallway listening to Walter Cronkite. Through the oval window.....". (p.81). The time which operates for Wes is clearly not historical:

Watching them, I am overcome by haunted feelings, touched by fragments of the past. It is déjà vu for certain, but also something else, something deeper and stronger. Within me thrives the keenest sense of time and place. I seem to be able to reach out and feel the texture of those days. (p. 140)

The frustrations in The Weekend Man result from the difference between historical and existential Time. Wes Wakenham is a character who lives in the present, experiences a series of "nows", and does not subscribe to the historical view of time. As he chooses not to order the past and future in relationship to the existential "now" Wes often appears a frustrated figure. He may be criticised because he cannot order the events of the past and the future, which have become objects in the external world. But in existential time this is not important. The present, as the character of Wes suggests is the time which has validity, not the past or future.

The contrast between historical and existential time in The Weekend Man does not appear in a Briefing For a Descent into Hell. The author's intention to expose a view in which the "senses were different from the normal person's", shows the mind of Charles Watkins expressing an existential view of time. Early in the novel a distinction is made between "time" and "man-time" (p. 12). The eventual return to a normal sensibility is essentially a return for Watkins to "man-time". During his early stages of amnesia Charles Watkins is obsessed with cosmic as well as existential time. Cyclical patterns are all that the protagonist can think of:

And now leaving the sea where I have been  
around and around for so many centuries my  
mind is ringed with Time like the deposits  
on shells or the fall of years on tree trunks,  
I step up on the dry salty sand, with a shake  
of my whole body like a wet dog. (p. 39)

The beginning of the return to a conventional sensibility  
is marked by a change in time:

But the very thing I became aware of first  
was that time had shifted gear and vibrated  
differently, and it was this that was the  
first assault on my own habitual pattern of  
substance. (p. 88)

The significant feature of this different existence is that  
the movement of time is subject to alteration. Thus, the  
difference between historical and existential time can be  
seen on (pp. 49, 93, 98, 154, 169 and 190). The dis-  
tinction between "time" and "man-time" is also made when  
the "Permanent Staff" declare:

. . . the main feature of these human beings  
as at present constituted being their inability  
to feel, or understand themselves, in any other  
way except through their own drives and functions.  
They have not yet evolved into an understanding  
of their individual selves as merely parts of a  
whole, first of all humanity, their own species,  
let alone achieving a conscious knowledge as  
humanity as part of nature. . . . (p. 121)

The existential view of time is also suggested when the  
"Permanent Staff" predicts that:

An ability to see things as they are, in their  
-- multifarious relations -- in other words,  
Truth -- will be part of humanity's new, soon-to-  
be developed equipment. Thanks of course, not  
to Us, but to. . . . (p. 122)

Later in the novel it is suggested that time is an essential factor which determines how things come into being in time, "But the element in which this process exists is -- Time. Time is the whole point. Timing." (p.245).

It was suggested in Chapter Two that novels which deal with subjectivity may be classified in Muir's theory as "dramatic" novels. Muir's idea that the "dramatic" novel moves in time as opposed to space suggests a cause for the experimentation with time. Novels which are solely concerned with subjectivity, as many modern novels are, often include, or argue for, existential time. Examples of this are evident in the novels already cited. The essential ingredient of the "dramatic" novel is extended as the novel attempts more and more to deal exclusively with individualism. Historical time is not the time which can accommodate the perceptions of the human mind.

The exclusive attention to human consciousness is accompanied by the use of existential time in Pincher Martin. In this novel Golding does more than present the dying moment of a sailor; the function of Pincher Martin's mind at the moment of death is essentially an examination of human consciousness. In order to examine human consciousness the author employs existential time. In one single moment the thoughts of the past, present and future

take place in the mind of the protagonist. The central image which runs throughout the novel is that of the rock, and the attempt of Pincher Martin is to apply this solidity to the mental operations which he experiences. Existential time accommodates the difference between the metaphysical and the physical; only through the idea of existential time can the consciousness of Martin be explained, "His mind inside the dark skull made swimming movements long after his body lay motionless in the water." (p.13).

The examination of human consciousness which takes place in Pincher Martin includes an existential statement from the protagonist:

There is no centre of sanity in madness. Nothing like this "I" sitting in here, staving off the time that must come. The last repeat of the pattern. Then the black lightning. The centre cried out.

"I'm so alone! Christ! I'm so alone!" (p. 165)

The use of existential time precipitates a manifestation of the central problem which Existentialism attempts to deal with. The eventual disintegration of Pincher Martin into "Christopher and Hadley and Martin" (p. 148), and the discovery that the rock "proved to be as insubstantial as the painted water" (p. 184) suggests that there is nothing permanent in existential being. In the realm of consciousness Martin must remain alone and the use of existential time by the author emphasises this fact.

Grendel, John Gardner's re-telling of the Beowulf legend also takes place in existential time. Grendel's conversation with the dragon reveals the Universe in a very different way from the manner in which it is normally seen:

"Illusion" he said. He half smiled, then let it go as if infinitely weary, sick of Time. "I know everything, you see" the old voice wheedled. "The beginning, the present, the end. Everything. You now, you see the past and the present, like other low creatures: no higher faculties than memory and perception. But dragons, my boy, have a whole different kind of mind." (p. 53)

Grendel suggests that "The ultimate evil is that Time is perpetual perishing and being actual involves elimination" (p. 115). The existential nature of Grendel leads him to make the same kind of statement as Pincher Martin: "I was alone" (p. 69). Grendel's assertion that "My wickedness five years ago, or six, or twelve, has no existence except as now" (p. 128), repeats the idea of time suggested by Heidegger in Being and Time. The past is only valid as it contributes to the present. The contrast between historical and existential time in The Weekend Man is also central to the historical time of Hrothgar and the existential time of Grendel. The essential difference in this re-telling is that existential rather than historical time is used.

The event which can cancel the individual's sense

of time, whether it be existential, cosmic or historical, is death. The state of "non-being", as Choron has pointed out, is the source of existential anxiety:

Existential anxiety, which "belongs to existence as such", is said to differ from pathological anxiety in the sense that it has an "object", this object however being "the negation of every object", "the ultimate nonbeing".<sup>2</sup>

The prospect of "nonbeing" is also the source of "fear" and "dread"; through the prospect of death the individual experiences the void which, like death, carries no meaning. It must be noted, however, that for many existential philosophers this condition in the face of death is what enables one to lead an existential life. Only in such an immediate situation can one "overcome" or pursue "authentic" existence. Thus, in existential terms death is not regarded in a negative sense but rather as providing the necessary condition for the courage of existential existence. The horror of death which man has experienced in historical time is made to appear positive in existential time.

Two interpretations of death arise from contemporary thought: it is either positive or negative. The idea of dread as positive is ironically portrayed by Billy Pilgrim

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<sup>2</sup>J. Choron, Death and Modern Man (New York, 1972), p. 153.

in Slaughterhouse Five, "Billy was guided by dread and the lack of dread. Dread told him when to stop. Lack of it told him when to move again. He stopped....." (p.73).

Rather than promoting action in Billy Pilgrim, the protagonist ceases action when confronted by dread. Although the function of dread is reversed, it exposes the idea as a positive one. The presence of dread makes Billy aware of himself and his situation. Self awareness is not the result of the obsession with death in The Bell Jar.

Throughout the novel, beginning with the Rosenbergs, death is a central issue. The insanity of the protagonist is precipitated by the thought of death as the ultimate event; the author cannot accept the fact that death will be the culmination of her existence. The Bell Jar, in contrast, depicts death in a negative sense. It is eventually responsible for the negation of Esther Greenwood.

The concentration on the psychological in contemporary fiction is an attempt to give meaning to existence; against the threat of "nonbeing" the mind of the individual is analysed in an attempt to combat meaninglessness. The event of his father's death which David Staunton experiences in The Manticore sends him to Switzerland in order to discover his identity. Self discovery is precipitated here by the presence of death. Without the intrusion of death the protagonist may not have embarked on the process of

seeking his own identity. The influencing quality of fear is also expressed by Margaret Atwood in Surfacing when she states that "Fear has a smell as love does" (p. 78). In both cases fear, which results from events external to the individual mind, is influential. The search in Surfacing for the protagonist's father is through fear of the unknown; David Staunton is obsessed with fear as a result of his father's death.

The implication of Choron's definition of "Existential anxiety" is that characters may become neurotic in the face of "nonbeing". That is, the effort to give meaning to being is accompanied by irrational behaviour. The use of "Existential time" to illustrate the mind of the individual does expose anxiety; confusion is often the result of the past and future residing in the present. Anxiety is clearly evident in Oedipa Maas. It is also prominent in the protagonist of Surfacing as well as Stacey in The Fire Dwellers. There are, in fact, few major characters in the contemporary novel who are completely free from anxiety. Even Stoner, a representative of traditional ways, is anxious about his own being in the sense that he does not fully understand it or the life that he leads.

The way death is seen in the modern world is stated by Norman Mailer in Why Are We In Vietnam?; "is not D.J. really white, really walking at sixteen into the vale where the death of breath crosses all eternal wires?....". (p.60).

What Mailer is suggesting here is that the breath of death touches everything; there is nothing in the Universe which can escape this inevitable conclusion. Death is also the goal which Rusty seeks, on p116; he must prove his superiority in death over animals, otherwise, as Mailer states, "He, Rusty, is fucked unless he gets that bear, for if he don't, white men are fucked more they can take no more.. he reads the world's doom in his own fuckup....." (p.116).

More important than the individual confrontation with death is the idea that "the death of breath crosses all eternal wires". It is precisely this kind of notion that is the source of meaninglessness. The eventual perishability of everything is that which questions the essence of existence.

This concept of death is responsible for the morbid context in which many modern novels are written. Indeed, it is not easy to cite many contemporary novels which celebrate life and make no reference to the mutability of the environment in which they exist. As religious possibility has become questionable in many cases the idea of permanence no longer prevails; death for individual existence has also added to this environment. Such an

environment is presented by William Golding in The Pyramid. The impressions which are experienced by Oliver take place in an environment which is essentially negative. Stilbourne is a society which clearly depicts the futility of existence. Against this futility Oliver is unable to make any sense of his experiences. That is, he cannot form a meaningful picture in such an environment. As the name suggests, Stilbourne symbolises a society which is permeated by death. At the end of the novel, as Oliver leaves Stilbourne, he has been unable to establish any connection between the three stages of his life. The stages in his development are separate and the redundancy of Stilbourne has not equipped him to deal with the world beyond. It is, in effect, the influence and image of Stilbourne which remains in Oliver's mind rather than his own perceptions.

The development of Del Jordan in Lives of Girls and Women is not unlike that of Oliver. The town of Jubilee, like Stilbourne, represents death to the protagonist. The discussion of suicide which takes place in the Epilogue is an extension of the continual references to death throughout the work. Like Oliver the final image of Del Jordan is her departure from Jubilee ill-equipped to meet the "real life". The distinction between "real life" and Jubilee suggests that life in Jubilee is different. In such a setting there is no development of the individual and again the environment is the influencing factor:

I looked at these lovers lying on the graveyard grass without envy or curiosity. As I walked on into Jubilee I repossessed the world. Trees, hoses, fences, streets came back to me, in their own sober and familiar shapes. . . . This is first a blow, then an odd consolation. And already I felt my old self -- my old devious ironic, isolated self -- beginning to breathe, again and stretch and settle, though all around it my body clung cracked and bewildered, in the stupid pain of loss. (p. 199)

For both Del Jordan and Oliver growing up is a painful process. The reason that it is painful is because they both exist in a society in which death is forever present. The presence of death makes them unable to arrive at any meaning for their own individual existence.

In both The Pyramid and Lives of Girls and Women death has a negative meaning. Neither Oliver nor Del Jordan can conceive of death as a means of existential awareness. This is also the case with Bruno in Bruno's Dream. The ease and gaiety with which Aunt Augusta moves through Travels with My Aunt is absent for characters who regard death in a negative sense. The point of Greene's novel is that Henry Pulling eventually accepts Aunt Augusta's way of life; he moves from regarding death in a negative sense, symbolised by his mother's funeral, to death as a positive thing. Henry's wish to identify with Aunt Augusta's existential existence is clearly the culmination of the novel.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis suggests that the world which has produced the contemporary novel is distinctly different from any preceding age. This difference has been summarised in the following way:

Adrift, identity-less, isolated from society and even from community, cut off from viable traditions, his country constricted, its reputation limited, its advice scorned -- the contemporary English writer, the emerging writer of the seventies, faces monumental tasks quite different from those of his predecessors in this or the last century.<sup>1</sup>

At the beginning of The Contemporary English Novel, Frederick Karl comments upon the comparison of the fiction in one era to another. He states:

To compare the fiction of one era with that of another is an inevitable consequence of criticism, but one that is valid only when the comparison, or contrast, brings forth values and does not destroy them.<sup>2</sup>

The "values" which are brought forth in the comparison of modern fiction with novels of preceding ages are existential values. Literature from preceding times shows

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<sup>1</sup>F. R. Karl, The Contemporary English Novel (New York, 1972), p. 327.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

that values in the modern novel are different; it does not destroy them. These values obtain their difference because the contemporary novel concentrates on the individual rather than society.

To exemplify this point the theory of Edwin Muir may be applied. Muir's notion of "Space" and "Time" in the novel was intended to explain the nature of novels written before the Second World War. The Structure of the Novel is aimed at dealing with writers such as Lawrence, Woolf and the revolutionary James Joyce. The references to such novelists as Trollope, Dickens and Thackeray fulfill the criteria set by Karl for comparability; the values of early twentieth-century literature may be appreciated through their comparison with Trollope, Thackeray, Dickens and George Eliot. The critical theory evolved by Muir, however, is useful in comparing the novels written in the latter part of the present century. Muir's theory, rather than being inapplicable to the modern novel, shows that values are different; the way that they are different is shown by the works of James, Lawrence, Joyce and Woolf.

The reason why contemporary fiction is different is because it concentrates to a great degree on the individual. As Karl has stated, "Perhaps this is the new sensibility; that community exists wherever the individual rests".<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> F.R.Karl, The Contemporary English Novel, (New York, 1972), p.325.

It is also the reason why Existentialism, appears so often in the modern novel. Existentialism is also concerned with the individual; the goal of Existentialism is to show how this individuality may be achieved and maintained. Previous concern with society and the individual in the 19th century has moved almost exclusively towards the individual in the 20th century. To accommodate this change Muir's criteria for the "dramatic" novel has been extended. Time is the subject of experiment.

The concepts of existential thought which appear in the modern novel then, focus upon the individual. The six classifications stated in Chapter One are aspects of individual consciousness. It is to be expected that an age so concerned with the individual should be disposed towards subjectivity rather than objectivity. In some cases, Durrell for example, it is necessary for the subjective and the objective to combine as the ingredients of a successful novel. But clearly objectivity is not the yardstick in contemporary fiction; the yardstick is the individual; particularly the mind of the individual. Rather than emphasising the presence of subjectivity in the contemporary novel, it is more effective to draw attention to the lack of objectivity. There are no novels in which objectivity plays a larger part than subjectivity; the presence

of objectivity exists for the examination of what meaning it might have for the subjective mind.

The manner of existence for the subjective mind is laid out in existential philosophy as well as the contemporary novel. Oedipa Maas, Grendel, Billy Pilgrim, Arthur Sammler and Bruno are characters who express Kierkegaard's idea of "persistent striving". The reason for this manner of subjective existence is that it provides a substitute for the meaning which has disappeared from the universe. In many contemporary novels the universe cannot be explained and consequently it is meaningless. Vonnegut, Murdoch, Gardner and Reed all take this view. The idea of a meaningless universe is asserted by both Nietzsche and Sartre. The emphasis on the individual man was precisely a result of this meaninglessness. The only possible meaning that remained lay in the mind of the individual.

The decline of religion and the lack of feasibility in a Christian God was accentuated by Nietzsche. His statement finds a good deal of support in contemporary fiction. The absence of God is also responsible for the concentration on the individual in the contemporary novel. The attention to the psychological rather than religion in The Manticore, Surfacing, The Bell Jar and The Crying of Lot 49 exemplify Nietzsche's statement that

"God is dead". In these novels the possibility of religious belief is not considered. The attempt to give meaning is through the mind of the protagonist. Where discussion of God takes place religion does not appear in the positive manner that it did in preceding centuries. This can be seen in the indecision manifested in The Fire Dwellers and the uncertainty in Travels with My Aunt. In some contemporary fiction religion is assumed but not discussed; the Jewish environment of St Urbain's Horseman is an example of this.

A change in the idea of time is expressed in existential philosophy and also in the contemporary novel. Concentration on the mind of the individual led to experimentation with time; the result, "existential time", had already been expressed by Heidegger in Being and Time. If the mind was the only reality for the individual then clearly "historical time" was not descriptive of the way in which the mind operates. This change in the concept of time permeates contemporary fiction. In some cases novels are written solely within the framework of "existential time". Reed's Mumbo Jumbo and Pynchon's The Crying of Lot 49 are interesting examples. Mailer, Vonnegut, and Durrell also use "existential time" to a great extent. The interest in the individual, in one way or another, leads contemporary authors towards a different view of time. That is,

the more a novel concentrates on the psychological aspects of its characters the less "historical time" is used.

The existential notion of anxiety also prevails in contemporary fiction. The stronger concepts of "fear" and "dread" are also apparent. The positive side of these ideas, however, has not found the same degree of currency with modern authors as it has with existential philosophers. Anxiety is often considered to be detrimental to human existence rather than a source for its correct manner of being. Anxiety is often conveyed in contemporary fiction as a neurosis in the minds of major characters. This neurosis is exemplified in The Bell Jar, Surfacing, The Fire Dwellers and Why Are We In Vietnam?. A more positive attitude towards death is taken in Grendel and Mumbo Jumbo. The anxiety exhibited by the protagonists in the first group of novels is not apparent in Grendel or the existential experience of "Jew Grew". In the existential experience, manifested in these later novels, anxiety disappears. As existential philosophers would want to suggest, anxiety is a means to an end.

The importance of existential philosophy to the contemporary novel may be explained in the following way: authors of today take a view of the world which includes

many of the thoughts contained in existential philosophy, so that the contemporary novel is indebted, in a limited sense to Existentialism. It would be naive to suggest that contemporary authors have arrived at their convictions as a direct result of studying existential philosophy. In some cases the author is not aware of using concepts that have been discussed by existential philosophers.

The service that Existentialism offers the reader of contemporary fiction is that it helps explain what may appear inexplicable. Existentialism may be regarded as a frame of reference for understanding the contemporary novel. The similarities between Existentialism and contemporary fiction are recognizable: both attempt to formulate a meaning for the individual in modern society. The fact that existential thought was developed in the 19th century shows that the problem of existence in an alien environment is not just a problem of the 20th century. Existential ideas which appear in many contemporary works show that the analysis of existence is the only way in which the being of the individual can combat the inhuman elements of present society. In this sense the contemporary novel and Existentialism complement each other. Both are seeking a solution to the dilemma of man in a modern society.

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