

POSTMODERN OR POST-CATHOLIC?
A STUDY OF BRITISH CATHOLIC WRITERS AND THEIR FICTIONS IN A
POSTMODERN AND POSTCONCILIAR WORLD

by

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SUMMARY:

This thesis is an investigation into the nature of the 'postmodern' narrative strategies and fictional methods in the work of two British Catholic writers. The work of David Lodge and Muriel Spark is here taken as an example of the 'Catholic novel'. In order to determine if the overlap of postmodern and Christian-influenced narrative strategies constitutes more than a convergence or coincidence of formal concerns, narrative form in these novels is analyzed in the light of neo-Thomist and Thomist aesthetics, a traditional Catholic Christian theory of the arts. The 'postmodern' in these 'Christian' texts becomes largely a coincidence of terminology. Narrative forms which can be classified as 'postmodern' can also be categorized using the terminology of Thomas Aquinas. The apparent similarities betray radically divergent metaphysical presuppositions, however. The nature of the Catholic 'difference' lies in the way postmodern forms are used to challenge the metaphysical bases of those forms.

TITLE OF THESIS:

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis is about the postmodern novel. It approaches postmodernity from an unusual angle. It looks at texts whose *form* is ostensibly postmodern but are committed nevertheless to a Catholic Christian understanding of the world. The allegiance to Catholicism is not merely an item in the personal lives of the authors themselves, it expresses itself in some startling *sui generis* attitudes to narrative construction and representation. We could speak of a convergence of formal strategies in the postmodern novel and in Christian-oriented works.

This thesis will argue that the Catholic novel is epistemologically different. It is different at the point of origin, even if the result is similar to what is being done in other kinds of novels. In what ways is the Catholic novel different? Formally, what is the nature of this difference? There exists no systematic Catholic theory of the novel, although neo-Thomism had much to say, *lato sensu*, on what constituted a Christian work of art. The appearance of neo-Thomist aesthetics coincided with the rise of the Catholic novel in Britain, France and the USA. A study of the Catholic novel using the theoretical terms proposed by neo-Thomism shows that in many instances the theory coincided with the actual writing practice. The theory gives a name and explains the writing practice.

Neo-Thomist aesthetics do not explain everything. There are a number of gaps and inconsistencies in the application of neo-Thomist theory to the Catholic realist novel. The realist novel emphasizes some of the aspects of the theory. The less emphasized aspects in the theory *vis-à-vis* the realist novel are of interest since what the theory envisions is a self-referential, formalist artwork. This has some relevance to the more formalist 'postmodern' Catholic novel.

Neo-Thomism is a theoretical articulation of what a Catholic Christian artwork is. It provides a theoretical *norm* from which these works may be viewed. Works may or may not diverge from the norm. Transgressions are revealing in that they tell us how Catholic writers have viewed their craft, how they have responded to the

weight of tradition, and how they have altered the form of the work in order to respond to new needs.

In order to explore the nature of the form of the Catholic novel in a postmodern age, and in particular the form as it has been theorized by neo-Thomism (and sometimes by Thomism itself), it becomes necessary to prepare some of the groundwork beforehand. This thesis tells a story, or various stories. It is the story of the Catholic novel and the narrative strategies it adopted. It is also the story of neo-Thomist aesthetics. I have called these the Aesthetics of Order. It is with these aesthetics of order that we enter the postmodern age. The route might appear unnecessarily circuitous and long, but I did not have a systematized theory to work from, and neither have neo-Thomists aesthetics been used as a theory of the Catholic novel. The application of neo-Thomist aesthetics is necessarily contentious. Neo-Thomist aesthetics are, for one, too abstract. If we try hard enough we can peg almost anything on to the theory.

But there are also reasons why they explain narrative form in a way other theories cannot. Neo-Thomism is constructed around certain metaphysical presuppositions, and so is the Catholic novel. This thesis will try show that such metaphysical presuppositions generate certain kinds of approaches to art, representation and construction. If in the process of 'trying to show' the workings and the applications of a relatively unknown theory I have laboured over a point it is because the territory was uncharted, the markers by no means clear. Sometimes the falsettos of style and the didactic tone, more than to help the reader, were there to guide the writer, as signs of faith in what was being said.

NEO-THOMIST AESTHETICS AND THE CATHOLIC NOVEL

And, when we proscribe that scholastic philosophy must be followed, what is of capital importance is that it should mean that which was taught by St Thomas Aquinas; we desire that all of which was determined by Our Predecessor [Pope Leo XIII] should be enforced, and in the needs of that we renew and confirm that, ordering that it be observed to the letter ... Let the theological edifice be constructed solidly over these philosophical foundations.

Pope Pius X (1907:70-1; my translation)

He had discovered how much they had in common: the plaster statues with the swords in the bleeding hearts: the whisper behind the confessional curtains: the holy coats and the liquefaction of blood: the dark side chapels and the intricate movements, and somewhere behind it all the love of God.

Graham Greene (1948; 1950rpt:49)

The post-Cartesian West defines its concepts in terms of opposites. Binary logic is at the root of Western thought. To define the concept of 'knowledge' we contrast it with 'ignorance', which is deemed inferior to it. Cartesian dualities such as mind/body or *reason/madness* are the conceptual blocks upon which Western thought has been constructed since the Age of Reason.

To conceptualize in terms of division generates division. The split between reason and madness occurred only during the Age of Reason (Foucault, 1979). The reason/madness division generates a body/mind split. The mad are perceived as divided selves: there is a dissociation between mind and body; the mind is perceived as standing outside the body. The self is perceived as a mental entity. This condition is what, in its most devastating forms, characterizes schizophrenia. The word means 'divided soul'. R.D. Laing calls the schizophrenic a 'divided self' (1971). In schizophrenia the Cartesian disjunction between mind and body becomes the actual manner in which the condition is experienced. The self is controlled

by disembodied voices, often of a frightening nature. The inability to control these voices, to make sense of the experience of being controlled by them, is manifest in the fragmentary, 'disordered' nature of schizophrenic discourse. According to Monique Plaza, modernist literature sometimes employs schizophrenic mechanisms, and this is particularly evident in the work of Artaud (1986: 29-39, 61-84). The schizophrenic has been theorized as an ideal self by anti-psychiatry (Laing, 1971) and in philosophy (Deleuze and Guattari, 1990).

Schizophrenia is an extreme example. It is also the logical response to a thinking whereby mind and body are perceived as dualities. Schizophrenia was catalogued as a disorder only in the nineteenth century. Madness did not of course begin in the nineteenth century. Schizophrenia was 'discovered' because madness had been conceptualized in opposition to reason. In the Middle Ages madness was *perceived* differently. It was not conceived as a *disorder*. Madness was part of much more fluid reality of things. Madness belonged in a world where, according to three psychiatrists:

People could become wolves, lead transmute into gold, fair foul and foul fair. It was possible to believe, at one and at the same time, both that living forms had each been created separately according to Biblical myth and had existed unchanged since those Edenic days, and that individuals were mutable. (Rose, Kamin, Lewontin, 1984:38)

Medieval thought was not immune to the need for conceptual dualities. Body and soul is a duality. St Augustine had distinguished between the body and the soul but he did not conceive them as a duality. Body and soul were unified in the same person and constituted a 'profound unity' (Van Steenberghen, 1990:127). The dualities of the Medieval world are not Cartesian binaries. That Descartes had not yet been born is not the reason. Medieval thinking integrates binaries within Order.

The philosophy of this ordered universe is scholasticism. Thomism, the philosophy of St Thomas Aquinas, is the *summa* of scholasticism. Thomism is a highly systematic and theoretical philosophical system — Umberto Eco speaks of its "geometric regularity" (1989b:154). Order determines the place of human beings within social and celestial hierarchies (Van Steenberghen, 1990:110). Society is

conceived as a commonweal and the interests of the individuals are subjugated to the needs of the common good. The neo-Thomist Thomas Gilby writes about the *bonum commune*: “[it] represented a collective idea when men were treated as individual units enclosed within the whole community — as, for instance, when it was said that a criminal, having lost his human dignity, could be excised from the body politic to which he was a danger” (1958:242). The approach is integrated — in the sense that it relates to the ‘whole’. It is not necessarily fair or just to the individual. Individualism is a concept derived from a different frame of reference.

Scholasticism is also a theological system. God is at the centre of this universe. Order radiates from God and returns to God. “The final and ultimate perfection can only be found in the vision of the essence of God”, writes Thomas Aquinas (cited by Rassam, 1988:62; my translation). God is the love at the centre of cosmos, Dante’s “*L’amor che move il sole e l’altre stelle*”¹ (*Il Paradiso*, XXXIII, l. 145). God cannot be abstracted from scholasticism. Religion is inseparable from scholastic metaphysics. If one removes God from the system the whole metaphysical system collapses. (We are speaking in metaphors — ‘foundation’, ‘edifice’, ‘structure’, ‘bases’ are metaphors derived from architecture. Metaphors never tell the whole story. The metaphor compares things in terms of their similarities, never in term of concurrent dissimilarities. The Thomist system is not merely a theoretical construction, it also the systematic articulation of a system of belief; that system is a religious one.)

Thomism was set down at a time when scholastic culture was already facing a crisis and was challenged by other competing philosophies such as neo-Platonism (Eco, 1989b:165-170). It reflected even less the post-Reformation reality of a Western Christianity *divided* in two. The universal Catholic state was no more. The Protestant/Catholic division had a finality which the Eastern Orthodoxy/Latin Catholic divide never had. (The relation between Eastern Orthodoxy and Western Catholicism had always been ambiguous; reunited at one time, many Eastern churches and monasteries were in communion with Rome.)

¹ “The love which moves the sun and the other stars” (my translation).

But by the time of Pius IX the greatest error in the eyes of the Church was no longer Protestantism but Modernity. Pius IX's *Syllabus Errorum* (1864) defined the *modern* errors as the Church viewed them. These included 'progress', 'liberalism' and 'modern civilization'. Liberalism in this context refers to the idea that "there is no positive truth in religion, but that one creed is as good as another" (Newman, 1964a:384). Progress is the idea that development could be attained through the progress of science. Faith is contrasted with science and is found wanting.

Modernity was also the legacy of the Enlightenment. With the *Aufklärung* religion comes to be regarded as a superstition. The term is significant. Superstition (*superstitio*) was the term legal-minded Imperial Rome used to designate the 'wild' religion of the popular classes. *Religio* was the 'official' state religion. With the *Aufklärung* the binaries have become inverted: philosophy is *religio*, religion *superstitio* (Trías, 1997: 115-7). Philosophy, starting with Voltaire, become suspicious of religion. The 'project' of the Enlightenment is not yet complete. Jacques Derrida talks about:

... a *certain* tradition of the Enlightenment, one of the many Enlightenments over the last three centuries ... this light from the Lights [Enlightenments] that runs through like a flashing spark, singly, a *certain* critical and anti-religious vigilance, anti-Judaeo-Christian-Islamic, a *certain* 'Voltaire-Feuerbach-Marx-Nietzsche-Freud-(and even)Heidegger' filiation. (1997:44; my translation)

Many of the great thinkers of the nineteenth century were not sympathetic to the Church or to the Christian religion. For Ludwig Feuerbach the whole notion of God was nothing more than a projection of man. "The absolute to man is his own nature", he writes. "The power of the object over him is therefore the power of his own nature" (1957:5). Friedrich Nietzsche, on the other hand, saw religion as a negation of the human ability to rise from man to superman. For him "God [was] a declaration of hostility towards life, nature, the will to life!" (1981:187). Karl Marx, writing in "The Mystery of the Fetishistic Character of Commodities", speaks of 'the nebulous world of religion' as a fetish "inseparable from commodity production" (1957:48).

In the eyes of the intelligentsia the Church had no credibility. It was regarded as superstitious and obscurantist. It was in this context that Pope Leo XIII, in his encyclical *Aeterni Patris* (1879), called for a return to the systematic study of Thomist philosophy.² The collected works of Aquinas were published under his auspices. The first edition of the *Summa* is called the Leonine. It was thought that through a well-trained clergy, solidly grounded in philosophy, the Church would influence the intellectual life of society. The highly systematic philosophy of St Thomas Aquinas — the word ‘Christian philosophy’ was coined by Leo XIII in his encyclical, it was never used by Aquinas — becomes, then, the philosophical response of Catholicism to Modernity.

The ‘modernist’ crisis in the early twentieth century would see the institutionalization of Thomism as the ‘official’ philosophy of the Catholic Church. Modernism in the sense that it is used by Catholics refers to something different from literary modernism. Edward Norman defines it as “the attempt by some Catholic scholars to apply historical and scientific knowledge to Biblical criticism, and to seek to claim for intellectual enquiry, and the methods by which it is conducted, a measure of autonomy from ecclesiastical authority” (1984:333). Pius X’s encyclical *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* (1907) condemned modernism as a heresy.

The pope’s encyclical called modernist scholars *virī loquentes perversa* (1907:9), men of perverse words. The existence of such men at Catholic institutions had led to the proliferation of what the pope called *pestilentiae cathedras* (68), ‘disciplines of pestilence’. The idea was that such men undermined the Catholic faith from within and could not be allowed to remain in the church. The best-known Modernists in England were Baron Friedrich von Hügel, a layman, and Fr George Tyrrell, a Jesuit. Tyrrell was excommunicated for criticizing Pius X’s *Pascendi* in

² I am of course simplifying. The Thomist renaissance does not date from Leo XIII’s pontificate or from his *Aeterni Patris*. Many theologians had been working on a restoration of Thomism. These included Taparelli, Liberatori, Sordi, Sanseverino, Signorelli and Cornoldi in Italy, Kleutgen, Denzinger, Schützler, Werner and Clemens in Germany and Gonzales in Spain. Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical was the final moment in a movement towards the restoration of Thomism.

the *Times* (White, 1989:166). In France the net was cast even wider and many theologians were silenced or forced to retract their views (Pierrard, 1996:297-9).

Thomism was to become a compulsory subject at all seminaries and pontifical institutions (Pius X, 1907:70). As a measure of his intent, the pope also declared that all doctoral candidates in Theology or Canon Law would henceforth have to complete a compulsory course in scholastic philosophy; where this had not taken place their degrees would be declared null and void (73).

Thomism had been largely urged on by Leo XIII. After *Pascendi* it acquired a further legitimacy. Neo-Thomist philosophers and theologians were working from a mainstream tradition that was sanctioned by the Church. Some neo-Thomists were clerics, such as Etienne Gilson and Thomas Gilby. Others, like Jacques Maritain, were laymen. Neo-Thomism, we could say, had its 'moment' this century, particularly in the decades that followed *Pascendi*.

One of the questions approached by neo-Thomism was the nature of the arts and of aesthetic experience. Aquinas himself did not leave behind a theory of the arts. His comments on aesthetics are scattered throughout his work. Two passages in the *Summa Theologiae*, the one found at I, 5, 4ad1, the other at I, 39, 8c, are the basis of Thomist thinking on the arts, although they link up with other conceptualizations expressed elsewhere. The frame of reference has proved to be a rich one. Both Jacques Maritain and Thomas Gilby published books on Thomist aesthetics. Maritain, a French philosopher, published his *Art et Scolastique* in 1920. (The enlarged edition, the one I cite in this study, came out in 1927.) Gilby, a Dominican philosopher, published his *Poetic Experience: An Introduction to Thomist Aesthetic* in England in 1934. (Herbert Ellsworth Cory published a further book, *The Significance of Beauty in Nature and Art*, in the United States in 1948. Unfortunately, because this book is something of a bibliographic rarity, I have not been able to consult it and have had to rely on secondary sources.)

Earlier this century, in British-controlled Ireland, James Joyce had also returned to the Thomist propositions and had tried "to forge out an esthetic philosophy" (1916; 1966rpt:179) on the basis of those propositions. A considerable amount of space in

The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (1916) is devoted to an analysis of Thomist aesthetics. Joyce's aesthetic thinking is partly derived from Aquinas. Joyce's indebtedness to Thomism is well-charted and many scholars have documented the degrees to which Joyce was faithful to, as well as the ways in which he transformed, the philosophy of the Angelic Doctor.³ Joyce called the great Dominican (*Donini canis*, the hound of the Lord) the "bulldog of Aquin, with whom no word shall be impossible" (1922; 1984rpt: 208). It is a measure of his tribute.

Joyce left the Catholic Church and cannot be considered a Catholic writer. His influence on Catholic writers should not however be underestimated. *The Portrait* is the first of many novels dealing with a Catholic upbringing. It is in many ways the 'model' text and other similar novels — such as Antonia White's *Frost in May* (1933) and Mary McCarthy's *Memoirs of a Catholic Girlhood* (1958) — need to be read in the context of Joyce's novel. Some of these writers left the Church, some did not. Joyce's relationship with Catholicism is also quite complex. For a writer like Anthony Burgess Joyce's Catholicism is more orthodox than that of the 'great' Catholic writers, Graham Greene and Evelyn Waugh. These, he states, "are less Catholic than the works of the great Jesuit apostate ... Joyce's residual Catholicism never really leaves the norm" (1982:31). Thomas Merton, the American poet/monk, converted to Catholicism after having read the novel (Eco, 1989a:4). It is not unfair to assume that Catholic writers would be influenced by Joyce.

Umberto Eco is another, later, addition to the Joyce-Maritain-Gilby triad of writers and theorists who have done much to make better known the Thomist conception of art. Eco's doctoral thesis was on the Aesthetic Problem in Thomas Aquinas and it was published as a book in 1956. The English version of his thesis was published in English only in 1988. Eco is not a neo-Thomist but his book is a useful exposition of Thomist aesthetics in the context of their time. Eco is a particularly useful reference when it is necessary to compare Thomist thought with its eventual utilization in neo-Thomism. This is sometimes necessary because the neo-Thomist aesthetics of Gilby and Maritain sometimes diverge from classical Thomism.

³ Beebe (1978), Levin (1941), Noon (1957), Eco (1989) are some of the critics who have dealt with Joyce's indebtedness to Aquinas.

Chronologically, the systematic exposition of neo-Thomist aesthetics coincides with the rise of the Catholic novel. By the Catholic novel I am referring to a new kind of novel, written by Catholics, which appeared in England and France. What distinguishes novels like François Mauriac's *Thérèse Desqueyroux* (1927), Georges Bernanos' *Journal d'Un Curé de Campagne* (1937) and Graham Greene's *The Power and the Glory* (1940), from other novels written in the same period is the attempt to suggest, within the novelistic form, a spiritual or other-worldly dimension. These are novels written at odds with the prevailing and dominant ways of thinking of the time. The world was secular, rationalist, and it was not open to the suggestions of a spiritual life. The Catholic writers wrote from the rear-guard. They were on the defensive. This included rendering a secularized, rationalist consciousness with irony, as though it were at fault. We read, in Graham Greene's *The Power and the Glory* (1940):

It infuriated him to think that there were still people in the state who believed in a loving and merciful God. There are mystics who are said to have experienced God directly. He was a mystic, too, and what he experienced was vacancy - a complete certainty in the existence of a dying, cooling world, of human beings who evolved from animals for no purpose at all. (1960rpt: 25)

The Catholic novel hints at another world, a secret life, that which Georges Bernanos called “[l]’univers invisible où respirent les grandes passions?”⁴ (cited by Tadié, 1997:77). The vocabulary used to talk about the Catholic novel uses words like ‘grace’, ‘spirit’, ‘damnation’. These are insubstantial words. Their power to signify is accepted only by those who share in the presupposition that they refer to something. Similarly with the Catholic novel. The territory of the Catholic novel is rendered in chiaroscuro. The ‘great passions’ arise from some darkened source and return to it: the “towards the worst horror of all” (1938; 1983rpt: 310) which ends Greene's *Brighton Rock*. Sometimes the chiaroscuro moves towards the light, but the light is an invisible one. It is as if there were things which could not be conveyed within the form of the novel. The sense is of something left hanging, as if the discourse terminated as it began. The novel hints at but is prohibited from

⁴ “The invisible universe where the great passions breathe” (my translation).

further exploring that other world. The novels of Mauriac, Bernanos, Greene (and later Flannery O'Connor) are in the realist mode. The 'world' they represent is ostensibly a material one. The novels work towards a verisimilitude with the world outside the novel.

The convergence of neo-Thomist aesthetics with the actual writing practice of the Catholic writers in the 1930s through to the early 60s has not generally been noticed. It is possible that Catholic writers were directly influenced by neo-Thomist aesthetic thought. The Joycean influence, through *The Portrait*, cannot be discounted either. There was, in England at least, a familiarity with Maritain as a figure.⁵ Flannery O'Connor quoted Aquinas frequently and her posthumous collection of essays (1984) shows the direct influence of Thomist aesthetics. To assess the extent to which Catholic writers knew and were influenced by neo-Thomist thought requires a study of a different nature, one that involves archival research rather than polemical speculations.

Neo-Thomism arose as part of an intellectual response by the Church to Modernity. Aesthetics were one of many themes investigated by neo-Thomism. The Church had an obvious interest in art and architecture since this was related to worship and had a liturgical function. Gilby and Maritain are not however merely concerned with the fine arts, they also look at poetry and drama. The concept of a 'Catholic literature' had also been bandied around since the end of the nineteenth century. There were John Henry Newman's essays on Catholic literature, originally given as lectures to the School of Philosophy at the projected Catholic University of Ireland. There was the French Catholic Literary Revival at the end of the nineteenth century. The 'revival', which coincided with Leo XIII's pontificate, was inaugurated with [Joris Karl] Huysman's novel *Là-Bas* (1891) and was continued with Léon Bloy's *La Femme Pauvre* (1897). The mixture of faith, decadence, and Gothic horror in these novels has still, to this day, not pleased all its commentators, some of whom have been inclined to dismiss this literature as less than Christian. Martin Green writes that this new literature initiated by Huysmans

⁵ See, for example, Antonia White's collection of letters written in the 1940s and published under the title *The Hound and the Falcon* (1989).

“belonged within the Romantic sub-species, [the] Satanic melodrama; [it was] rhetorical in language, violent in action, bitter and extremist in spirit” (1967:74). Maritain’s guidelines for a Christian art may have had something to do with the ‘decadence’ of this earlier type of Catholic fiction.

Another way of accounting for this convergence of theory (neo-Thomism) and creative endeavours (the Catholic novel) is to see it in the context of a ‘global paradigm’. The notion of a ‘global paradigm’ comes from Thomas Kuhn’s study of scientific knowledge. Kuhn’s central idea is that change in science does not come about through the continuous spiral of progress. Change comes about through a change in paradigm. A paradigm is a global vision which determines how things are viewed and understood. It refers to “the entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques, and so on shared by the members of a given community” (1971:175). Scientific change implies a total overhaul of the previous paradigm from the most general to the most elementary. Kuhn calls it “a reconstruction of the field from new fundamentals” (85).

If scientific and cultural developments can be said to change in paradigms the same could be argued for the Church. The Church should not be seen as an ‘unchanging institution’, although the term forms part of its populist rhetoric. For Hans Küng continuity and identity exist only in outward form. “[T]he ‘essence’ of the Church”, he writes, “is not a matter of metaphysical stasis, but exists only in constantly changing historical ‘forms’” (1967:4). Continuity co-exists with decisive ruptures. Many of the features that were considered until relatively recently essential to Catholicism were actually post-Tridentine innovations: Ignatian discipline, the obligatory use of the Roman rite, even the final part of the Hail Mary.

The Church changes in accordance with historical and practical necessity. The Church in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was different from the Church soon after the Council of Trent. The loss of the Papal States had ended the pope’s temporal power. The Church was forced to cohabit with many antagonistic anti-clerical or anti-Catholic governments: Bismarck’s Germany, the French Republic. The Church was an inward, alternative society. Its image of itself was of

a barge or Noah's ark floating on a sea of troubles, an ocean of modernism: the image appears again and again in Catholic literature: the "Barque of Peter" (Rolfe, 1904; 1958rpt: 131), "the Ark, the one and only refuge" (Baring, 1925:519). It was also a Church with many popes named Pius: Pius IX through to Pius XII (d. 1958). The period initiated with Pius IX's *Syllabus* (1864) has distinct characteristics of its own: the greater centralization around Rome (ultramontanism); the proclamation of Papal Infallibility; and the definition of dogmas of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary in 1854 and of the Assumption of Mary in 1950,⁶ probably the most sublime expressions of the theological conservatism of the preconciliar Church.

One reason why it can be said that endeavours of the theoreticians and the artists converged is that, as Catholic Christians working at a given historical moment, they shared in the same of the same global vision of the church. The existence of deviant theologies or oppositional movements (such as the 'modernists'), rather than pointing to competing visions, would merely confirm the existence of such a dominant vision to which some would react.

Why, in that period, the Catholic novel should have appeared mainly in Great Britain and France is an interesting question in itself. Although it is impossible to speak of the Catholic novel without reference to its French-language practitioners, it is outside the scope of this study to investigate the situation in France.⁷

In speaking of British Catholicism I am aware of the problematic nature of the term 'British'. Catholicism in the United Kingdom is no less problematic since it includes Ulster, historically part of the Irish Church. It is probably more correct to speak of English Catholicism, although the Knoxian dimension — the sense of opposition to Calvinism — is alien to it, at the same time that it is an important reference in the literature of Scottish Catholics. Much of what I say relates only to

⁶ The Immaculate Conception refers to Mary's conception without the stain (*macula*) of original sin; the term is often confused with Virgin Birth, which is something different. The belief that Mary, the mother of Christ, was assumed body and soul into the heaven (called the *Dormition* by the Eastern Orthodox churches) was long held in the 'deposit of faith', but there was always some reluctance in defining it as it would upset the sensibilities of Protestants who maintained that the belief was unbiblical.

⁷ Useful references in English are O'Donnel (1953) Griffiths (1966) and Birkett (1977).

the Church in England. The dominant literary figures in British Catholicism have been English.

The Catholic Church in England is a minority church, which it is not in Ireland. Since the time of Elizabeth I England has become definitively a Protestant country. Catholicism is contrasted with Protestantism, or dominant Anglicanism; it is the inferior part of a Catholic/Protestant binary. The Catholic community was small and insubstantial. As Catholics they were looked on as outsiders. John Henry Newman, writing in 1850, at the time of the restoration of the English hierarchy by Pius IX, tells us that Catholics were perceived as “a *gens lucifuga*, a people who shunned the light of day ... [and who were] dimly seen ... as ghost flitting to and fro, by the high Protestants, the lords of the earth” (1964a:170).

Newman sermon's “The Second Spring”, which I have quoted, is the quintessential text of the Catholic literary renaissance in England. It is not a text about literature, but the archetypes underlying it are particularly relevant to the future literature of English Catholics. His argument in “The Second Spring” is constructed around opposites — “high Protestant lords” versus “a *gens lucifuga*” (1964a:170). He inverts the order of the binaries by contrasting the second item with a third item, which supersedes the second. Hence we have the “glorious hierarchy” (168) of the pre-settlement Church versus the “corpse” (168) of what it became, followed by “the resurrection of the Church” (173). The most famous passage from the sermon reads: “The English Church was, and the English Church was not, and the English Church is once again. This is a portent, worthy of a cry. It is the coming of a Second Spring; it is a restoration in the moral world, such as that which yearly takes place in the physical” (167). The logic of Newman's construction, as well his as eloquence, should be self-evident.

The rise of a substantial body of literary works by Catholics in England (and in Scotland) should be seen in the context of these archetypes. ‘Catholic’ exists in opposition to ‘Protestant’, but at the same time it exists without the Protestant, as a step beyond or above it, one that has superseded it. Catholic literature does not exist in opposition to a Protestant literature. It is the annulment of Protestantism. It

posits itself as the authentic English tradition.⁸ If the Catholic novel exists in opposition to anything it is against modernity, secularism, and rationalism. In Scotland, where Presbyterian Calvinism remained a dominant force, much of Scottish Catholic literature can be read as an extended tract against Calvinism.⁹ This essential anti-Calvinist quality of Scottish Catholic literature is summed up by George Mackay Brown, who writes: "The word was imprisoned between black boards, and chained and padlocked, in the pulpit of the kirk" (cited by Bold, 1978:11).

The notion of a "Catholic literature" was also first theorized and analyzed by Newman. 'Literature' in the sense that it is used by Newman refers to what we would call 'letters'. Newman's idea is that English literature will have been Protestant. He writes: "we cannot extinguish [the Protestant writers] ... we cannot deny their power; we cannot write a new Milton or a new Gibbon; we cannot expurgate what needs to be exorcised" (1964b:296). Newman resolves the problem of creating letters of a specifically Catholic kind by accepting that its language will be no different from that of English culture. The 'difference' of Catholic letters will not reside in the difference of its language or diction. A Catholic literature will need to cohabit with the broader culture. At the same time Newman endorses Catholics' turning to literature and writing about their own concerns. "Catholics", he writes, "must do as their neighbours; they must be content to serve their generation, to promote the interests of religion, to recommend truth, and to edify their brethren today, though their works are to have little weight, and their works are not to last much beyond themselves" (1964c:309).

What is interesting about England since the end of the nineteenth century is the actual number of Catholics who turned to literature and wrote about matters of Catholic interest. Newman's words seem, in retrospect, to have been too humble in their aim. In a sense these Catholic writers were writing for the Catholic ghetto,

⁸ See Woodman (1991:53-57) for a discussion on the 'Englishness' of English Catholic literature.

⁹ Much of Scottish Catholic literature is virulently anti-Calvinist, the work of Compton Mackenzie and Fionn MacColla being the best examples of this. The work of George Mackay Brown and Muriel Spark can also be read in terms of this opposition to Calvinism, at a more sophisticated level. Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961), which we will analyze in Chapter Three, is a critique of Calvinist notions of predestination and the way these are translated into literary form.

although often their popularity extended beyond it. The list of Catholic novelists in English is a long one. Some of these were popular novelists whose work has since been forgotten. The British Catholic tradition also includes names like G.K. Chesterton, Hilaire Belloc, Graham Greene, Evelyn Waugh, Antonia White, J.R.R. Tolkien, Muriel Spark, David Lodge, George Mackay Brown, Alice Thomas Ellis, Beryl Bainbridge. Many of these writers, like Newman, were converts to Catholicism.

To call the body of novels written by Catholics 'the Catholic novel' has a number of inherent methodological pitfalls. 'Catholic novel' would seem to confuse the text with the writer. Such problems are less likely to exist where a literature is defined in terms of a national or local language. The problem of creating a Catholic language was, as we have seen, expressed by Newman. However, no linguistic solution could be suggested. English Catholicism, at least in the nineteenth century, did not have at its disposal any kind of idiolect which would have established some sort of linguistic difference. Since many of the writers were upper-class or educated converts it was also not likely that they would use working-class Irish English as a means of literary expression. The Catholic novel is invisible to the reader at the level of language. Catholic terminology — 'nuns', 'mass' — had always existed in anti-*Romish* Protestant folklore and was intrinsic to pre- and post-Reformation English.

I have opted to define the Catholic novel in two ways. The first is at the level of content. This was also Newman's position. A Catholic novel is a novel written about the Catholic sub-world. It does not follow that such a novel needs to be written by a Catholic. Most of Chesterton's books were written before his formal conversion. Rolfe and Firbank, both converts, wrote satires in which Catholicism figures prominently; their lives would be considered unedifying by the standards of the Church (see Symons, 1934).

A second way of defining the Catholic novel is to consider it as a novel written from a perspective informed by Catholicism. This perspective need not be that of the ecclesiastical authorities. Flannery O'Connor defines the Catholic novel thus: "[it] is not necessarily about a Christianized or Catholicized world, but simply that

it is one in which the truth as Christians know it has been used as light to see the world by" (1984c:173). Josephine Jacobsen talks about a work "which sees all things within the focus of belief" (1964:139). The author of such a novel need not be a Catholic. Anthony Burgess' *Earthly Powers* (1980) could be perhaps included in this category. The work of the later Graham Greene, where there is neither a Catholic perspective on events nor the portrayal of a 'Catholic world', could not be regarded as belonging to that class of novels called the Catholic novel.

This study will concentrate on the works of Muriel Spark and David Lodge. Those works by these two novelists which we will approach in this study can be categorized, to lesser or greater degrees, depending on the text in question, by both definitions. Muriel Spark and David Lodge also exemplify the plural nature of British Catholicism. Spark is Scots, and has written about Scotland, although she has lived in Italy for many years and has often written of a European world. Lodge is English and has written about middle-class Catholicism in England. Spark is a convert to Catholicism, Lodge is a 'cradle-Catholic', meaning that he was born into the faith.

Both Spark and Lodge write at a time when the Catholic novel is said to have died (Hebblethwaite, 1967; Bergonzi, 1980). The Catholic novel has usually been exemplified by the works of Evelyn Waugh and Graham Greene. It has, furthermore, been identified with the inward-looking Church of the period preceding the Second Vatican Council (1962-5).

The Second Vatican Council was called by Pope John XXIII, the successor to Pius XII. Pope John's declared aim was to "shake off the dust that has collected on the throne of St Peter since the time of Constantine and let in some fresh air" (cited by Lodge, 1982rpt:80). Constantine was the emperor who made the Christian faith the official religion in the Roman Empire. The Constantinian reference is to the Church-State nexus; in this context it indicates a call for a greater fidelity to the evangelical mission of the Church.

John XXIII (d. 1963) did not live to see the end of the Council. It was supervised by his successor, Paul VI, who signed the main document produced by the

Council, the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World of Today* (1966), better known as *Gaudium et Spes*. The emphasis of *Gaudium et Spes* is on plurality, best summed up by the document's famous line: "Let there be unity in things essential, liberty in things doubtful, charity in all things" (1966:93). References to the Church as the sole custodian of the universal are replaced by references to 'the human family'. The Reformed and Orthodox churches, traditionally regarded as heretical, are recognized as 'ecclesiastical [ecclesial] communities' (39). The most obvious sign of the Church's new pluralism was the abolition of Latin as the language of the liturgy in the Western Church. (Eastern-rite or 'Uniate' Catholics had always used their own liturgical languages.) Latin is replaced by the vernacular, the homogeneous by the plural.

The change-over to a liturgy in the vernacular has another significance for Christian writers because the Church, in some countries at least, invited writers to participate in its commissions to produce the new liturgies in the vernacular. Muriel Spark was a member of the International Committee on English in the Liturgy. ICEL produced the new English missal for the British Isles and Africa. The importance of this lies in the fact that the institutional church acknowledged her role as writer who had a fine command of language and who was also not against being identified with Christian causes. Neither Muriel Spark nor David Lodge has, however, been appointed to the Pontifical Council for Culture, as Walker Percy (d.1990), the American Catholic writer, had been. Even if their names were suggested for appointment it is also unlikely, going by their works, that either of these two writers would want to be identified with John Paul II's brand of Catholicism.¹⁰

The Church under John Paul II, who succeeded to the pontifical chair in 1978, has seen the return of many of the disciplinary methods used by the preconciliar popes. 'Deviant' theologians have been silenced. These include Hans Küng, Leonardo Boff and Charles Curran. Their theologies challenge the Church's views on

¹⁰ In an interview to *Newsweek* Spark had this to say about the present pope: "The pope is a Pole first, a pope second and a Christian third. [He] hasn't much spirituality. He's a Polish statesman, full of subterfuges. He understands running the Catholic Church as a Pole would run Poland" (1992b:56).

authority, political involvement and human sexuality. Many of the 'excesses' of the postconciliar church have been curbed. These range from the too close identification of Catholicism with certain political and 'land' struggles in Latin America, to liturgical syncretism in Zambia and Zaïre [Congo], to the use of altar-girls in Canada. Vatican II introduced many changes, such as a more ecumenical attitude to other Christians, but the Church under John Paul II also cautions us to read for continuity with the preconciliar church. Whether it is possible to speak of a new 'paradigm', even if it relates only to how Catholics have come to view the Church, is not something that can be explored within the confines of this brief summary.¹¹

There was, in the immediate period following Vatican II, the possibility that Catholic theology would move beyond Thomist orthodoxy. *Optatam Totius* (1970), the decree on the education of priests, suggests that attention should be given to the more recent developments in theology and to the philosophical traditions of each country. The decree states that this would be "the only way the Church would be adequately prepared to dialogue with modern man" (1970:18; my translation).

Many of the new theologies that appeared in the postconciliar period challenge the Church's claim to authority. (Hans Küng is the best known of these theologians.) John Paul II remains committed to the Thomist model. He has also acknowledged his own personal indebtedness to Jacques Maritain, the French neo-Thomist (Gendreau, 1985:44). For John Paul II the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas is still useful because it offers a synthesis of universal truths and is open to 'modern developments' (Ibid:49). The vision of the 'official' Church still relies on Thomist notions of the world and universe. This is most evident in the 'social teaching' of the Church.¹² Thomism cannot be said to have been superseded with Vatican II.

¹¹ The references for this paragraph on John Paul II's pontificate are: Hebblethwaite (1980), Colonna-Cesari (1992) and Willey (1993).

¹² The term 'the social teaching' of the Church refers to the papal encyclicals which were concerned with defining a Christian position regarding 'social' issues. Included among these were Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* (1891), Pius XI's *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931), John XXIII's *Mater et Magister* (1961), Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio* (1967) and *Octogesimo Anno* (1971), and John Paul II's *Laborem Exercens* (1981) and *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1988). A recurrent thread in all these encyclicals is the idea of society as a common good and also the idea that all members of any

The proliferation of Catholic novels in England (and France) coincided with the appearance of neo-Thomist aesthetics. There is an overlap between theory and practice insofar as the theory names and explicates some of the narrative strategies used in the Catholic novel. We will explore neo-Thomist aesthetics, as well as the nature of the convergence between the Catholic novel and neo-Thomist aesthetics, in Chapter Two. The Catholic novel will be the Catholic novel as it was, the realist novel. Viewed from the perspective of neo-Thomist aesthetics the realist novel will be viewed as an incomplete practice insofar as the novel cannot accommodate some of the more interesting aspects of the theory. The next question we will pose will be as follows: to what extent do these Aesthetics of Order explicate and give a name to the narrative strategies of novels written in the 'postmodern age' and to what extent do these novels depart from the formulaic definitions of 'Christian art' set out by neo-Thomism? For the purposes of shorthand postmodernism will be used to refer to the period when the form of the novel began to adopt techniques which came to be theorized as 'postmodern'. It is hence not a 'period' but an attitude to form which reflects many underlying philosophical assumptions. The 'postmodern' form will be defined at a later stage.

We cannot however investigate the relation between the Catholic novel and postmodernity without reference to the Second Vatican Council. The Council altered many of the ways Catholics viewed the world. It was also perceived as a momentous experience by writers themselves. Evelyn Waugh, in a letter to Nancy Mitford in 1965, wrote: "The buggering up of the Church is a deep sorrow to me and to all I know" (1981:633). In her novel *In This House of Brede* Rumer Godden writes that the changes by the Council came not as "a fresh breeze as perhaps Pope John had intended, but in gusts, damaging storms" (1969:388). Alice Thomas Ellis' *The Sin Eater* (1977) is especially scathing about the progressiveness of the Church after Vatican II:

It is as though ... one's revered, dignified and darling old mother had slapped on a mini-skirt and fishnet tights and started ogling strangers. A kind of menopausal madness, a

society have a legitimate right to its resources. The position of most popes, while anti-Communist, was clearly also anti-capitalist.

sudden yearning to be attractive to all. It is tragic and hilarious and awfully embarrassing. And, of course, those who knew her before feel a great sense of betrayal and can't bring themselves to see her anymore. (1986rpt: 98-9)

Anthony Burgess' epic novel *Earthly Powers* (1980) is similarly antagonistic to the post-conciliar Church. Carlo, Pope Gregory, is a take off on John XXIII. The pope's insistence on human goodness and his insistence that evil is the realm of the Devil (and Carlo is also an exorcist and the casting out of spirits is literal) seems to run counter to the traditional Catholic dogma of original sin. Toomey, the novelist-narrator, is critical of Carlo's inability to face up to radical human evil, exemplified by the Holocaust: "I wanted to have Carlo with me there to smell the ripe gorgonzola of innate human evil and to dare say that mankind was God's creation and hence good" (458). Ironical also is the fact that a boy that Carlo miraculously 'cures' later grows up to be a psychopathic cult-leader. It is also as a result of the postconciliar liturgical innovations that the pope's (and the narrator's) nephew and his wife are sacrificed as part of an African vernacular mass that has cannibalistic rites.¹³

Given the way the Council was received by Catholic writers in Britain I have opted to separate works written before and after the Council. This will raise the question of whether the Council altered the way Catholic novels responded to post-modernity. Thus we will study two novels written before the Council and two after the Council, in the following order: Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (Chapter Three) and David Lodge's *The British Museum Is Falling Down* (Chapter Four), Lodge's *How Far Can You Go?* (Chapter Five) and Spark's *Not to Disturb* (Chapter Six). The extent to which the Catholic novel approximates, distances itself from, usurps and plays with the modes of the postmodern novel will be analyzed from the perspective of neo-Thomist aesthetics. The theoretical sub-terrain will thus explore the manner in which the Aesthetics of Order converge with and diverge from the forms of the postmodern novel.

¹³ Not all Catholic writers were critical of the post-conciliar Church. Graham Greene's sympathetic portrayal of Father Rivas, the guerrilla priest in *The Honorary Consul* (1973), suggests an openness to the new mood in the Church. The work of the early Paul Piers Read, particularly *Game in Heaven with Tussy Marx* (1966) and *Monk Dawson* (1969), was not unsympathetic to the reforms of Vatican II. Read has since adopted a more conservative doctrinal and political line (Tóibín, 1995:261).

THE AESTHETICS OF ORDER

Find these and you find the qualities of universal beauty. Aquinas says: *Ad pulcritudinem tria requiruntur integritas, consonantia, claritas*. I translate it so: *Three things are needed for beauty, wholeness, harmony, and radiance*.

James Joyce (1966rpt:208)

Probably the devil plays the greatest role in the production of that fiction from which he himself is absent as an actor. In any case, I think we should teach our prospective writers that their best defense against his taking over their work will lie in their strict attention to the order, proportion and radiance of what they are making.

Flannery O'Connor (1984c:189)

A neo-Thomist aesthetic is a Christian theory of the arts. Aquinas had not needed to insist on the 'Christianness' of his propositions because they were universally valid: art was not abstracted from religion, it was commensurate with it; art and religion were integrated in the same universal order. Maritain was writing in a different context. The Church was no longer the figurative City of God. At most it was an alternative society within the City. Art was not inspired by the Church. The art of the world, of the City, spoke of different concerns from those of the Church. The steady leap of progress is also the desacralization of Western culture: faith is substituted by Progress, the rites of religion are replaced by the mechanized rhythms of technological production. Western culture had also become largely an urban culture. The city really was the City.

Modernist literature is largely the literature of the City: Joyce's Dublin, Proust's Paris, Dos Passos' New York, Musil's Vienna, Tsirka's Cairo. When the countryside is taken up it is in opposition to the City. Even Faulkner, writing of the American South, follows the trend. The "corrupt and decadent South", writes a French critic, "[is a] lost paradise in the face of the Hell of the megalopolis" (Tadié, 1997:125; my translation). The contrast of the vigorous social relations of

the countryside against the anonymity of the City restores another, more ancient dichotomy: the fruitful land versus the barren desert. The City is a desert (it is also a Hell and a labyrinth). It is a desert without God.

The desert is an ancient Christian (and Hebraic) trope. It is in the desert that Moses finds God (Ex 15:22ff).¹⁴ The Christian contemplative tradition includes its Desert Fathers. The desert, the philosopher Vincenzo Vitiello tells us, “is also a *promise*. The column of smoke that guides Moses and Israel is already that *meeting place*. In the desert, only in the desert, is it possible to meet the God-guide” (1997:167). The Christian who inhabits the figurative desert of the City is living out the Mosaic condition of “a stranger in a foreign land” (Ex 2:22). Christians producing art in the City were alien beings, their concerns were not those of the City. At the same time the promise of the desert is present in the City. A conference cycle dedicated to Jacques Maritain in 1985 was entitled: “Jacques Maritain/*Philosophe dans la Cité*”. The choice of title is revealing.

Maritain’s *Art et Scolastique* (1927) redefines scholastic thought on art. It also defines the parameters for a Christian art. For Maritain, Christian art was that which was produced by a Christian. Maritain denied that there could be a separation between the writer and the writer who was a Christian; they were one and the same thing. If the writer was genuinely Christian the faith of the writer would manifest itself in the artwork and it would have an impact on the texture of the work. Christian writers should not attempt to dissociate art from the faith they professed allegiance to. He writes: “Do not try the absurd attempt [*entreprise absurde*] at separating in yourself the artist from the Christian. They are one if you *are* truly Christian and if your art is not isolated from your soul by some aesthetic system” (1927:113-4; my translation). The underlying suggestion is that a moral life produces a moral text. Only an artist committed to Christianity can produce an artwork suffused with the Christian spirit. Simone Weil, by no means a neo-Thomist, offers a very similar conception of the artist. She writes:

¹⁴ All Biblical quotations are from the *Jerusalem Bible: The New Testament* (1967) and *The Old Testament* (1969). The standard abbreviations for the various books are used throughout.

There exists a focal point of greatness where the genius creating beauty, the genius revealing truth, heroism and holiness are indistinguishable ... A tragedy like *King Lear* is the direct fruit of the pure spirit of love. Holiness irradiates the Romanesque churches and the Gregorian chant. Monteverdi, Bach, Mozart were beings whose lives were pure even as were their works. (1978:224-5)

The idea, once taken to its logical conclusions, is highly problematic. Maritain suggests it, but does not work out its implications. In *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry* (1955), a much later work, he attempts to resolve these inconsistencies by focusing on the artwork as a sign of a Christian commitment. The text is thus Christian, the writer is absent. The idea has a post-structuralist ring to it. Maritain quotes Oscar Wilde with obvious approval: "The fact of a man being a poisoner is nothing against his prose" (1955:36). The artist is a free agent. Elsewhere Maritain had written: "The Sons of God are under no law" (cited by Rose, 1985:196).

The tension remains. Mary Carmen Rose, one of Maritain's more recent commentators, sees this unresolved tension as one of the central gaps in his theory. If the author of a Christian text is a Christian it follows that his or her spirituality is in some way imbued in the text. If the theory glosses over the spirituality of the writers because they are free, then their spirituality becomes indistinguishable from the 'spirituality' of those who are not Christian but who have discerned 'goodness':

Is the artist ... free to serve nothing but his art? Because Maritain asserts that the artist is thus free, a dilemma appears at the heart of CI [*Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry*]. If the artist does not serve truth and goodness as well as beauty, then his spirituality (as viewed by the Christian) is less than the spirituality of those who are not artists but who are faithful to what truth and goodness they have discerned. (1985:196)

The problem cannot be resolved too easily. It exists at the level of theoretical conception. Maritain attempts to provide a model of Christian art in a society where Christianity is not the norm. The City is inimical to Christian art: Christian art is that which is produced by Christians within the City. This Christian art is theorized by restored Thomist aesthetics. Yet the problem is not evident in Aquinas. His aesthetic propositions were, theoretically speaking, universally valid

because Western Christendom was Christian, a universal Catholic state. Thomism does not pursue the problem of authorship. The concern is with the artwork itself, the finished product. Umberto Eco tells us that Thomism maintains that the artwork is complete unto itself and obeys its own structural laws (Eco, 1989b:17). The intention of the artist was not theoretically important. Aquinas states that even if the intention was perverse what mattered were the formal properties of the artwork:

Non pertinet ad laudem artificis, inquantum artifex est, qua voluntate opus faciat; sed quale sit opus quod facit. (ST, I-II, 57, 3)

The problem of ‘the free artist’ resides in the modern application of the theory, not in the theory itself. It is thus that the rest of Maritain’s argument builds on the scholastic inheritance. Similarly to Aquinas, Maritain maintains that the artwork is self-sufficient, has its own laws and is driven by an internal logic. Art is in the domain of the Making, not of the Acting. Art cannot be a substitute for action — any kind of critical intervention in the world is ruled out for art. The artwork is concerned with its own ‘making’, its own internal demands and its own ‘good’: “Art, which is related to the Making [*le Faire*] and not Acting [*l’Agir*], is outside the dividing line of human affairs, its end, rules and values are not those of humankind, but those of the work which is to be produced. The work is made for the Art [*Cette œuvre est tout pour l’Art*] ... the demands and the good of the work” (1927:10; my translation).

Thomas Gilby, the Dominican neo-Thomist, provides us with a similar conception of the artwork. Poetry, he tell us, is an end in itself, not a means towards something, it is “a delight, not a utility” (1934:98). Art is similar to a game or a joke, end-directed activities whose good is the pleasure or delight they give. “The poetic experience in itself”, Gilby writes, “teaches nothing, making neither for edification nor appearing to lead onwards to higher truths, it comes as a rest in human activity, as something desirable for its own sake” (1934:99).

The intrinsic self-sufficiency of the artwork also works to separate the artwork from the Church to which it is related and whose faith inheres in the artwork. The

freedom from theology and the apparatus of ecclesiastical control are thus acknowledged, at least at the level of creation. At the same time the Church is free to proscribe that artwork if it works against God or against the 'ends of humankind'. Maritain writes: "Art has no right to go against God ... nor against the final Good of human life" (1927:121; my translation).¹⁵ Flannery O'Connor says very much the same thing when she writes: "The business of protecting souls from dangerous literature belongs properly to the Church. All fiction, even when it satisfies the requirements of art, will not turn out to be suitable for everyone's consumption" (1984a:149). O'Connor's words can also be read as a refusal on the part of the writer of any kind of self-censorship. Catholic literature is not of the Catholic Church. Insofar as it is art rather than propaganda it may even be against the Church.

Art is self-sufficient and an end in itself because it does not lead to the 'higher truths'. Art cannot be a substitute for theology. Art is an extended game, a ludic enterprise. Insofar as it gives pleasure it is good in itself. The intent is not the same as that of theology. For Aquinas poetry was an *infirmata doctrina* because it lacked truth. Thomism devalORIZED art because it had no immediate didactic function. Art was outside the realm of pure knowledge. Umberto Eco explains the scholastic rationale underlying this assertion:

We are dealing with the usual devalorization of art as making as opposed to pure *theory* ... poetry is compared to the Sacred Scriptures and in that contest it is found wanting. As for the lack of truth (*defectus veritatis*), that should be understood in the sense that poetry narrates inexistent things ... The poet uses metaphors and metaphor, from a logical point of view, is a falsity. But he uses them to create images, and images give pleasure to man. Yet, if the object of poetry is a pleasing lie, we understand the reasons why it is loath to embrace rational knowledge. Thus what we see is not a condemnation, but rather a

¹⁵ It is certainly true to say that the Catholic Church in the 1920s and 30s did not show any reluctance in proscribing the works of Catholic writers whose works it considered heretical. Antonia White, writing in 1941, says that "it's a sign of these extraordinary times that, if one reads anyone good, one always fears they've either renounced the Church or been condemned by it" (1989:96). White was thinking of writers like Greene and Bernanos, whose works had been forbidden to Catholics in the 1930s and 40s. Graham Greene's *The Power and the Glory* (1940) was placed on the Church's *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* (an institution abolished only in 1966). Bernanos' work, on the other hand, had been proscribed in certain French-speaking dioceses, such as the archdiocese of Montreal.

theoretical disinterest in the poetic pleasure, especially when this pleasure has no immediate didactic function. (1989b:136-7; my translation)

The function of art is not didactic. Its end is not the edification of the faithful. Flannery O'Connor writes: "... what is good in itself glorifies God because it reflects God. The artist has his hands full and does his duty if he attends to his art. He can safely leave evangelizing to the evangelists" (1984c:171). O'Connor's point is especially effective because it alludes to Aquinas' idea that art 'is a kind of good' (ST, IIa:9:2&4).

When we say that the beautiful is a kind of good, as does Thomas Gilby when he says, "The beautiful is a delight, an experience of a complete good" (1934:100), we are in territory first charted by Plato. The notion that beauty and goodness are interrelated, both of them grounded in truth, is taken from his *Symposium* (sometimes also called *The Banquet*), and in particular from the dialogue between Plato and the sorceress Diotima (201a-211c).¹⁶ This conception of the artwork was long maintained in the West; after David Hume challenged the view it found itself displaced by other aesthetic propositions (Rose, 1985:195).

Christian aesthetics have found it less necessary to forgo this notion of the goodness of the artwork. Goodness is central to Christian revelation. The word 'gospel', *euaggélion*, means 'good news'. The order of Creation is seen as good in itself. (Evil exists as a consequence of the exercise of free will; it does not diminish the idea that the natural order is good. The Manichean distinction between separate empires, one good, the other evil, is a Christian heresy. It was also one of the heresies refuted by Aquinas.)

Goodness is central to the Thomist (and neo-Thomist) conception of art. Commenting on a famous passage by Aquinas, which we shall have occasion to refer to, Maritain speaks of the experience of the beautiful and the good as *joyful*: "The beautiful is that which grants joy, not any kind of joy, but the joy of knowing; it is not a joy particular to the act of knowing, but a joy in excess and

overflowing from the act because the object has become known" (1927:35; my translation). Maritain's words tend towards a certain rhetorical excess, which is obfuscating rather than elucidating. He is referring to the *apprehension* of the artwork; the apprehension of the beautiful brings joy. He continues: "If something exalts and delights the soul at the same time that the soul intuitively it, that thing is good to apprehend, it is beautiful" (1927:36; my translation).

The thing which is apprehended is both good and beautiful. Both *are apprehended*. There is no necessary distinction between goodness and beauty. Thomism distinguishes between the two merely at the level of cognition and appetitiveness. Good is that which is desired (appetitiveness). Beauty is that which 'pleases when seen' (cognition). Art is desired because it is good; insofar as it gives pleasure it is beautiful. Alexandra, the Abbess of Crewe in Muriel Spark's homonymic novel says this about herself "... I am become an object of art, the end of which is to give pleasure" (1974:125). Dame Alexandra has made herself into a work of art, an unlikely proposition, but the underlying props for her statement are grounded in St Thomas' well-known definition:

Nam bonum proprie respicit appetitum: est enim bonum quod omnia appetunt. Et ideo habet rationem finis: nam appetitus est quasi quidam motus ad rem. Pulchrum autem respicit vim cognoscitivam: pulchra enim dicuntur quae visa placent. Unde pulchrum in debita proportionem consistit: quia sensus delectatur in rebus debite proportionatis, sicut in sibi similibus; nam et sensus ratio quaedam est et omnia [omnis] virtus cognoscitiva. (ST, I, 5, 4 ad 1)¹⁷

Aquinas relates the apprehension of beauty and goodness to the form of the artwork. Beauty is satisfied by that which is duly proportioned. The concept of proportion is derived from Greek thought. The ancient formula for beauty was

¹⁶ The page numbers refer to those in the standard *Opera Omnia*, edited by Henri Stephanus and published in Paris in 1578; most modern editions indicate the original pagination alongside the one they happen to follow.

¹⁷ "... for goodness properly relates to the appetitive faculty (goodness being what all men desire); and therefore it has the formal aspect of an end (the appetitive faculty being a kind of movement towards a thing). Beauty relates to the cognitive faculty; for *beautiful things are those which please when seen*. Hence beauty consists in due proportion; for the senses are satisfied in things duly proportioned, as in what is after their own kind - because sense is a sort of reason; and so is every cognitive faculty" (English translation by the Dominican Fathers; cited by Beebe, 1978:155).

congruentia, proportion. It is evident in the work of Pythagoras, Aristotle and Plato. It was appropriated by Christian thought via St Augustine, who writes, for example, of beauty as “*congruentia partium*” (cited by Eco, 1989b:41), the proportion of parts. For Aquinas, the beauty of the human form lies in the perfect proportion of its parts (ST, Ia:5,4,ad 1). The Thomist conception of the artwork is built around the notion of proportion. Proportion occurs when a thing is adequate to itself or adequate to its function. Proportion also means proportionate to its function:

Quilibet autem artifex intendit suo operi dispositionem optimam inducere, non simpliciter, sed per comparationem ad finem. (ST, I, 91, 3)

In other words: every artifact has to confer to its work the best configuration, not in relation to an absolute, but in relation to the desired end. Proportion is also the fulcrum around which beauty is constructed and apprehended. It is the link between the wholeness and the radiance of the artwork, both of which Aquinas considers essential to the artwork but which cannot exist without their being duly proportioned. Aquinas defines these three qualities as the essential pre-requisites for the proper ordering of beauty:

Ad pulchritudinem tria requiruntur. Primo quidem integritas sive perfectio; quae enim diminuta sunt, hoc ipso turpia sunt. Et debita proportio sive consonantia. Et iterum Claritas: unde quae habent colorem nitidum pulchra esse dicuntur. (ST, I, 39, 8c)¹⁸

Integritas refers to wholeness, the thing’s textual integrity (Lat. *integritate* › *integro*, whole, intact, complete). In a well-known extract Aquinas writes: “*Quae quidem perfectio est forma totius, quae ex integritate partium consurgit*” (ST: I, 73, 1). That is to say, the existence of all the parts define the thing as a whole. Elsewhere, he talks about the natural desire in the mind for those things which are whole or complete (ST: I, 26, 2). This is also the sense of *integritas* accorded by Thomas Gilby, who translates the reference to *integritas* in the passage relating to the three criteria of beauty as “a certain wholeness or perfection, for whatever is

¹⁸ “For beauty includes three conditions, *integrity or perfection*, for those things which are impaired are by the very fact ugly; and then due *proportion or harmony* is required; and lastly, *brightness or*

incomplete is to that extent ugly” (1934:89). James Joyce’s interpretation is, in outline, also very similar: “You apprehend it as one thing. You see it as one whole. You apprehend its wholeness. That is *integritas*” (1966rpt:212). Wholeness occurs only when none of its parts are missing (“*quae enim diminuta sunt*”) and in that sense it suggests a kind of proportionality. It is this sense that Eco refers to *integritas* as “a type of proportion” (1988:99).

It is the third quality, *claritas*, that has raised the greatest polemics among the modern interpreters. For James Joyce, who had constructed a Thomist ‘esthetic philosophy’ before neo-Thomism proper had appeared, *claritas* was the ‘whatness’ of a thing:

Aquinas uses a term which seems to be inexact. It baffled me for a long time. It would lead you to believe that he had in mind symbolism or idealism, the supreme quality of beauty being a light from some other world, the idea of which matter is but the shadow, the reality of which is but the symbol ... But that is literary talk. I understand it so. When you have apprehended that basket as one thing and have then analyzed it according to its form and apprehended it as a thing you make the only synthesis which is logically and esthetically permissible. You see that it is that thing which it is and no other thing. The radiance of which he speaks is the scholastic *quidditas*, the *whatness* of a thing. (1966rpt: 212-213)

Herbert E. Cory, writing from a neo-Thomist position, takes objection to Joyce’s definition, which he sees as erroneous and to which he offers a striking rebuttal. For Cory, *claritas* is more than the mechanistic (or formalistic) whatness of thing.¹⁹ *Claritas* refers to the effulgence of the soul, the transfiguration of the body, it is the spiritual manifestation of God’s presence on earthly things:

Just what *claritas* meant to St Thomas we may gather from his account of what the glorified human body will be after its resurrection. The glory of the soul, already in

clarity, whence things are called beautiful which have a bright color” (English translation by the Dominican Fathers; cited by Beebe, 1978:163).

¹⁹ A more orthodox understanding of *claritas* did exist in Joyce’s conception of epiphany, which he had rehearsed in *Stephen Hero* (1944; 1963rpt) but which he later discarded when he went on to write *The Portrait*: “By an epiphany he meant a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of a gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself. He believed that it was for the man of letters to record these epiphanies with extreme care, seeing that they themselves are the most delicate and evanescent of moments” (211).

heaven, will glow through its restored body and make it splendid. For this once too often recalcitrant flesh will now be ablaze in its every part with the effulgence of the soul which has experienced the Beatific Vision ... Even on earth ... *claritas*, the crowning attribute of beauty is the shining through, to some greater or lesser degree, of the operative and essential presence of God. (cited by Beebe, 1978:164)

For the neo-Thomists *claritas* (or radiance) refers to something much more powerful than Joyce's 'whatness' of a thing. The 'bright colour' of St Thomas is the luminosity of the blessed souls resplendent in glory. According to Umberto Eco the Thomist conception of the artwork is also the prototype of the *body* of the risen Christ (1989b:114). Aquinas writes:

... *nam ad corpus glorificatum redundat claritas ab anima, sicut qualitas quædam permanens corpus efficientis.* (ST: III, 45, 2)

Claritas is the body of Christ, risen, transfigured in glory, resplendent with beauty. *Claritas* is a spiritual transfiguration. It is the shining through of this transfiguration. Even if we remove its spiritual aspect *claritas* still remains a kind of transfiguration. Eco, in his own interpretation of *claritas*, calls it *radioactive*: "*claritas* is the true capacity of the organism; it is, as it were, the radioactivity of the formal aspect" (1989b:114; my translation). Maritain, on the other hand, is more cautious. He relates *claritas* to the form, with which it is commensurate, and which determines the spiritual nature of the artwork. *Claritas* becomes an 'essence', a 'secret', a 'mystery':

[the] 'form', the principle determining the particular perfection of all that is, that which constitutes and attains the essence and qualities of things, the ontological secret, as it were, that they carry within them, their spiritual essence, their operative mystery, it is above all the particular principle of intelligibility, the particular *clarity* of all things. (1927:38; my translation)

Claritas cannot be abstracted from the other qualities with which it is integrated. *Integritas*, *proportio* and *claritas* constitute a proportioned whole, an ordered set. The whole is greater than its constituent parts. That which remains, that which cannot be accounted for, 'the spiritual essence', 'the ontological secret', that which is left over, so to speak, that is *claritas*.

One of the aims — possibly the most important — of, especially, the preconciliar Catholic novel was to work towards a representation of what could be called *claritas*. To say that is also to invite the accusation that *claritas*, because it is so vague and imprecise a concept, can mean almost anything. We profit nothing by using such a term because it tells us nothing. Eco says very much the same thing when, as if preempting a criticism of the concept, he warns against a *too easy*, too generalized, updating of the concept of *claritas*:

But if the game of updating consists - let us admit - of showing that Thomist *claritas* also defines a rock concert or a painting by Pollock, then it is very easy. Easy in the sense that it is *true*, but in the sense that it is true to say that in all cultures fire is the symbol of heat. Any philosophical concept taken at its most generic level explains anything. (1989b:180; my translation)

What has to be borne in mind is the manner in which *claritas* is defined. It is a spiritual quality that emanates from the work. It is a self-evident luminosity at the heart of the work, a spiritual reservoir, the irradiation that bursts from the thing itself. The spiritual dimension is relevant for Catholic writers. By Catholic writers I mean people who write Catholic novels, be they Catholic or sympathetic to Catholicism. We can assume that people who write from a Catholic perspective share in the metaphysical presuppositions of the Catholic system. As Catholics they believe in the spiritual world, that the world of visible things is merely a transitory world. Human beings are “visitors and pilgrims” (I P 2:11) on their way to that world ‘other than this’. Take for instance the concluding words of Muriel Spark’s *The Ballad of Peckham Rye* (1960), where the richly metaphorical language conveys an affirmation of that other world:

But it was a sunny day for November, and, as her drove swiftly past the Rye, he saw the children playing there and the women coming home from work with their shopping-bags, the Rye for an instant looking like a cloud of green and gold, the people seeming to ride upon it, as you might say there was another world than this. (1975rpt: 143)

All the same we cannot reduce the spiritual to the eternal. The Catholic Christian believes in the interpenetration of the spiritual on the material. “The supernatural

life of man", Gilby tells us, "has not a complete and separate existence of its own apart from nature" (1934:44). It is through the natural that the supernatural is manifest. For the Catholic Christian the supernatural is always beneath the surface, below the texture of appearances. The priest in Muriel Spark's *The Mandelbaum Gate* (1965) says that a "supernatural process is going on under the surface and within the substance of all things" (214). The supernatural is contained in the natural world, God's grace is manifest through concrete reality.

The use of these distinctive terms of 'grace' and 'nature' should not obscure the fact that these things occur together, as one. The theologian Karl Rahner cites as examples of this immanence of grace within the natural order: "... the experience of infinite longing, radical optimism, discontent which cannot find rest, anguish at the insufficiency of material things, protest against death, the experience of fundamental guilt with hope nevertheless remaining" (1963:36). It is through the real that God's grace is manifest.

The problem for the Catholic writer is how to represent this interpenetration of the supernatural on the material, this spiritual transcendence. The dominant fictional literary mode in the earlier part of the century, at the time that Maritain was writing, and the one taken up by most Catholic writers, was the realist novel. Realism is a particularly tricky concept to define. It can be used to mean many different things. By realism I mean a fictional representation of the 'real' that does not question its own ability to 'represent'. The text's representationability is unproblematically assumed; the relation with the world outside the text is one of verisimilitude, signifiers refer to their signifieds. A useful metaphor for realism is that of the window. The language of realism is "dematerialised to achieve perfect representation—to let the identity of things shine through a window of words" (MacCabe, 1985:16). The window is a surface that 'reflects' the outside. 'Reflects' is an optical metaphor itself, which highlights the dangerous circularity of metaphorical language.

The realist technique is largely cinematographic or photographic (Boyd, 1968:24). The realist mode was largely taken over by the cinema, which is a truer realism insofar as it is a visual medium and perfects the illusion of 'reflection'. Post-

structuralist knowledge has shown the notion of 'reflection' to be a ruse. Artistic products are subject to all types of mediation, editorial, ideological, unconscious. The realist text is never 'objectively' given. It does not reflect — even the Althusserian notion of ideology as an 'unconscious reflex' (1984) betrays its indebtedness to the window metaphor.

Literary productions are constructions (of the 'real'). They are formations; they are also deformations. Literary texts are articulations of an ideological — or theological? — version of reality. Some texts foreground the processes of construction and question the limits of representationability. Other texts erase the marks of construction; novelistic texture (a metaphor taken from the textile industry, it refers to the arrangement of threads, Lat. *textura* › *texere*, to weave) is seamless, a transparent illusion of reality. The distinction between these types of texts will form the basis of our distinction between formalist and realist texts.

Some Catholic novels are realist, some are formalist. The distinction reduces all manner of products to a far-too-neat dichotomy. Although this may not be valid for all kinds of novels — modernist literature cannot be easily categorized as either — it is methodologically useful when applied to the Catholic novel. Realism has been the dominant mode used by Catholic writers, especially in the period before the Second Vatican Council. Thereafter formalist approaches appear as dominant.

The problem of representing *claritas* is essentially a realist problem because the aim is to 'represent' *claritas* within the representational space. Rephrased, the intention is to 'represent' spirit through matter. There are no rules on how to produce a spiritual dimension within a literary work; it is a seemingly impossible task. *Theoretically speaking*, following the lines of neo-Thomist thought, it becomes more possible. The neo-Thomist (and Thomist) conception of the artwork suggested that if the work was a proportioned whole it would exhibit, by its very nature, that spiritual 'light' that the Thomists called *claritas* or radiance. The spiritual is manifest in matter (the artistic form) if the artwork is an ordered whole, if all that makes up the whole is proportionate to its function. We are not here talking of a *pièce bien faire*, a well-composed work. Neo-Thomism does not set

out rules for construction or composition. *Proportio*, *integritas* and *claritas* are not rules — they are certainly not stylistic rules.

The Thomist criteria of beauty are ordering principles of construction. They do not exist as separate entities, as abstract rules, but as parts of a whole. A work will exhibit *claritas* if it is constructed according to the principles of wholeness and proportion. The end result — the ordered whole, the beautiful artifact — is the only thing which can be measured. The work exists as a whole. The whole cannot exist if it was not proportioned (or if the constituent parts of the whole were not proportionate to their function). *Claritas* is the consequence, the result, of this whole.

When we say that Catholic novelists attempted to represent *claritas* we do not mean that they tried to represent the spiritual property of *claritas* as a separate entity. Their aim was to render the life of the spirit, Bernanos' 'invisible universe where the great passions are breathed' (Tadié, 1997:77). *Claritas* is the spiritual outpouring of the artwork. The concepts connect, although they are not necessarily the same things. Similarly, when we say that Catholic writers tried to 'represent' *claritas* we are not suggesting that they had to have a prior knowledge of the Thomist system. Thomism is a theory that articulates the practice. *Claritas* is an abstract formulation of that theory; it is the name the critic can give to what would otherwise be an essentially ambiguous aspect of novelistic form, the 'representation' of grace or the life of the spirit.

There are two approaches to the representation of *claritas* (by which we mean: to the representation of the whole that will exhibit its own *claritas*). In the first the whole is the frame, in the other it is the whole within the frame. The first is formalistic. The whole is contained in the form, the form produces the ordered whole; if *claritas* exists it is because the whole has been precisely ordered. An ordered whole has connotations of geometry and architecture. These are valid metaphors to use when we refer to formalist approaches to fictional construction. Mathematical formulations sometimes underlie the construction of fictional texts. We will have occasion to study this.

The other approach will seek to represent *claritas* within the representational space of the fiction. If the first approach was outward, this second one is inward. The whole is the interior space of the fiction. Here we are speaking of a 'represented' whole, a fictional world. The notion comes with the necessary pitfalls inherent in a 'reflective' discourse; it is not of course a 'reflected' world. At the same time we must pursue its implications on an *as if* premise. The represented world represents the world *as if* it were the real world. Grace is manifest through the material, the natural, the 'real'. Following this logic, grace is manifest through a representation of the material. The logic is not necessarily fatuous if one accepts the *as if* premise. It also implies that, if the writer wants to convey a sense of the other-worldly (the 'spiritual'), this needs to be done from the source, the material. *Claritas* in the inward space of the novel implies fidelity to a material representation. Grace is evident only if the writer pays rigorous attention to the material. Grace, the sense of 'mystery', cannot be represented as such; it follows from realist representation in the same way that *claritas* follows from the ordered whole. Flannery O'Connor, who as always has the last word when it comes to applying Thomist dictates to the arts, expresses the view in her typically aphoristic style: "[the] fiction writer presents mystery through manners, grace through nature, but when he finishes there always has to be left over that sense of Mystery which cannot be accounted for by any human formula" (1984a:153). In the same essay she also writes: "When fiction is made according to its nature, it should reinforce our sense of the supernatural by grounding it in concrete, observable reality" (1984a:148).

O'Connor's comments justify a realist practice,²⁰ they also explain why, in a fiction committed to a representation of the other-worldly dimension — the novels of Bernanos, Greene, Mauriac, O'Connor — supernatural occurrences are almost non-existent. A more low-brow Catholic fiction has all the elements of a supernatural saturnalia. In Bruce Marshall's *Father Malachy's Miracle* (1931) when a priest asks God to 'transport' a dance hall to a remote rock, this is promptly done, and the Anglican vicar who does not believe in miracles is incredulous. A comment by Flannery O'Connor is particularly apt in this context:

²⁰ It is interesting to see how a Catholic commitment to a realist practice appears, also, in film theory. André Bazin, for example, objected to filmic montage as it would erase the traces of the real: God's presence could only be manifest in the real. (See Lapsley & Westlake, 1988:159-160)

“The novelist who deliberately misuses his talent for some good purpose may be committing no sin, but he is certainly committing a grave inconsistency, for is trying to reflect God with what amounts to a practical untruth” (1984c:174). “The result”, she writes further in this essay, “is another addition to that large body of *pious trash* for which we have so long been famous” (Ibid:180; my italics).

The supernatural — grace, Maritain’s ‘operative mystery’ and ‘ontological secret’ — is evident only through the action within the represented space, through the dislocations of the narrative and the behaviour of the characters inhabiting that space. It cannot be identified on its own, as a distinct entity, some inexpressible ‘sense’ that cannot be expressed in words — a sort of paralinguistic spiritual fulmination. All that suggests *claritas* as something separate, unique to itself. *Claritas* is the cumulative effect of actions, the sum total of a progressive movement, it cannot be abstracted or removed from its context. The illumination in the representational space is the sense ‘left over’ when all has been said and done.

To identify the nature of this ‘illumination’ within the text using the language of critical discourse requires a complex analysis of the work in its entirety. This is necessary unless we are to fall back on the rather subjective ‘sense’ that remains on reading a novel for the first time, a personally valid response but empirically unsound. The novels of Flannery O’Connor, Georges Bernanos, Graham Greene’s ‘Catholic novels’, Evelyn Waugh’s later work, are all suited to this task. Space prohibits us from undertaking such an analysis. We will however cite one example, taken from Greene’s *The Power and the Glory* (1940), of this inexplicable ‘mystery’ that arises out of the action. Our exposition will be cursory, merely in the way of explaining a point.

Briefly stated, the novel tells the ‘story’ of a priest during a time of anti-clerical fervour and of the persecution of the Church in Mexico. The presentation of this brandy-drinking, woman-consorting priest is hardly edifying by the commonly received standards of Christian morality and decency. (The novel, we recall, was placed on the Church’s *Index*, its list of books dangerous to the Catholic faith and morals; Christian-inspired art is not always at one with the institutional church.) The priest’s crime, in the eyes of the Mexican state bureaucracy, is that he

continues to administer the sacraments of the outlawed Church; in this sense the priest is criminally subversive. His death by firing squad is the inevitable consequence of his transgression. The death is recounted briefly, sparingly, with very little extraneous adornment. Adjectives and adverbs, both of which can be used to create emotional associations around the words they qualify, are kept to a minimum. The presentation is a relay of 'facts'. The action is narrated through the perspective of a Mr Tench, a Protestant, a foreigner with a certain disinterest in the Latin-blooded troubles and squabbles of Mexico. 'Facts' are narrated with a casual disinterest. (This is of course a carefully chosen technique which has nothing to do with 'facts'; the factual presentation is suitable to its purpose.) We read:

The jefe said, "What are you waiting for? The air gets into this tooth."

Of course there was nothing to do. Everything went very quickly like a routine. The officer stepped aside, the rifles went up, and the little man suddenly made jerky movements with his arms. He was trying to say something: what was the phrase they were always supposed to use? That was routine too, but perhaps his mouth was too dry, because nothing came out except a word that sounded like 'Excuse'. The crash of the rifles shook Mr. Tench: they seemed to vibrate inside his own guts: he felt sick and shut his eyes. Then there was a single shot, and opening them again he saw the officer stuffing his gun back into his holster, and the little man was a routine-heap beside the wall — something unimportant which had to be cleared away. Two knock-kneed men approached quickly. This was an arena, and the bull was dead, and there was nothing more to wait for any more. (1960rpt:281)

The priest's life has been represented throughout the novel as sordid. The death of the priest is a routine one. Yet various associations come to play on any reading of the death of this 'routine-heap' of a man. There is the inevitable comparison with the Christian idea of martyrdom, sometimes called 'baptism by fire', a purifying action that cleanses all sin. The sub-text, the one referring to Christian martyrdom, suggests that having died for the faith he is welcomed into what St Paul calls the 'inheritance of the saints' (Ep 1:18). The priest's debased life, his unheroic facing up to death, contrasts unevenly with the received images of Christian martyrdom. It also ill conforms with the images that herald the coming of God's reign, "the kingdom, the power and the glory" as it is expressed in the Catholic eucharistic liturgy (whence the title of the novel), the kingdom that is already present on earth

(Lk 17:21). There is a disjunction between the ideal and the actual life lived by the priest.

The death of the priest is integrated within a coherent framework that explains and gives it meaning only at the very end of the novel. A new priest on the run appears at the home of the Christian families that have retained their faith in the Church. It is here that all the theological sub-codes cohere: the actions of the dead priest are vindicated through a process of emplacement and the line of priests serving the Church remains unbroken and we have before us, the death, the priest's depraved life, the sacerdotal succession, a mystery that harks back to 'the power and the glory' that give the novel its title. *Claritas* is not a moment, it is all the various actions, displacements and allusions that cohere to produce a sense of the inexpressible as it has been expressed by the cumulative weight of the narrative process.

Claritas is integrated within an ordered whole. The whole in *The Power and the Glory* is the 'whole' of the narrated space. It is a whole because it is viewed as a whole from a certain vantage point. We are talking here of distance, clear lines of separation between author and narrative persona and narrated world. Distance is also altitude. The author or the narrative persona narrates from a lofty position; he (or she) does not participate in the represented world; he (or she) is outside that world. The material world is represented 'faithfully', 'objectively', 'factually', to use some of the terms used in the critical discourse of Catholics. The Catholic novel is usually narrated in the third person.

Thomism endorses the separation of the author from the (authored) text. Maritain's idea of the Christian writer as indissociable from the Christian text was a neo-Thomist innovation, one that was problematic, although the rest of Maritain's ideas were built on the Thomist notion of a self-sufficient artwork. The author is outside the work — the whole constitutes a whole only when it is viewed from the outside. The author provides the moral — the objective — norm from which the whole may be viewed. The sub-message here refers to the need to portray good and evil objectively. Maritain speaks about "an art which is robust enough and in

the right [*droit*], never losing out its on its height [*hauteur*] and its purity, to control its material entirely” (1927:125; my translation).

Maritain calls for authoritative fictions viewed from a perspective that suggests altitude. This is not too different from what literary-critical language used to call ‘the omniscient narrative’. It refers to the all-seeing, God’s-eye-view perspective on narrative events. Omniscience was standard in the eighteenth century romance; thereafter, with the rise of a more realist type of representation, and the Jamesian point of view, the author was pushed back into the wings of creation. Authorial intrusions still appear at the end of the nineteenth century, even in the work of such realists as Eliot and Stendhal (see Lee, 1990:7-9). By the twentieth century the authorial mode had become obsolete, its use archaic and anachronistic; it was overtaken by the more cinematographic scope of the various European realisms, neo-realism, social realism, and also by the subjective presence of modernist writing. Omniscience was viewed with serious suspicion by great ‘intellectuals’ like Jean-Paul Sartre. His at-the-time famous polemics in *La Nouvelle Revue Française* in 1939 against Catholic writer François Mauriac articulate the reasons for this distrust. They also define the Catholic novel as an especially authoritarian text.

Omniscience is also playing at God. This is rarely stated as such by the authors themselves who make use of this convention. An article published by Mauriac in *Cahiers de la Quinzaine* (1928) is particularly revealing since he states exactly that. Mauriac says that the author, like God, has the power of a creator over his characters. The author is assured that the characters possess their own life and ‘human truth’ when they refuse the destiny that the author has assigned to them (1928:60-1). The article was published a year after he had published his novel *Thérèse Desqueyroux* (1927). It was because of this novel that Sartre took him to task for the omniscient manner of his presentation of Thérèse’s predicament.

Sartre, who was speaking from within a philosophy that puts freedom at the centre of existence, felt that Mauriac had no right to *judge* a character in a novel, and even less to be the conscience of that character. I quote Sartre in the original since the word-play on which he makes his point will be lost with translation:

Lorsqu'il juge que cela lui est plus commode, il quitte Thérèse et va soudain s'installer au beau milieu d'une autre conscience ... Il y fait trois petits tours et puis s'en va, comme les marionnettes. (cited by Tadié, 1997: 78).²¹

The allusion seems to be to the French children's ditty "*Ainsi font, font, font / Les petites marionnettes: / trois petits tours et puis s'en vont*". The suggestion is that Mauriac is a puppeteer. Sartre calls his technique 'bizarre' and accuses him of playing the omniscient God of his small world:

All the *bizarries* of his technique are explained by the fact that he uses God's point of view over his characters: God sees the inside and the outside, the depths of the souls and the bodies, the whole universe at the same time. In the same manner M. Mauriac is omniscient over everything that touches his small world, that which he says about his characters is Gospel truth [*parole d'Évangile*], it explains them, judges them and condemns them without appeal. (Cited by Tadié, 1997:79; my translation)

If Sartre's objections point to the sheer incomprehension in the face of the *bizarries* of narrative omniscience, Graham Greene's defence of Mauriac in an article later reprinted in his *Collected Essays* (1969) is similarly instructive in defining the Catholic writer's need for such a technique. Greene writes: "M.Mauriac's first importance to an English reader ... is that he belongs to the company of the great traditional novelists: he is a writer for whom the visible world has not ceased to exist" (116). This is the first point: the 'visible world'. We are reminded of the 'observable reality' Flannery O'Connor spoke about. Greene continues, "[Mauriac's] characters have the solidity and importance of *men with souls to save or lose*, and [he is] a writer who claims the traditional and essential right of a novelist, to comment, to express his views" (Ibid; my italics). Greene makes the link between omniscience, the suggestion of an other-worldly dimension and the representation of the 'real'. He does not explain why there should be a link between these disparate propositions, but the ideas are consistent with the neo-Thomist notion that altitude was required for the represented world to be seen as whole, the whole suffused with a radiance that was also spiritual.

²¹ "When it suits him he leaves Thérèse and he set ups home in another conscience ... He goes round three times and then he goes away, like the puppets" (my translation).

The polemics around Mauriac's *Thérèse Desqueyroux* — Sartre's attack, Greene's defence — suggest a high-handed narrative posture, whereas in fact, in those instances where narrative omniscience is used, it is utilized in a much more discreet manner. Writing about Greene's use of the convention, David Lodge writes that there is "a continuity of tone between the rendering of his characters' consciousness in indirect speech and authorial comment, so that the reader is scarcely aware of the transition" (1971:120). Very often narrative omniscience functions also in an ambivalent manner. The use of a sceptical or an unreliable narrator in novels like Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* (1945) and Graham Greene's *The End of the Affair* (1951) makes the narrative presentation particularly ambiguous. The device of the unreliable narrator saves this type of novel from accusations of propaganda (Woodman, 1991:24).

So far we have identified the practice of narrative omniscience with the realist novel. Omniscience occurs, but in degrees, greater in some novels, less obtrusive in others. A continuum could be established of the degrees to which the convention is adhered. In novels more concerned with a faithful transcription of the 'real' the convention is less emphatically overt (such as O'Connor's two novels). In novels that approach a more self-reflexive mode adherence to the convention seems greater, such as Greene's *The End of the Affair* (1951). The continuum could be further extended to include the 'formalist' novels. In a sense it is unfair to talk about formalist and realist as diametrically opposed concepts. Formalist and realist exist as ideal positions. Some novels are both realist and formalist. To speak in terms of a realist/formalist split is methodologically useful, even if the precise application is not always so neatly exclusive.

The more formalist the novel the greater the insistence on narrative omniscience. The formalist novel is the one where the frame, the construction, acquires a special significance: it is the fundamental ordering principle of the artwork. In paying attention to the frame, the artifice of the construction, the inward or representational space becomes less of a 'given' but an extension of the constructivist interest. The represented world is artifice, it is framed by the ordered outline. Narrative omniscience creates a space between the order of the form and

the represented space, between narrator and narrated world. The represented space is fictive — it does not represent the world, at most it is a metaphor for the world; the emphasis has shifted. Narrative omniscience in the formalist work emphasizes the fictiveness of the inward world. It thus has a metafictional function.

Theoretically, the formalist work is closer to the Thomist (rather than neo-Thomist) conceptualization of the artwork than is the more realist-inclined work. The self-referentiality of art, art as end in itself, suggests less a concern with the transcription of the real than with how the real can be used in the interests of fiction, of story-telling, of the formal whole. The formalist work is a “pleasing lie” (Eco, 1989b:136), a game, a joke. The ludic accompanies the formalist work at close distance. Narrative omniscience, the altitude, the distance between narrator and narrated world, has also a comic function. The authoritativeness that accompanies the playing-at-God becomes the norm from which to laugh at the world, the fictive world. The British Catholic novel has also been a comic novel. Rolfe, Firbank, Chesterton, Waugh, Spark and Lodge have all written comic novels. The premises underlying the use of comedy in the work of these writers are not the same however because the nature of the comedy differs from work to work. We will study this more closely in later chapters.

Realist and formalist works are different from each other in many ways, but they are also related by a similar underlying premise: the world as God’s script. God, insofar as he is the source of all authority, is also the author of the world. The world is God’s script, to be read, deciphered, retold. This view, with its word-play on this ancient etymology of *author*, is well summed by Pope Leo XIII, who says that “every civilized community must have a ruling authority, and this authority ... has its source in nature, and has, consequently, God for its author” (cited by John XXIII, nd[c.1963]:17). In narrative omniscience the analogue between God as author of the universe and the writer as the author of a literary work is never far below the surface. Universe and literary works are similarly *authored*. Malcolm Bradbury is correct when he says that, in Catholic writing, “the analogue between God’s making and the writer’s tends wonderfully to generate a large frame of reference for art and a sense of high presumption” (1972:242). The realist representation of the spiritual and other-worldly, self-reflexive concerns, comic

plots, follow in their different ways from the same presuppositions. Bradbury's exposition of the way this is done is a lucid and elegant summary of what we have been saying:

At the one end of the debate is the Joycean extreme, the secular casuistry by which he is able to speak of the wholeness and the objective existence of a fiction, a suspended aesthetic stasis, dramatically self-validating, while the novelist, Omnipotent creator, stands outside, 'indifferent, paring his fingernails.' At the other is the doubt that invests much French Catholic fiction and is best embodied in Mauriac's famous statement, which is not without paradox: 'the heroes of our novels must be free in the sense that the theologian says man is free. The novelist must not intervene arbitrarily in their destinies.' Mauriac's view is the more humanistic, and it gives an uneasy liberalism to his work; but it is the line from Joyce that gives formal purity, the wholeness of a symbolist art. (Ibid)

Significantly, Bradbury notes the Joycean link with narrative omniscience. Joyce's statement, taken from *The Portrait*, that the "artist, like the God of creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails" (1916; 1966rpt:215) defines also the manner in which authority and altitude are used in the more formalist Catholic fictions. Joyce was not a Catholic writer, but his indebtedness to Thomism is evident in his own work. Order is an operative principle in Joyce's work. The world of *Ulysses* (1922; 1984rpt) is a world of chaos, suggestion, subjectivity. The text provides us with a vast array of scholarly information and literary styles; language is manipulated, neologisms are bred out of the fusion of the English tongue with its sometimes distant European cognates; meaning is imprecise, multiple suggestions and connotations arise from the word; heterogeneity substitutes one-to-one signification: these are signs of a world of disorder. The paradox of Joyce's art is that he has "superimposed the classical order onto the world of disorder" (Eco, 1989a:154). Beneath (or within or behind or beyond or above) the disorder there is a highly structured Order. I quote from Eco:

... even the most banal arguments (feminine beauty, the lawfulness of makeup, or the excellence of the sense of smell in resurrected bodies) have their own function within the whole.

These characteristics of an organism arranged according to the most rigorous criteria of a traditional formalism are found in that reverse *Summa* which is *Ulysses*. Each chapter

corresponds to an hour of the day, an organ of the body, an art, a color, a symbolic figure, and each uses a distinctive stylistic technique. (1989a:46)

The list is not yet exhausted. There are the Homeric parallels, there is the musical construction (the sonata, the fugue, polyphony) — Eco's book on Joyce provides a fuller analysis and I refer anyone wishing to pursue the topic to it. But just as Order underlies Joycean aesthetics, so too can a link be made between Thomism, a sense of Order and fictions inspired by Catholic notions of the universe. *Ordo* is central to an understanding of Thomist thought: there is the order of Creation and providence is itself an 'ordering force' (Eco, 1988: 90-1). Order is a "transcendental rule" (Ibid:98), it is not a model to be followed but a need to be satisfied. Proportion satisfies the need for order. Proportion is a "transcendental matrix" (Ibid) that makes order proportionate to the need for it.

Joyce accepts the disorder of the world; he expresses that disorder through the "proportional modules" (Eco, 1989a:47) of the Thomist *Ordo* he had rejected. Catholic writers also speak of disorder. Newman's vision of the world speaks of "some terrible aboriginal calamity ... out of joint with the purposes of its Creator" (1982:163). Newman's apocalyptic description of original sin creeps up quite often in Catholic fiction.²² The world is the territory of the original sin. Terry Eagleton calls it "the sense of some metaphysically unchangeable corruption at the very heart of humanity" (1988:1033). The literary responses of Catholic writers to that disorder — formalist structures, narrative altitude, the representation of spiritual light — are expressive of a sense of Order against which the disorder is thrown into relief. The Thomist qualities of beauty, *integritas*, *claritas* and *proportio*, are also the names we can give to the form of that Order.

There are many ways to create Order, there are many ways to write fiction. Disorder takes on different forms. The 'disorder' of Dublin on June 16th 1904

²² Graham Greene cites Newman's paragraph as the opening quote to his travel book, *The Lawless Roads* (1939), which rehearses many of the themes of his *The Power and the Glory* (1940). Evelyn Waugh, on the other hand, rewrites Newman's words with a sardonic wit, using them to poke fun at human pretensions: "The children of Adam are not a race of noble savages who need only a divine spark to protect them. They are aboriginally corrupt. Their tiny relative advantages of intelligence and taste and good looks and good manners are quite insignificant. The compassion and condescension of the Word becoming flesh are glorified in the depths" (cited by Phillips, 1975:45).

would not be same as the 'disorder' of the 1960s and 1970s, when Muriel Spark and David Lodge were writing. The question to occupy us in the coming chapters is whether the response to 'postmodern disorder' suggests also an underlying vision of novelistic Order.

DISORDER AND TRANSFIGURATION

Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961)

It was twenty-five years before Sandy had so far recovered from a creeping vision of disorder that she could look back and recognize that Miss Brodie's defective sense of self-criticism had not been without its beneficent and enlarging effects; by which time Sandy had already betrayed Miss Brodie and Miss Brodie was laid in her grave.

Muriel Spark (1961; 1986rpt:86)

The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie (1961; 1986rpt) is probably the best-known of Muriel Spark's books. Part of its success can be attributed to the film version which starred Maggie Smith in the title role. The book has also been popular with critics and has proved to be fertile ground for many contradictory critical interpretations. Critics who have approached the novel as a formalist work have praised Spark's artistry, Frank Kermode (1967 & 1970) and David Lodge (1971) being the better known. For Ruth Whittaker Spark's earlier novels, which would include *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, "were basically realistic" (1982:12). It is as a realist work that Spark's novel tends to be approached. Hers is seen as a rather thin realism. Frederick Karl calls her "light to the point of froth" (1963:280). For Richard Mayne this 'thin realism' has to do with Spark's religious faith: "Perhaps if the next world's the truly real one, it seems to her legitimate to be fairly summary with this" (1965:66). Patrick Parrinder calls her a "reactionary allegorist" (1983:25), by which he means her realism lacks the substance of lived reality and is used as propaganda for her version of Catholicism. It is almost axiomatic to say that defined by the yardstick of realist fiction Spark's novel is inevitably found wanting.

The approach of most critics suggests a realist interpretation of the novel: the characters in the novel 'stand for' real people and they ought to be judged as representations of real people. One critic has even said that Miss Jean Brodie

'stands for' Muriel Spark herself. "Miss Jean Brodie is Muriel Spark's clearest conception of herself to the present" (Hoyt, 1965:141). Such a realist-oriented approach does not do justice to Spark's artistry. While it is true that she explores some complex issues at a representational level — the book can be read as a study in the burden of spiritual disquiet — which suggests a continuation of the realist line of earlier Catholic novelists, her interests are also formalist. Her novel undermines an unproblematic conception of realist representation; it also interrogates the nature of narrative authority.

Spark's immediate predecessors were Graham Greene and Evelyn Waugh, both of whom recognized her as an important new writer. Greene supported Spark in her early years; Waugh refers to her as Greene's "protégée" (1981:576). Waugh spoke of her first novel as "brilliantly original and fascinating" (1981:477). This means nothing more than that there was a very real appreciation of her work. But it is not with these writers she belongs. A writer who shares many of her formalist assumptions is Christine Brooke-Rose, now vedetted as an 'experimental' writer. Spark, Brooke-Rose and Gabriel Fielding were members of a Catholic intellectual circle that used to meet at Aylesford Priory (Woodman, 1991:34). Brooke-Rose has since disowned her earlier Catholic satires; Fielding, on the other hand, has never received the sort of critical attention lavished on Spark. If we forget these early formative associations of Spark then it is easy to see her as an idiosyncratic latter-day practitioner of the Catholic novel, one who arrived on the scene *ex nihilo*. Bernard Bergonzi writes: "There is a case for regarding Muriel Spark as a *later practitioner* of the Catholic novel" (1980: 46; my italics). The inevitable comparison is with Greene and Waugh.

The Greenian point of departure could be a useful one, if only to show how different the Sparkian novel is. It is easy to read the Sparkian novel as surface. Her novels work however at various levels, of which the realist text is merely the obvious (surface) level. The Catholic realist text — Greene or Mauriac's novels — is the type that represents the idea of an ordered whole or microcosmic world viewed from a certain altitude and which exhibits, though its actions, the kind of spiritual radiance or transfiguration called *claritas*. It is with that kind of text that we shall start.

The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie (which we will hence abbreviate as *The Prime*) is about Miss Jean Brodie, a teacher at a private girls' school in Edinburgh in the 1930s, a spinster in her 'prime'. The word 'prime' is the one she uses to refer to the period of life she finds herself in: "... I am a woman in my prime of life" (1986rpt:43). The 'prime' probably also signifies menopause, in which case Jean Brodie's choice of word points to the creative transformation of an otherwise traumatic experience.

Jean Brodie is described as "beautiful and fragile" (111). The duality continues. She claims also to be a descendant of Deacon Brodie, the respectable eighteenth-century councillor who was a robber by night. We are reminded of Hogg's Justified Sinner, Stevenson's Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, as well as other antinomian characters in Scottish literature. Antinomianism here refers to belief held by certain Protestant sects that Christians are beyond moral law. In Scottish literature it has become something of a literary convention. In her fusion of opposites Jean Brodie embodies that *Caledonian antiszygy*²³ that occurs again and again in Scottish literature. We are also warned not to read her portrait in terms of easy polarities: good/bad, moral/immoral.

Miss Jean Brodie's approach to teaching is unorthodox. The five girls under her care learn about Giotto and the interior decoration of Milne's house, Mussolini's *fascisti* and the fighting in Flanders where Jean Brodie's lover is supposed to have died; they also learn to do arithmetic with their fingers. Jean Brodie also teaches the five girls about truth, beauty and goodness. We are told that "the girls went to study the Gospels with diligence for their truth and goodness, and to read them aloud for their beauty" (1986rpt:36). The reference to the Aristotelian conception of the artwork — from which the Thomist one is derived, even if it is not identical — should alert us to deeper concerns at work.

The headmistress at the school is aware of Jean Brodie's unusual teaching methods and of the excessive influence she wields over the girls under her care. Her

²³ The term *Caledonian antiszygy* was first used by Gregory Smith. It has been applied to Spark's work by Hart (1967) and Kennedy (1974).

attempts to have Jean Brodie dismissed are always foiled by lack of concrete evidence. Jean Brodie's concern with her girls' welfare goes beyond the purely educational. She continues to show an interest in the girls long after they have moved to secondary school. When a new girl, Joyce Emily Hammond, joins the set she convinces her to join in the fighting in the Spanish Civil war, on Franco's side; the girl later dies. She instigates Sandy Stranger to conduct a love affair with Teddy Lloyd, the one-armed, Catholic art teacher, details of which she takes pleasure in hearing about. Before the start of World War Two, Sandy in a conversation with the headmistress gives her the reason that will serve as a pretext for dismissing Jean Brodie: fascism. Sandy joins the Catholic Church and later becomes a contemplative sister. She acquires a certain notoriety for a treatise that she writes.

That, briefly told, is the bare outline of *The Prime*. The story is not however told in a linear fashion. It jumps back and forth in time. We move from the past into what may be called future since it has not yet occurred at the time that the central action takes place. The ground, the temporal order of defined tenses, keeps shifting and time becomes one endless relativization. Added to these flashforwards and flashbacks are many anticipations of the future, hints to the future, often dropped mid-sentence. There are no surprises. We know that Jean Brodie was betrayed on p 27, we are told that Sandy became a nun on p 33. (The Penguin edition has 128 pages.)

The traditional suspense of the novel is substituted by a more reflective attitude to the ordering of events. Patricia Waugh says that in *Spark* the hermeneutic code is "ultimately a metaphysical one" (1984:83). The hermeneutic code is one of the five narrative codes identified by Roland Barthes in his analysis of Balzac's "Sarrasine". It includes "the various (formal) terms by which an enigma can be distinguished, suggested, formulated, held in suspense, and finally disclosed" (1990: 19). The hermeneutic code is thus concerned with the unfolding of an enigma: it answers the question 'What happens next?'. In *Spark* the hermeneutic code functions differently. It is not possible to answer the 'What happens next?' question in an anti-linear narrative that tells the future early in the narrative. 'What happens next?' is subordinated to a 'Why did it happen?' question. "The

hermeneutic", Waugh writes, "is thereby translated into the terms of a metaphysical or moral enquiry ..." (1984:83).

The older Sandy, the one who had betrayed Jean Brodie, writes a psychological treatise on *moral perception*. The name Sandy takes on when she becomes a religious is Sister Helena of the Transfiguration. The name of the treatise is 'The Transfiguration of the Commonplace'. There is a connection between Sandy's name and the nature of the treatise, although critics tend to gloss over this fact. One critic has even said that the information should not have been included in the novel, and that Spark includes it so as to tease the reader. It is these incomplete bits of information that make her art *disordered* and *fragmentary*. Bernard Harrison's comments are what we typically expect from Spark's detractors; the motive seems more to denigrate than to elucidate, which probably explains why they excuse themselves from the need to analyze the text. We read:

Why does she become a nun in an enclosed order? What about her strange book of psychology, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* ('on the nature of moral perception')? *Why put any of this in at all?*

There are two answers, which are at first sight contradictory. The first is that the enigmatic and *incomplete fragments* of information which the novel drops causally concerning Sandy are meant to *puzzle and irritate*; to create in the reader a spirit of *nervous dissatisfaction*, of not knowing quite where he is going or what he is supposed to see when he gets there ...

The second and more important answer ... is that the enigmas are there to *obstruct* the establishment of that systematic and unblemished unity of conception which it is of the essence of Jane Austen's genius to create and of her readers' pleasure to explore, and which makes possible the liberating, constantly surprising play of wit and moral perception which informs the interior of the novel precisely by the very rigour with which it restricts the range of what can enter the bounded, though not finite, world which it creates. The technique of a Muriel Spark novel is exactly the opposite to Jane Austen's ... (1976:237-8; my italics)

Moral perception is the recognition of what is moral. It relates to moral or ethical standpoint, a point from where it is possible to decide what is ethical and the extent to which the moral imperatives of conscience are the norms of perception. The ethical is closely related to artistic 'transfiguration', a word which appears in diffe-

rent contexts of the novel. The form of the novel, the transfigured whole, with its moral self-reflections conspires to reinforce this ethical dimension. We shall look more closely at the relation between the ethical and the artistic form.

Sandy betrays Jean Brodie. In response to a letter she had received from Jean Brodie announcing her retirement and the betrayal (which happened in about 1938) Sandy writes her a reply:

Sandy replied like an enigmatic Pope: 'If you did not betray us it is impossible that you could have been betrayed by us. The word betray does not apply.' (1986rpt: 126)

This is told towards the end of the book. Earlier in the book, seven years after the betrayal, that is, in 1944, Sandy's reaction to Jean Brodie's consistent 'whining' about her betrayal is more ambiguous: the "whine in her voice — '... betrayed me, betrayed me' — bored and afflicted Sandy" (60). There has been a shift, in time, from the absolute certainty of Sandy's position — Sandy as an 'enigmatic pope' — to the more bore 'bored and afflicted' response seven years later. Fourteen years later still, in 1958, Sandy's response to the betrayal is even more afflicted:

'Oh, she was quite innocent in her way,' said Sandy, clutching the bars of the grille. (127)

There has been a clear temporal progression, from indifference to an unsettling indifference and then to an unsettled state, although the order in which these states are presented in the book is different. Half-way through the novel we are told that Sandy — Sister Helena — recognized ("perceived") Jean Brodie's qualities as a teacher, that her "defective sense of self-criticism had not been without its beneficent and enlarging effects" (86). The clutching of the grilled bars is a sign of that recognition. The image, repeated four times (34, 35, 127 & 128), is an index to Sandy's burden of spiritual disquiet and also to the *claritas* within the representational space since the understanding of the past follows on and is viewed retrospectively from the act of clutching the convent bars. All the sub-codes cohere around this image. It is both the end and the point of departure. The image which ends the novel is literally at the centre of the work. We shall understand why as we proceed.

The perspective of the novel is largely Sandy's perspective. The novel is in many ways Sandy's attempt to make sense of her past. We are told that Sister Helena "had recovered from a creeping vision of disorder" (86). In looking back into the past she imposes order on the events. The events acquire the 'form' of art, not as they would have been but as 'economy' (a favourite Sparkian term) demands it. They are subject to a 'magical transfiguration' (111), 'magical' being another favourite Sparkian term.²⁴ Sister Helena's 'Transfiguration of the Commonplace' is the *claritas* that flows from the ordered whole. It results from the attempt to see that 'creeping vision of disorder' within a larger framework. There is a larger order. For Sister Helena it is her religion, the ethical standpoint, moral perception. It is within this moral order that the disorder is contained. It is only within a perspective of order that the past actions may be understood. To impose order on the past is to allow for the artistic transfiguration of that past. 'Transfiguration' is also a spiritual quality: 'the transfiguration of the commonplace' is the light that shows forth from within. But only when things are ordered is there transfiguration, Thomist *claritas*, because order — ordering — comes with knowledge, a matter of moral rightness, the 'purity of vision' Maritain spoke about (1927:125). Moral perception underlies order; to impose artistic order on events is an ethical imperative, it allows these things to be seen for what they are (Maritain, *Ibid*). This is not a simple question of deciding what is good and evil. Sandy — Sister Helena — acquires a sense of order only when she recognizes that a moral understanding of Jean Brodie would need to be ambiguous. She was both "innocent" and "guilty"; she was guilty insofar as she had no guilt and had "elected herself to grace" (109). The statement is paradoxical. The younger Sandy was too dogmatic — too full of 'Knoxian fury' (125). A clear moral stance is not the negation of a subtle understanding of events, a sense of nuance, of fine detail.

When we say that Sandy's 'vision of disorder' acquires coherence through the ordering of the past we can of course apply the same aesthetic aim to Muriel

²⁴ We see the word 'magic' in the description of the writer Emma Loy in *A Far Cry from Kensington* (1988): "Along came Emma ... with her magic and her charm ... Opinions varied about Emma Loy, but nobody could deny that she was a marvellous writer" (98). Emma's surname seems to be a tribute to the poet Myrna Loy but also, and I think especially, to Rosetta Loy, *grande dame*

Spark's art. This is not to suggest, as does Charles Alva Hoyt, that Sandy is a version of Mrs Spark (1965:141-2). Sandy is a scholar and an artist figure. We are told that as a child Sandy "was fascinated by ...[the] method of making patterns with facts" (1986:72). Sandy functions therefore as the embodiment within the narrated space of Spark's self-reflexive interest in the act and nature of storytelling. Sandy's moral transfiguration is a metafictional reflection on the production of art. What occurs at a representational level explores what occurs, in a much more complex manner, in the authorial level.

The Prime is constructed around three levels. We could call them tiers. We are using a spatial metaphor, whereas a story is not 'space'. The novel is constructed as though it had three tiers, as though it were a dense surface; the tiers approach underlies the logic of construction (itself a metaphor to do with 'filling in' space). The top tier is the surface or representational level. It is the story of Miss Jean Brodie's rise and fall, Sandy's conversion and her more enlightened vision. It is on this level that transfiguration shows itself: Sister Helena's burden of disquiet, the past distilled into its essence by an economic ordering of events, the ambiguity that results from the act of knowing as opposed to the moral uprightness ('the Knoxian fury') of not knowing. This is the level of *claritas*.

The tier above the first level is that of altitude. 'Above' is an inevitable metaphor when speaking of a narrative perspective that is *lofty* and *haughty*. Both words are dead metaphors which originally referred to height. Spark's narration is achieved from an elevated position. Anthony Burgess remarks that she writes from on high, from the heights of the Church Triumphant (the church in heaven): "Muriel Spark is a Catholic convert and already seems to have joined the Church Triumphant. This means that she can look down on human pain and folly with a kind of divine indifference" (1984:88).

This second level, the high narrative perspective, the lofty poise, the haughty manner, cannot of course be separated from the first level; it is integrated with it, sets it in motion, and is understood only with reference to it. (The first tier is

of Italian letters, author of *Le Strade di Polvere* (1987). The word 'magical' is obviously associated with Rosetta Loy's 'economy' of style.

likewise better understood with reference to the second level, the altitude with which it is narrated: we ought not to separate Sandy and Jean Brodie's story from the manner in which it is told.) We can see this second level in terms of Thomist *consonantia* or *proportio*; it functions as the motor of the narrative, it links the *claritas* of the first tier to the *integritas* of an eventual third tier. *Consonantia*, *claritas* and *integritas* ultimately function as one, not as separate entities. The three-tier metaphor is a metaphor, it is useful to the point that it can be used to deconstruct Spark's integrated art. The approach is necessarily reductionist because it provides a only bare outline of what Spark is doing and thus does not do justice to Spark's artistry. The only valid critical dialogue with Spark's novel would be a creative work, not the breaking of the toy to-see-how-it-works approach of literary-critical discourse. David Lodge's *How Far Can You Go?* (1980) is an example of such a creative dialogue with Spark's novel.

Viewed as kind of *proportio*, this second level would be what makes everything in the novel (representation, structure) proportionate to its eventual shape in the artwork. Altitude of perspective is necessary to the complete artwork. It is also integral to the story. It is at the centre of the novel.

Many critics have recognized this altitude of presentation. The words they use to refer to it — 'intrusive', 'obtrusive', 'didactic' — suggest that it is alien to the narrative, has been imposed on it for 'shock effect' or as a show of moral (ie, Catholic) superiority. Richard Mayne writes: "[I]t's a matter of moral absolutism which can't be finally separated from the fact that Muriel Spark is a Roman Catholic novelist" (1965:62). The objection to Sparkian altitude — which could also be called 'omniscient narration' — is that it denies contingency within the narrated space. The narrator knows all, she announces the future before its time, the characters are not free to change their destiny since their futures have already been set. It is a humanist objection. It is as if the novel were a playground of real-life dramas and choices, as if the contingency in the novel were real and not 'represented'. Spark has been called "a notoriously anti-humanist novelist" (1983:25). The charge is that she denies 'human' freedom in the novel. Parrinder also talks about her "manipulating her characters' destinies for a dogmatic purpose" (Ibid). Hoyt talks about this narrative control as being akin to a

“magician’s efforts to make demons do his bidding” (1965:130). For these critics it is obviously important that Spark should preserve the novel’s *illusion of contingency*.

The novel is non-contingent. Even Sartre recognized this — Sartre the one who had attacked François Mauriac for his authorial interventions and denial of human freedom within the narrative space. Sartre was aware of a deeper crisis: the contingency represented in the novels exists within a form that destroys contingency; the novel has *a priori* limitations. He observed that if men were entirely free they could walk out of the story (Kermode, 1967:138). The freedom of characters within such a non-contingent form cannot be unproblematic. What Frank Kermode praises in Spark is the fact that hers is “a radically non-contingent reality to be dealt with in purely novelistic terms” (Ibid: 131). Needless to say, Kermode does not approach Spark as a realist.

The novel’s non-contingency also provides a useful theological frame of reference: contingency (freedom) within a non-contingent form (a design, a plan, an ordered structure) is likened to freedom within a providential plane. The character in a novel is thus free, within the limits of a greater order. The theme of free will versus providence appears throughout the Sparkian *œuvre* — in *The Driver’s Seat* (1970), *Not to Disturb* (1971) and *Symposium* (1992), especially. Spark herself has said, in a interview, that she believes that events are “providentially ordered” (1962:14).

The function of narrative altitude, and in particular the narrator’s daring time-shifts, is to allow events to be seen in the light of Providence, which is also an ordering pattern that makes ‘sense’ of events. Early in the novel we are told that one of the characters, a ten-year-old girl, will die at the age of twenty-three. Mary Macgregor is the scapegoat of the Brodie set. We read:

‘ ... Speech is silver but silence is golden. Mary, are you listening? What was I saying?’

Mary Macgregor, lumpy, with merely two eyes, a nose and a mouth like a snowman, who was later famous for being stupid and always to blame and who, at the age of twenty-three, lost her life in a hotel fire, ventured, ‘Golden.’

'What did I say was golden?'

Mary cast her eyes around her and up above. Sandy whispered, 'The falling leaves.'

'The falling leaves,' said Mary. (1986rpt:13-14)

Mary's future death is a clause in a sentence about her stupidity. This may be an example of what Mayne calls Spark's "moral absolutism" (1965:62); she disposes of characters at the drop of a clause.

Mary Macgregor's death is mentioned again in Chapter Two. Previously her death had been anticipated by means of a reference to the future made in the same tense as the rest of the sentence. This second reference actually goes into future time; it makes also an anaphoric reference to the anticipation of her death in Chapter One, thus making the transition from present time to future time more discreet. We read: "Mary, who later, in *that* fire, ran hither and thither till she died" (1986rpt:28; my italics). The phrase "hither and thither" and the image of fire are again used with reference to Mary in Chapter Four, but in a different context. We are in the autumn of 1932 and Mary is twelve. We read how she took fright during a science experiment with magnesium flames:

Mary Macgregor took fright and ran along a single lane between two benches, met with a white flame, and ran back to meet another brilliant tongue of fire. Hither and thither she ran in panic between the benches until she was caught and induced to calm down, and she was told not to be stupid by Miss Lockhart ... (76)

The panic and the flames in the science experiment prefigure Mary's death. Because the reader knows in advance that Mary will die by fire, the experience in the science laboratory is meaningfully understood as a sign of her death. Her death is rendered natural. Add to this the comment, soon after the first anticipation of Mary's death, that her years with Miss Brodie "had been the happiest time in her life" (15), and the death becomes more ambiguous still. The narrative play with time places Mary's life within a wider temporal context where death is not the end itself, where it has no sting (Rm 6:5-11). Her death, the prefiguration of her death in the science laboratory, are seen as part of a broader ambiguously providential plot.

Human acts, Spark would insist, are subject to providential patterns of order. The concept is a theological one. Providence is of God's making. Human beings cannot create providence. In utilizing narrative altitude, by allowing events to be seen in a providential light, she is hinting at another kind of providence at work in the world. Her novel is not a substitute for that other providence. It is rather a theological exploration into the nature of providence within a non-contingent creative medium. Art is not life. The erasing of those boundaries is also one of the themes of *The Prime*.

The portrait of Miss Jean Brodie is a metafictional study in the poise of altitude, in a God-like perspective on events and in the usurpation of providential thinking for illicit ends. The portrait becomes a study of the limits of omniscience, pointing to the danger of a wanton application of omniscience in a situation not framed by some ordering principle.

We are told, through the perspective of Sandy, that Jean Brodie "thinks she is Providence" (1986rpt:120). Throughout the narrative Jean Brodie assumes for herself the right to decide what is right. What is right is what corresponds to her own private notion of what right is. It is what suits her temperament or her artistic taste. When she asks the girls under her care who the greatest painter is the inevitable response is "Leonardo da Vinci, Miss Brodie". Jean Brodie responds: "That is incorrect. The answer is Giotto, he is my favourite" (11).

The egotistical core around which her sense of self has developed is again evident when she tells the girls: "... Give me a girl at an impressionable age, and she is mine for life" (9). The line, repeated later in the book (112), quotes the well-known statement attributed to the Jesuits. The difference is that her intention is not merely to form or educate, but also to impose her own designs on the girls. The most dangerous example of this is when she suggest to the new schoolgirl, Joyce Emily, who had joined, or rather was a hanger-on of, the Brodie set in secondary school, that she should join the fighting in the Spanish Civil war, on Franco's side. The girl dies in an accident. Jean Brodie also predicts how things will turn out. She foresees, for example, that Rose Stanley, one of her girls will become the lover of Teddy Lloyd, the art teacher. As it turns out it is Sandy, the future nun, who

becomes Teddy's lover. By thwarting Jean Brodie's plan, Sandy undermines the providential logic of Jean Brodie's thinking.

It is also through Sandy that we see a developing critique of Jean Brodie's attempt to play at God. From the perspective of Sandy, later Sr Helena of the Transfiguration, we are told that Jean Brodie "thinks she is the God of Calvin, she sees the beginning and the end" (120). Miss Brodie's claims to Providence, more precisely, a Calvinist notion of providence, contrast with the orthodox Catholic understanding of providence which maintains that God's providence works itself through human free will. (This, one assumes, was the rationale underlying Muriel Spark's own use of narrative altitude: freedom within order, contingency within the non-contingent form of the novel.) The Calvinist idea of predestination is, from a purely Catholic understanding, a false theory of providence. It is false insofar as it allows no space for human free will. Miss Brodie appropriates for herself and secularizes the Calvinist conception of providence (or predestination). The point is not that Miss Brodie secularizes predestination, but that her frame of reference remains a Calvinist one. The novel, so ambiguous about so many of the concerns it brings to the surface, is curiously and unambiguously critical about the Calvinist idea of predestination:

... when Sandy read John Calvin, she found that although popular conceptions of Calvinism were sometimes mistaken, in this particular there was no mistake, indeed it was but a mild understatement of the case, he having made it God's pleasure to implant in certain people an erroneous sense of joy and salvation, so that their surprise at the end might be the nastier. (108-109)

The criticism of Miss Brodie lies not only in the fact that she acts as Providence, but that she has appropriated a Calvinist sense of election, the idea that election is of those whom God has chosen and that others are predestined to perdition. We are told that "Miss Brodie ... elected herself to grace in so particular a way and with more exotic suicidal enchantment than if she had simply taken to drink like other spinsters who couldn't stand it any more" (109). Calvinism has been secularized, but the frame of reference remains Calvinist.

It is clear that the novel's theological sub-text does not endorse Miss Brodie's playing at God and Providence. Yet the novel also points to the fine aspects of Miss Brodie's teaching, "its beneficent and enlarging effects" (86). This makes for ambiguity. It means that readers cannot make a categorical moral condemnation of Miss Brodie's behaviour when it is viewed in its full range of effects. The same ambiguity is applicable to Sandy Stranger who, in betraying Miss Brodie, also plays God and is thus guilty of the same thing she repudiates. Interestingly, Sandy's act of betrayal is described in appropriately Calvinist imagery. We are informed that she "was more fuming, now, with Christian morals, than John Knox" (125). This once again reinforces the identification of playing at omniscience with Calvinism, applicable both to Miss Brodie and to Sandy. The idea is that, like Calvinism with its Knoxian moralism, playing at omniscience implies a denial of human freedom. Evidence of this narrative condemnation of Sandy's behaviour is the rather ironic fact that Sandy, whose betrayal of Miss Brodie consisted of the accusation that her former teacher was a fascist, found in the ranks of the Catholic Church "quite a number of Fascists much less agreeable than Miss Brodie" (125).

The rather disparaging reference to the Catholic Church should not obscure the fact that what is posited as an alternative to Calvinism or any other false theory of providence is the Catholic system. We are told that the older Sandy — Sister Helena of the Transfiguration — had recovered from her earlier "vision of disorder" (86), which suggests that the older Sandy has moved away from the Knoxian dogmatism, and that her new vision, according to Joseph Hynes, "swings opposite to narrow theocratic absolutism, and now occupies a ground that, in the opinion of the narrator, allows individualism within law and system" (1988:77).

The criticism of Miss Brodie lies precisely in her inability to contain her individual spirit within a system; she becomes the system itself, the law. The passage that articulates this most forcefully relates this to the fact that Jean Brodie would have been ideally suited to the Catholic Church:

She was by temperament suited only to the Roman Catholic Church; possibly it could have embraced, even while it disciplined, her soaring and divine spirit, it might even have normalized her. (1986rpt:85)

The passage does more than speculate “that Miss Brodie herself might have been saved by Catholicism”, as David Lodge says (1971:142). Catholicism provides a vision of order that does not obliterate but contains the disorder. That at least is how Catholicism has often been perceived. Antonia White writes that it “is in practice, flexible while maintaining a rigid outline” (1983:137). The Catholic system is seen as the *via media* between predestination (a false theory of providence) and excessive freedom; it does not deny providence, but allows free will to act within it. Miss Brodie’s fault rests precisely in her inability to allow for or to accept the freedom of choice of others. Her vision, enlarging as it was, was disordered *in outline*; it lacked the frame of reference that would have tamed and ‘normalized’ it.

The idea of disorder contained within order is of course also one of the aesthetic principles underlying Spark’s art. Narrative altitude is a means of surveying the disorder; it is also *the means* through which the order is created. *Proportio* was the generator of the order, it was not the order itself, it was through it that the order was created. Altitude functions in this sense as a kind of *proportio*.

It is through the altitude in presentation, the loftiness of manner, the omniscient poise, that the narrative shifts back and forth in time. Altitude creates the norm from which all is observed. It is the vantage point from which time may be viewed. Past, present and future events are narrated in the same tense, the historic past tense. (When Spark goes back into the past from a present, narrated in the past, she has to resort to the past perfect tense, the ‘had been’, which in a sense undermines the logic of construction but which is also inevitable to avoid confusing the present narrated in the past with what had come before it. Spark is working with language, a convention, and in that sense, she has to retain the conventional markers of time.) When the future itself is narrated in the past tense — I am not thinking of the anticipations of the future, told in the future tense, but of the actual telling of future occurrences in the past tense — the future loses its distinction as a future and

becomes part of a large temporal backdrop. Past, present and future are rendered similar when measured against the eternal, that which is outside time.

Narrative altitude hints at, even if it does not (or cannot) replicate, the eternal order. The *distance* between narrator and narrated action suggests the littleness of actions, the fact that they fit within a larger (providential) order whose real form is outside the novel but whose order is glimpsed at through narrative altitude. The form, the altitude of presentation, thus acquires a very definite representational significance: it is the backdrop against which actions are judged, the scale against which they are measured.

The eternal is suggested by narrative altitude. But Spark, as if to alert the reader to its importance, also hints at it in one of the narrative passages:

They looked out of the wide windows at the little Braid Burn trickling through the fields and at the hills beyond, so austere from everlasting that they had never been capable of losing anything by the war. (56)

The passage makes an allusion to the Book of Genesis — and it was Lodge (1971:144) who first pointed out the reference — where we read of the “blessings of ancient mountains/bounty of the everlasting hills” (Gn 49:26). Here we should also note that the change of register, the shift from Spark’s usual terse style to a more sublime lyricism, signifies a foregrounding or affirmation of what is being said (Whittaker, 1982:137). What is being suggested here is the immanence and interpenetration of the other-worldly on this world, and the other world as the scale against which all is measured.

Narrative altitude hints at a sense of order outside the novel. It also suggests a sense of order within the novel. The novel is a constructed whole, it is an ordered artwork. The novel is akin to an architectural structure. Let us look more closely at the architecture of *The Prime*.

Narrative altitude defines the novel’s continual flashbacks and flashforwards. According to Ruth Whittaker there are fourteen flashbacks and fourteen

flashforwards (1982:131), which suggests a highly stylized approach to fiction. Whittaker however does not define exactly what she means by a flashback or flashforward, so it is difficult to know how she arrived at those figures.

In my reading of the novel I have arrived at very different figures. I have perhaps defined flashback and flashforward differently from Whittaker, which accounts for the disparity. By flashforwards I refer to what Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, following Genette, has called *prolepses* and which she has defined as “telling the future before its time” (1987:48), the *narration* of an event before it has occurred. Rimmon-Kenan distinguishes a *prolepsis* — the narration of the future — from presages of or hints to a future yet to be (Ibid). Similarly, an *analepsis* (a ‘flashback’) refers to the “narration of a story-event at a point in the text after later events have been told” (46).

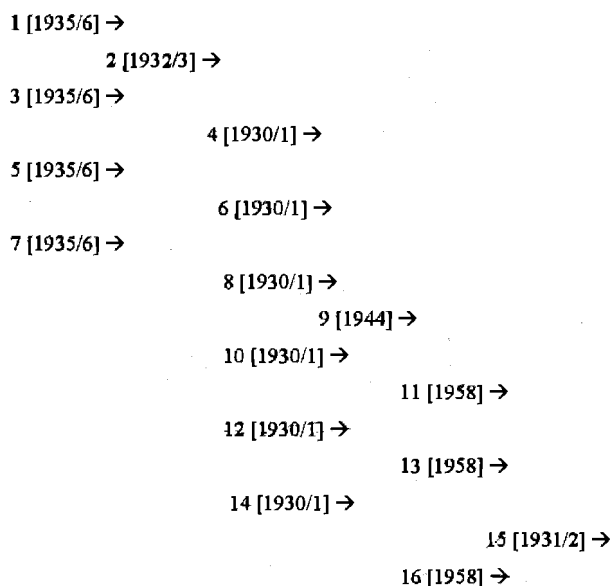
The novel, in terms of my understanding, is organized around time in a highly stylized and formalistic manner (which is also the point made by Whittaker); I count 43 discrete units of time.²⁵ (A segmentation of these time units is appended as an annexure.) Each of these units reflects an event or events that occurred at a particular time during a particular year. A year is constantly used to delineate time. We read, for example: “In the summer of nineteen-thirty-eight” (1986rpt: 122) or “It had turned nineteen-thirty-one” (25). Some of these units occur in the present (narrated in the past), others are flashbacks or flashforwards from the vantage point of the present identified in that chapter. The present tense is different for every chapter. The present tense in each of these chapters is usually identified by a year, although often this is not the calendar year but the European scholastic year

²⁵ The number of units might itself be significant from another point of view. Forty-three is the Cabbalistic seven ($4 + 3 = 7$). Jean-Yves Tadié in his chapter on the structure of the modern novel (1997:81-124) talks about the arithmetical structure underlying much of the construction of the ‘modern’ [ie, modernist and postmodernist] novel. He cites, among others, the works of Queneau, Proust, Kundera. Writing about the number seven he has this to say: “*Le nombre trois, c’est la Trinité. Le chiffre quatre est celui des éléments, symbole de la matière, du corps, du Monde. Sept, c’est quatre plus trois, le corps plus l’âme, le nombre humain par excellence, l’union des deux natures. Il y a sept âges de la vie, sept vertus, sept demandes du Pater, sept péchés capitaux. Dans le cosmos, le nombre sept renvoie à sept planètes qui commandent la vie humaine, aux sept jours durant lesquels Dieu a créé le monde. «Les sept tons de la musique grégorienne sont, en dernière analyse, l’expression sensible de l’ordre universel» [E Mâle]*” (106). *Proportio* was also the proportion of numbers. The idea that beauty could be reduced to numbers is found in the writings of St Augustine and Hugh of St Victor. Eco writes that “number, order, proportion are principles so much ontological as ethical and aesthetic” (1989b:50; my translation).

which begins in the autumn and ends in the summer of the next calendar year. The years which define the present tense in each of the chapters are as follows:

Chapter One	= 1935/6
Chapter Two	= 1930/1
Chapter Three	= 1931/2
Chapter Four	= 1932/3
Chapter Five	= 1935/6
Chapter Six	= 1938

The first obvious thing to notice is that the 'present tense' does not follow a strict chronological order (for instance, 1930/1 follows 1935/6). But the temporal structure is still more complex: what is the past tense, a flashback, in Chapter One — the events which occurred in the year 1931 — becomes the present tense of the Chapter Two, and the other narrated events become the future. In Chapter Four a flashforward to the betrayal of Miss Jean Brodie (in 1938) becomes the present tense of Chapter Six. If we schematize these temporal units, starting from the point where they are first introduced, we observe how they constitute a rather complex pattern. Units move away from and return to where they start. New units are interlocked with previously introduced units. A schematized diagram of these units would look something like this:



	17 [1946] →	
	18 [1931/2] →	
	19 [1946] →	
	20 [1931/2] →	
	21 [1946] →	
	22 [1931/2] →	
23 [1932/3] →		
	24 [1958] →	
		25 [1946] →
26 [1932/3] →		
	27 [1958] →	
28 [1932/3] →		
	29 [1958] →	
30 [1932/3] →		
		31 [1938] →
32 [1932/3] →		
33 [1935/6] →		
		34 [1938] →
35 [1935/6] →		
		36 [1938] →
37 [1935/6] →		
		38 [1938] →
	39 [1958] →	
		40 [1938] →
		41 [1946] →
		42 [1938] →
	43 [1958] .	

Schematized in this manner the novel ends literally at the centre, Sandy's act of clutching the convent grille, the moment of transfiguration, the *claritas* of the novel. The structure determines how the novel is read: when the reader finishes the novel he or she will have reached the heart of the novel.

The temporal organization constitutes the architectural (or perhaps musical) structure of the novel. This would be the third tier of the novel, the level of *integritas*, of wholeness. The three levels of the novel do not function separately, they play off against each other and are integrated in a unifying structure. To speak of three levels is to speak metaphorically. All the same, to read the novel as surface, as a faulty realism, never tells the whole story. The Thomist criteria of beauty can be usefully applied to Spark's novel insofar as they allow us to apprehend the formal complexity of the artwork. Malcom Bradbury is correct

when he says that in a Sparkian novel “we read backwards and forwards, for *integritas, consonantia, claritas*” (1972:250).

Integritas, proportio and *claritas* are artistic criteria for Order. A vision of order underlies the construction of *The Prime*; it tells us also about Spark’s understanding of life as providentially ordered. Order is also identified with the Catholic faith. While it is true that the novel should not be seen “as a kind of Catholic tract” (Lodge, 1972:142), it is equally true that the novel interprets the world from a decidedly dogmatic Catholic position.

The novel was published in 1961, the year before the start of the Second Vatican Council. Spark’s aesthetic, more self-reflexive than it was realist, points to the metafictional developments in the ‘postmodern’ novel. In so many ways Spark’s early novels are precursors of the metafictional novel. Metafiction has been linked to the self-reflexive postmodern novel (Waugh, 1988), but in Spark’s novel metafiction is inserted within a normative structure of order and it is not yet fair to speak of postmodernism. Spark’s Catholic novel has transformed the realism of her predecessors, but it is still committed to the aesthetics of order. Postmodernism, as we shall have occasion to study in more detail, exists only at the level of appearances. In many ways the highly formalistic nature of her art is closer to the geometrical spirit of classical Thomism.

Umberto Eco has asked an interesting question about the relation between this theoretical purity proposed by the Thomist system and the society that produced the theory:

... scholastic aesthetics seem to represent to us a world that does not entirely correspond to the daily reality in which those formulae were enunciated. How to reconcile the sense of geometric regularity, the limpid rationality ... with the so many manifestations of cruelty, of misery and inequality suffered daily? (1989b: 154-5; my translation)

The relation between Thomist theory and the world of today would be no less problematic. Spark’s answer would seem to be that art can only provide answers in its own domain. Art hints at an eternal order, formally it can be an ideal order. It is

not fiction's business to reproduce the suffering of the world. There is a vast space separating lived reality from words, those "names which betokened a misty region of crime and desperation" (1986rpt:32). The disorder of the world, the novel seems to say, will always be out there.

POSTMODERN ORDER:

David Lodge's *The British Museum Is Falling Down* (1965)

Adam listlessly turned over pages of notes on minor novelists who were now excluded from his thesis. There was this great wad, for instance, on Egbert Merrymarsh, the Catholic belletrist, younger contemporary of Chesterton and Belloc. Adam had written a whole chapter, tentatively entitled 'The Divine Wisecrack' on Merrymarsh's use of paradox and antithesis to prop up his facile Christian apologetics. All wasted labour.

David Lodge (1994:275)

David Lodge's *The British Museum Is Falling Down* (1965; reprinted in *Three Novels*, 1994) was published towards the close of the Second Vatican Council. The Council itself is part of the backdrop to the world of the novel. It was on the Council that the protagonist and his wife "and most of their Catholic friends pinned their hopes for a humane and liberal life in the Church" (1994:257). What they hoped for in particular was a change in the Church's attitude to birth control. The only method of contraception permissible to Catholics was the Rhythm or Safe Method, the 'natural' method endorsed by the Church. The vagaries of this method, the practical difficulties of applying it and the emotional strain wrought by it are comically exploited in the novel.

Our protagonist's name is Adam Appleby, a name suggestive of the Adamic fall and also the apple that brought on the original sin — we recall the Catholic notion of the world as the territory of the original sin. Adam Appleby is a cash-strained, Catholic postgraduate student researching the modern(ist) novel at the British Museum, whence the title of the novel. He is married and already has three children, largely as a consequence of adhering to the Rhythm Method of contraception. His wife is possibly expecting a fourth child.

The novel follows the various adventures experienced by Appleby in a day of his life. (The idea is reminiscent of James Joyce's *June 16th*, the novel as the microcosm of a day; although in Appleby's case, where neither the calendar date nor the season is stated, it suggests a more mundane sort of day, one that lacks the mythological weight of *Bloomsday*.) Appleby undergoes various farcical experiences in the course of that day, including inadvertently setting off the alarm that the British Museum was on fire, as well as getting lost in the labyrinthine stacks in the belly of the Museum. The central action of that day is the discovery of the existence of some manuscripts and also extracts from a novel by Egbert Merrymarsh, a fictional Catholic belletrist. Appleby hopes to utilize this unpublished material to create a scandal in the Catholic and literary worlds and to launch himself into notoriety.

The journey into the world of Merrymarsh's missing papers becomes also the discovery of Egbert Merrymarsh's dirty little secret, his affair with his housekeeper's niece, who as the now highly respectable Mrs Amy Rottingdean is his literary executor and guardian of his past. Mrs Rottingdean's devotional style, where relics and stoups of holy order are the order of the day, suggests the orthodoxy of a 'vulgar Catholicism' that contrasts so easily with Protestantism since it confirms all its fear of Catholicism's reliance on superstitious practices. Her interchange with Adam Appleby is evidence of the smug certainty of this anti-Protestant, anti-modern attitude:

'Won't you have some holy water?'

'I'm not thirsty, thanks.'

'I see you're not a co-religionist, Mr Appleby,' said Mrs Rottingdean, dipping her hand into a holy water stoup fixed to the wall, and crossing herself.

(1994:332)

Mrs Rottingdean's version of Catholicism is not however the only vision which is offered. There is also Adam's parish priest, Fr Finbar, who appears at unlikely moments in the narrative and who is extremely dogmatic and seems oblivious to the fact that his is a London parish. He regarded it as "a piece of the Old Country which had broken off in storm and floated across the sea until it lodged itself in the

Thames Basin" (1994:257). Fr Finbar is unconcerned with the Council, then in session.

Much concerned with the Council are the members of a discussion group named in honour of Dollinger, a German theologian who had been excommunicated in the nineteenth century for refusing to accept Papal Infallibility. Adam Appleby is a member of the group and attends its lunch-time meeting on the day the action in the novel takes place. These are liberal Catholics and they attempt to discuss some of the more problematic aspects of Catholic doctrine. Their commitment to orthodox Catholic practices — such as Appleby's following the Catholic teaching on birth control — exists side-by-side with a desire to challenge the received tradition. Unlike their patron, the Dollingerites prefer to remain within the Church. It is as if, the narrator informs us, "the liberal conscience had a more thrilling existence within the Church than outside it" (1994:288).

There are many competing visions of the Church — Fr Finbar's model is obviously the dominant one. The Church is at odds with the world. One of the concerns of the novel is how Adam Appleby grapples with the Catholic system in the context of a world that finds the system obsolete. Appleby's story is one of moving in and out of the Church, of forays into the world — the British Museum, the drinks party at the Department of English, the almost sexual episode with Mrs Rottingdean's daughter — but returns always to the observance of Catholic moral teaching, be it the Rhythm Method or sexual fidelity. The Church and the City are conceived as two separate worlds, the twain do not meet, and Appleby who traverses both worlds is a sort of double-agent.

A similar tension could be applied to the novel. How does the novel committed to the Christian worldview — and that worldview is never challenged in the novel — respond to the 'modern world', *the world of today*? That 'modern world' is also a postmodern world. What does this response imply about literary form and tradition? In this chapter we shall investigate the nature of this relationship. Lodge's novel will be proposed as a kind of interface, a place from which we can have access to many different routes. Some of these point to the Catholic novel as it had existed; other directions are suggestive of 'postmodernism'.

The British Museum is essentially a realist work. Lodge in fact has made much of the fact that when he started writing his model was the 'angry young men' social realist reaction to the metaphorically-charged fictions of Woolf and Joyce which had until then dominated English letters. "The fashionable *écriture* ...", writes Lodge, "was neorealist and anti-modern—not a climate in which Joyce's influence was likely to be encouraged" (1986b:63). Having said that, we note a difference from other types of realism and in particular the sort of realism that had been practised by writers committed to Christianity: Greene, Mauriac, O'Connor. This was the type of work that attempted to represent the spiritual through observable, material phenomena, the novel that worked towards an exhibition of *claritas* in the representational space. If Lodge's novel is considered realist it is by different standards. The writer's ability to represent the outside world is never openly questioned; its representationability is questioned by implication, through the formal structure of the work; in this sense the work is only partly realist. Neither does the action in the representational space suggest a movement towards some sort of spiritual illumination, of grace and damnation. The life of the spirit in Lodge's novel is rather drab. We will understand why as we proceed with our investigation. Lodge's realism shares some qualities with that of Spark in *The Prime*, even though in this novel there does not exist a sense of disquiet, discomfort and ambivalence in the representational space which is intrinsic to the 'sense' of the novel. But Spark's realism functions also as a surface, a ploy, a shadowy world of phenomena. One thinks of Cardinal Newman's motto: *Ex umbris et imaginibus in veritatem*, 'From shadows and types to the truth' (cited by Whittaker, 1982:4). The realist surface tells only half the story. As with Spark, in Lodge's novel there is something much more interesting going on under the bedrock of appearances. There are two operations going on in Lodge's text. On the one hand there is the supposedly realist text, a readable — or *readerly* as Roland Barthes would call it (1990:4) — text that purports to represent the world in an unmediated manner. On the other hand there is the text to be decoded, the one below the surface. This is the *writerly* text (Ibid), the one to be deciphered.

What precisely is the other text below the realist surface? We recall that in Spark's case the sub-text was a tightly constructed architectonic structure built around

temporal units. The underlying idea suggested order and the emphasis was on *integritas*, the sense of a whole. In Lodge's case the sub-text is not constructed around time, but by means of stylistic and situational parodies of older authors. Different chapters and passages are earmarked as different by means of these parodies. While on the one level there is a 'realist' story being enacted, at a deeper level we encounter other stories which determine the nature of the narrative at surface level.

Thus we meet Clarissa Dalloway from Virginia Woolf's novel, grown into an old woman. The allusion is to the transformation of the main character in Kafka's *Metamorphosis*: "I had a queer experience ... this morning on my way to the Museum ... I met Mrs Dalloway grown into an old woman" (1994:269). Clarissa has grown old but is still in period costume:

At the edge of the pavement and old, old lady, white-haired and wrinkled, dressed in sober black and elastic-sided boots, stood nobly erect, as if she thought someone really important had passed. In her right hand she held a speaking trumpet, which she raised to her ear. (1994:260)

There is also Hemingway's Spain with its ruddy machismo:

Two men sat at the table drinking beer and talking to each other in a foreign language. They were not very handsome and when they saw Adam they stopped talking. Adam looked at the bull-fighting posters.

'You are *aficionado*?' the hairy man asked.

'I beg your pardon?'

'You follow the bulls?'

'I've never been to a bull-fight.'

'Who is he?' one of the men at the table said. The thumb was missing from his hand.

(1994:327)

Many other authors are parodied in the novel. Lodge himself has said that the novel parodies the work of Kafka, Lawrence, Conrad, Woolf, Henry James, Hemingway and James Joyce (1986b:66), the great secular writers of the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century. The playful re-utilisation of the voices and stories of dead authors is a characteristic feature of a certain type of novel that

critics have labelled as 'postmodern'. In this kind of novel the past is called up in parody. Some critics have dismissed this kind of literature as a collage of fragments, a mosaic composed of the detritus of Western culture, a literature that goes nowhere because it merely recirculates what has been done and said before. In place of books and texts we have, to cite the words of Fredric Jameson, "metabooks which cannibalize other books, metatexts which collate bits of other texts" (1987:222). Jameson writes from an historical materialist position and is critical of the relativization of History and of a literature that zestfully plunders past styles as an end in itself. History becomes history, a story, a version of the past.

Parody reflects also on a sense of crisis about the ability to say new things. There is a passage in *The British Museum* where the protagonist flees from an upstairs room down a fire escape. The narrator says: "As he cautiously descended the ladder he was conscious of re-enacting one of the oldest roles in literature" (1994:374). We are reminded of Romeo. The associational short-cut conveys the idea so that it does not need to be elaborately restated. At the same time it rehashes the old tale. It is a very *vieux jeu*. It has all been said before.

The sheer quantity of written works no doubt contributes to the sense that it has all been said before. The Reading Room in the British Museum is described as "the [cerebral] cortex of the English-speaking races" (1994:320), which reinforces the idea of the excess of information (and written works obviously) available. This raises an interesting question: Why should it be the British Museum, and not London Bridge, that is 'falling down'? The idea seems to be that Western culture — or rather English-language culture plus Kafka — is falling down like a pack of cards. If I am permitted to take the metaphor a bit further, I would say that the house of cards can rise no higher because it has already reached its summit (nineteenth-century realism? modernism?). The idea, and this seems to be the logic of Lodge's novel, is to pick up those stray, fallen cards, the flotsam and jetsam of Western culture, and re-utilise them. Thus we are offered a literature of fragments and broken mirrors.

This is true of Lodge's novel, although the argument must not be pushed too far because others had already constructed a genuine literature of fragments (such as T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*), whereas Lodge's parodies of (mainly) dead authors are contained within a normative realist structure which to that extent hides their fragmentary quality. The use of the Grail legend as a unifying myth in Eliot's poem does not take away the fact that what is presented is a collage of fragments. That they acquire an ordering sense is another operation altogether.

But the point remains: Lodge's novel is responding to a crisis in representation. One of the features of the postmodern is that representation is no longer perceived as an unmediated process, naturally given. Postmodern literature reflects on itself, on its own processes of fictional construction. Very often it also plays with its own fictiveness: the ludic acquires here a special importance. The hybrid, which Ihab Hassan defines as "the jumbling or syncretism of styles" (1987:446), is a further extension of the artifice of the referent. In saying that the postmodern is characterized, *inter alia*, by the ludic, the hybrid, the self-reflexive I am also aware that these features are not new to literature. They are particularly evident in the zestful artificiality, the experimentation and the asymmetric and excessive ornamentation of the literature of the Spanish Baroque and 'Mannerist' periods (Orozco, 1981; Carilla, 1983). The Spanish designate their 'postmodern' novels as neo-Baroque (Hutcheon, 1987:11), which tells us something about how they are perceived.

The ludic, the hybrid and the metafictional, some of the postmodern 'features' prominent in Lodge's novel, are not new to literature. There have been manifestations of each of since Homer. We could say that they are already contained in Homer.²⁶ What postmodernism does that is different is to grant these features the status of ends in themselves. Self-reflexiveness serves no purposes except to reflect on itself. It does not participate in some prior framework that elucidates and justifies its function. It points to that crisis of representation we have just

²⁶ Speaking on the use and function of the metafictional devices in Homer, John Gardner writes: "In the *Argonautica*, Apollonios repeatedly jerks the reader awake with some unexpected, slightly frigid joke, or some seemingly needless, ponderous comment. But when we've finished the poem, we can never look with the same innocent admiration at the machismo of Homer's epics ..." (1991:87).

identified. The labyrinthine acquires here a special significance, not as a search towards a goal as it had been classically conceived, but as an end in itself. One of the recurrent images in postmodern literature is that of the labyrinth. The image appears also in Lodge's novel: there is the protagonist's labyrinthine search through the stacks of the British Museum. Many postmodernist texts utilize the labyrinth as a significant trope or as representational space which stands for the way society is conceived, for knowledge and meaning.²⁷ The labyrinthine, not as a search towards a goal, but as a situation or a condition in itself, stands as a sign for an ontological insecurity, an inability to find and establish meaning because certainties are, if not false, at least illusions.

The postmodern crisis in representation is related to another crisis of faith in systems of totalizing authority, be they philosophical or theological. It can even refer to the idea of Reason as a guiding light. Jean-François Lyotard's oft-quoted definition of the postmodern is an "incredulity towards metanarratives" (1987:xxiv). These are the metanarratives or the 'master stories' which define Modernity or the period since the *Aufklärung*: the progressive emancipation through reason and freedom, human enrichment through technological advances, emancipation from work, and even the salvation proposed by the Christian 'narrative' of self-sacrificial love (Lyotard, 1993:31). According to postmodern theory, it is no longer possible to seek for ordering meaning in normative patterns (or narratives) of authority. The epistemological centre has been cleared away as an illusion and philosophical (or theological) systems no longer explain and give meaning. Nietzsche's 'the death of God' becomes also the death of the subject of humanism — to be replaced by the impersonal subject of technocratic post-industrial society.

This definition of postmodern, which draws largely from Lyotard, is likely to cause confusion if it is conceived in terms of opposition to modernism (that which comes *after* modernism, the post-). By modernism I am referring to literary modernism, exemplified by such works as Joyce's *Ulysses*, Eliot's *The Waste*

²⁷ Texts that use the labyrinth as a significant trope include: Samuel Beckett's *The Trilogy* (1959), Jorge Luis Borges' *Labyrinths* (1962; trans), John Barth's *Lost in the Funhouse* (1969), William Burroughs' *The Naked Lunch* (1986) and Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* (1984; trans).

Land, Pound's *Pisan Cantos*. Many authorities see the difference between modernism and postmodernism in the fact that modernist works are often structured around totalizing myths: Homer's *Odyssey* provides the structure around which *Ulysses* is constructed, the Arthurian legend performs a similar function in Eliot's poem.²⁸ But literary borrowings that serve as totalizing or ordering myths are flimsy substitutes for the great 'transcendental myths' of God or Being or Rationality. The recourse to literary myths would seem to suggest a crisis in authority at its incipient stage. This would seem to be one of the ways of interpreting Lyotard's enigmatic statement that postmodernism "is not modernism in its terminal stage, but in its nascent stage, and this stage is constant" (1993:24; my translation).

Postmodernism is not what comes after (literary) modernism, but the rejection of the 'modernist' project of the *Aufklärung*, of the Enlightenment. Seen this way, literary modernism is an early version of postmodernism, for it already points to that crisis in authority and the incredulity, the lack of faith, in the face of the 'transcendental myths' which are at the source of Western metaphysics. 'Transcendental myths' refer to any systems of authority whose end is to legitimate social and political practices, ethics, ways of thinking:

These narratives are not myths in the sense of fables (not even the Christian narrative is), even though, like the myths, they have as their end the legitimization of social and political practices and institutions, of legislation, ethics, ways of thinking. But, differently from myths, they do not look for this legitimization in an original founding act, but in a future which will come to be realized. This Idea (of liberty, of the 'light', of socialism, etc) has the value of legitimating because it is universal and it Guides all human realities. (1993:32-3; my translation)

Included in Lyotard's 'transcendental myths' is the Christian metanarrative. The Christian 'story' of the Adamic Fall and Christ's Redemption has been used throughout history to legitimate social practices as diverse as the regulation of sexual activity, political systems and even learning. Lyotard's idea is that such

²⁸ C.K. Stead argues, at length, that the Grail myth, derived from Jessie Weston's book, was imposed on the poem as a kind of 'making sense' pattern *after* it had been completed. Stead uses

'authority' is no longer accepted as an unquestionably given, hence the 'incredulity'. At the same time, there is a difference between speaking about a crisis in authority whose consequence is that people no longer accept the Christian narrative as a unifying myth that explains human life and the actual belief of those within the Christian Church who chose to accept the Christian narrative as an integrating and valid vision. It is a question of who is doing the talking.

A writer whose perspective on narrative events or whose attitude towards narrative form is Christian is positing Christianity as a valid alternative. Given the Church's claims to divine authority and truth it is more likely that these writers would see themselves as custodians (or scribes) of the truth; the others are the ones who walk in error. We are over-simplifying of course. But the fact remains that a vision from within is different from without. We are not playing at a postmodern game of mirrors. It is a question of seeing two types of discourse in terms of the position from which they emanate. That these discursive sets might be incorrect from yet another vantage point is not what is at stake. Viewed from within, each discourse is valid.

The crisis in authority, the incredulity in the face of totalizing myths or narratives, viewed from a Christian perspective is not an occasion to rejoice. More likely it is to be criticized, rejected, even ridiculed. The Christian metaphysic is still committed to a vision of an ultimate Order under which all is subsumed. That Order exists because God exists. Newman, in one of his letters, writes: "I believe in design because I believe in God; not in a God because I see design" (1957:147). We have seen, likewise, how Thomist aesthetics insisted on order as an ultimate and organizing principle. Proportion as the motor that generates the form of the beautiful, *claritas* as the lineament or outward form of the proportioned work, the vision of the whole whose parts are proportionate to its function; the insistence on authoritativeness; the altitude from which the created whole is viewed: all these things are indicative of a reliance on Order as a guiding principle. Neo-Thomist propositions function, we have seen, as a theoretical exposition of some of the creative endeavours by artists still committed to the Christian system.

words like 'bogus', 'deception', 'contradiction' to describe this process of imposition (1989:84-128).

To what extent can these theoretical propositions explain a work such as Lodge's *The British Museum*, a work which exhibits features of what has been called 'postmodern' and which is also responding, at a formal level, to some of the exigencies of postmodernity? Postmodernity and the Christian system are, if anything, antithetical to each other. The postmodern recognizes that master narratives do exist, not as bearers of the truth obviously, but rather as transcendental illusions. Master narratives exist because they suppress the narrative enunciation of all the small narratives, *les petits récits*. It is for that reason that postmodern literature rejects the all-knowing metanarrative. "We have paid a high enough price for the nostalgia of the *whole* and the *one*", writes Lyotard. "Let us wage a war on totality" (1984:82; my italics). Postmodern writing is a literature of *petits récits*. These 'little stories', because they have ceased to be subsumed under a metanarrative, have also lost their ability to refer back to it. There is no source of origin. *Petits récits* refer, as if through a multiplying chain, to other small narratives. Together with this plundering of other narratives comes their duplication by means of pastiche and parody.

At first glance this appears to describe Lodge's novel, which is constructed around the parodies of other texts. The novel looks postmodern, hence it is postmodern. It would be an easy assumption to make. Now we recall that the 'revolution' of the Catholic novel was that it used the dominant fictional mode of the time, realism, in a way which made it indistinguishable from other kinds of realism. The presuppositions were of course different — the idea was to represent the 'life of the spirit' — but in outline Catholic realism was not essentially different. The use of the authorial convention was of course different, although it was precisely in the realist novel that it was most discreet.

In what ways, if any, is *The British Museum* committed to a Christian vision? It is not through the 'postmodern' games played out beneath the realist surface of appearances. There is no architectural structure beneath the realist surface. Lodge is doing something different from Spark. In a sense it is also architectural: Lodge's novel *constructs* a British Catholic literary tradition. The commitment to the Christian worldview is achieved through a *via negativa*, it builds on what others

have done. If the logic of appropriating other texts is of course postmodern, the result is less certainly so.

We had earlier on stated that Lodge parodies the great secular writers of the late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth. Included among his parodies are a number of British Catholic writers. These include G.K. Chesterton, Frederick Rolfe (also known as Baron Corvo) and Graham Greene. The choice of names is revealing; it tells how the 'canon' is perceived by the artists themselves. In reappropriating and re-utilising certain texts from the British Catholic literary tradition, Lodge's novel also enters into a dialogue with these texts. These parodied segments become the building blocks upon which Lodge constructs his own alternative creative 'edifice'. The 'buildings' metaphor is particularly appropriate: the British Museum, the repository of English culture, is falling down. It is in this sense that Lodge 'deconstructs' (or 'unbuilds' if the first term is likely to raise unfortunate expectations) the English tradition. Yet he seems to be doing the opposite with the Catholic writers. He is building something with bits and pieces taken from Catholic texts. In doing so he is constructing a tradition because no such tradition exists. Beneath the comic surface of the novel is a very scholarly compendium of British Catholic literary history; the book is a *summa* of themes and styles from various (some of them obscure) authors. Let us now look at some of these presences in Lodge's novel.

Early in the novel we are presented with a four-page interlude where Adam Appleby imagines that he has been elected pontiff of the Holy Roman Church, his wife having died at childbirth as a consequence of adhering to the Rhythm Method. He becomes the first married layman (in recent times) to be pope, and also an Englishman: "Little did the Fathers of the Council suspect, I wager, when they approved by so narrow a margin the admission of married men to Holy Orders, that they would soon be acclaiming a Supreme Pontiff with four *bambini*. Most mirific! Astonishing are the ways of God" (1994:299). Appleby takes on the name of Alexander VII. (Alexander VI had been the last married pope.) His first encyclical *De Lecto Conjugale* (ie, 'From the Marriage Bed') announces new and invigorating reforms within the Church.

The story is an old one. It was published in 1904 (1958rpt) and its author was Fr Rolfe (also known as Baron Corvo). The name of Rolfe's pope, the first layman (in recent times) to accede to the papal chair, and also an Englishman, is Hadrian VII. (The Dutch-born Hadrian VI had been the last non-Italian pope.) His first encyclical, which he calls a Bull, a word that has since disappeared from the papal lexis, is entitled *Regnum Meum* ('My Kingdom'). The reference is to the Johanne "Mine is not a kingdom of this world" (Jn 18:36) and thus it is that Hadrian VII promptly does away with the Papal States (1958rpt:149). He also restores old national rites (188), the great Gallic heresy. He is a radical conservative; his vision is anarchic yet he begins his Bull by stating his "unwavering defence of the Divine Revelation, the Church, Peter, and the Power of the Keys" (148). When accused of being overzealous he states:

We are conservative in all Our instincts, and only contrive to become otherwise by an effort of reason or principle, as We contrive to overcome all Our other vicious propensities. (164)

Lodge's portrait of Alexander the VII is a superimposition on the portrait of Hadrian VII. There is even the link in the choice of vocabulary. The use of the antiquated "Most mirific!" (1994:229) is reminiscent of Rolfe's penchant for archaisms. Rolfe's prose, writes Thomas Woodman, "is ...idiosyncratic and yet impersonal, modern and yet archaic" (1991:20).

The portrait of Alexander VII is introduced in the novel in the context of a fantasy dreamt up by Adam Appleby. It functions as a compensatory fantasy to fulfill neurotic impulses. The fantasy is the release of surcharge of pent-up emotions and frustrations felt by the main protagonist with regards to the Catholic Church's birth control prohibitions. Neurotic texts figure large in the literature of the Catholic ghetto; we will encounter more of these as we proceed.

Another writer from the same period as Rolfe, and like him a convert for a while, is Ronald Firbank. His novels (or novellas) are black-humoured, camp attacks on the Church. He is reported to have said: "The Church of Rome wouldn't have me and so I mock at her" (cited by Woodman, 1991:67). Sometimes the mockery,

such as we see in *Concerning the Eccentricities of Cardinal Pirelli* (1926; 1961rpt) where dogs are baptized and choirboys dance in a cathedral, is indistinguishable from an 'affectionate' endorsement of such behaviour. It is a vision of a libertarian Rome, a type of *ROMA* (Rome) back to front in every sense, an *AMOR* (Love) that is carnal, spiritual, mystical, hedonistic.

Lodge's novel moves at times towards that union of the mystical and the carnal. Appleby's 'holy quest' is described in the following terms: "If the success of this quest, contrary to the old story, necessitated his fall from grace in the arms of a seductive maiden, then so much the better. He had enough of continence" (1994:357). But the Firbankian influence is evident most in the parodically over-emphasized choice of names: Mrs Rottingdean, Egbert Merrymarsh, Cardinal Scarlettofeverini, Adam Appleby. Literary names are similarly rendered as parodic travesties: C.P. Slow, Kingsley Anus, John Bane, Shani Hodder, Mormon Nailer.

G.K. Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc appear indirectly, through the figure of Egbert Merrymarsh, the obscure (non-existent) literary figure that had belonged to the Chesterbelloc school, a bit like Maurice Baring (see Lodge, 1960). Appleby had earlier written a chapter for his thesis on "Merrymarsh's use of paradox and antithesis to prop up his facile Christian apologetics" (1994:275) Merrymarsh's *belles-lettres* suggest contemporaneity with Chesterton and Belloc as much as a composite of the style of the two, paradox and antithesis being the evident qualities. We read this in an extract from his *Lay Sermons and Private Prayers*:

Talk about purity, it might be said at the risk of appearing paradoxical, begets impurity. It puts ideas into young heads which they would be better without. (337)

Egbert Merrymarsh's name suggests 'Englishness', a pre-Norman Anglo-Saxon 'English-ness', the culture of the peasantry rather than of the ruling classes. It is not the sort of 'Englishness' of the Abbess in Crewe in Spark's novel, "with fourteen generations of pale and ruling ancestors of England, and ten before them of France" (1974:10). This is evident in Merrymarsh's very Saxon choice of titles: *The Return of Piers Plowman* and *The Holy Well* (1994:309). It is, in other words, a hankering back to the *popular* culture of the Middle Ages. Medievalism had a

very real appeal to intellectual figures like Chesterton, Eric Gill and Fr Vincent MacNabe. It was Chesterton too who claimed romance was superior to realism. He writes: "The simple need for some kind of ideal world in which fictitious persons play an ideal part is infinitely deeper and older than the rules of good art, and much more important" (cited by Coates, 1984:160). The parody of a medieval-type romance, with the trappings of a sire, a damsel and the Grail, appears in *The British Museum*:

For what was that house in Bayswater, dismal of aspect and shrouded in fog, with its mad, key-rattling old queen, raven-haired, honey-tongued daughter, and murderous minions insecurely pent in the dungeon below, but a Castle Perilous from which, mounted on his trusty scooter, he, intrepid Sir Adam, sought to snatch the unholy grail of Egbert Merrymarsh's scrofulous novel? (1994:357)

The figure that has dominated English Catholic letters this century has, however, been Graham Greene. His 'Catholic novels', those novels where there is a Catholic perspective on events, are few,²⁹ but it is also true that Graham Greene set a 'model' of what it was to write 'Catholic'. The world of Greene's novels — many critics talk of *Greeneland* — is a world of exotic locations, spiritual extremes, the smell of evil. Terry Eagleton writes: "That the love of God and a diseased humanity are squarable *in the end* is the point of Greene's Mauriacian doctrine that only sinners are on intimate terms with the Almighty" (1988:1033). Greene's theology of sin and corruption is more extreme than that allowed by orthodox Catholicism. It has become something of a commonplace to call him a Jansenist. Anthony Burgess, for example, writes: "Greene is a Jansenist, and Jansenism ... is too close to Calvinism to be good Catholicism" (1982:31). Jansenism, named after Bishop Cornelius Jansen (d. 1638), refers to the rather strict application of Augustinian doctrine and is indeed rather close to Calvinism.

Appleby, when he is lost among the stacks of the British Museum, comes across a book that "bore the device of the Jansenist Christ, arms raised above the bowed head in a grim reminder of the exclusiveness of mercy" (1994:319). The Jansenist

²⁹ Only four of Greene's novel can rightly be considered Catholic novels: *Brighton Rock* (1938), *The Power and the Glory* (1940), *The Heart of the Matter* (1948), *The End of the Affair* (1951). In

reference might appear to suggest that Lodge is mocking the Irish-inherited Jansenism of English Catholicism, “that over-scrupulous, puritanical kind of Catholicism” (1982rpt:40) is how one of the characters in *How Far Can You Go?* refers to it. But the image of the Jansenist *crucifix* — does such a thing exist? — has richer connotations. It is a clear borrowing from Graham Greene’s *The Third Man* (1950):

Turning away from Dr. Winkler, he confronted yet another crucifix, the figure hanging with arms above the head: a face of elongated El Greco agony. “That’s a strange crucifix,” he said.

“Jansenist,” Dr. Winkler commented and closed his mouth sharply as though he had been guilty of giving away too much information.

“Never heard the word. Why are the arms above the head?”

Dr. Winkler said reluctantly, “Because He died, in their view, only for the elect.”

(51)

The allusion to Greene’s Jansenist crucifix does not seem intended to evoke humour through parody, but is rather an acknowledgment of Greene’s influence, of his ability to represent the tormented spiritual life of a particularly dramatic version of Catholicism. The Jansenist crucifix functions as an index to Greene’s represented world. It is also a tribute. (Michael, the academic Catholic in *How Far Can You Go?*, writes his Master’s thesis on the novels of Graham Greene.) At the same time there is a recognition that to write like Greene is impossible for Lodge. The passage that articulates this most forcefully contrasts the spiritual life of Father Wildfire, who knows at first-hand what Greene would call “the weight of all that misery” (1948; 1950rpt:123), with Adam Appleby’s more ‘suburban’, middle class concerns:

Adam wanted to ask if it was better to make love to your wife using a contraceptive, or not to make love to her at all; but somehow it did not seem an appropriate question to ask Father Wildfire. He lived at the frontiers of the spiritual life, where dwelt criminals, prostitutes, murderers and saints, a territory steaming with the fumes of human iniquity, and from which souls emerged, if they emerged at all, toughened and purified by a heroic struggle with evil. In contrast, Adam’s moral problem seemed trivial and suburban, and to

other novels, such as *A Burnt-Out Case* (1961), “the secular and religious world-views are evenly balanced, and the interpretation of events is left deliberately open” (Lodge, 1971:120).

seek Father Wildfire's advice would be like engaging the services of a big-game hunter to catch a mouse. (1994:292)

The Catholic experience in Lodge's novel is much more mundane than it is in a novel by Graham Greene. It is the environment of the local church with a typical parish priest (Fr Finbar), church sodalities (the Legion of Mary) and discussion groups (the Dollinger Society). This helps to explain the nature of the Catholic perspective. We no longer have the spiritual ups and downs of Greene or the aristocratic heights of Waugh, the baroque spirals of Firbank, the paradoxical leaps and turns of Chesterton. Lodge's is the world of the *petite bourgeoisie*, respectable as it is without the excessive spiritual torments of the 'frontiers'. Altitude has been reduced, has fallen down like the British Museum. The narrator does not look down on a 'fallen' world, but arrives from within it. Adam Appleby's name is significant; it suggests the apple that brought the Adamic fall. We are in the territory of the original sin, not viewed from heights "to dizzy and appall" (1982:162), as Newman says, but from within the City itself. This determines the nature of the comedy in *The British Museum*: it is not done with the irony and detached position of someone looking at the world from an elevated position (such as we have in Waugh and Spark), comedy comes from within: wit is replaced by farce. *The British Museum* can be regarded as a survey of many farcical moments.

The reference here is to James Joyce, in many ways an eminently comic writer, one who had a troubled relation with the Church. Anthony Burgess calls *Ulysses* "the great comic Mass" (1982:26). *Ulysses* provides a model for such comedy, also for writing from within the City. It also provides a model for the structural organization of Lodge's novel. The last section in *The British Museum*, a soliloquy by Barbara Appleby, is in fact a parody of Molly Bloom's long, unpunctuated monologue at the end of *Ulysses*. It is a tame, domesticated parody, lacking the wonder and linguistic dexterity of the original. In Joyce's work we read,

... I was a Flower of the mountain yes when I put the rose in my hair like the Andalusian girls used or shall I wear a red yes and how he kissed me under the Moorish wall and I thought well as well him as another and then I asked him with my eyes to ask again yes and then he asked me would I yes to say yes my mountain flower and first I put my arms

around him yes and drew him down to me so he could feel my breasts all perfume yes and his heart was going like mad and yes I said yes I will Yes. (1984rpt:704)

Whereas Molly Bloom said yes, Barbara Appleby says *perhaps*:

... he said it'll be wonderful you'll see perhaps it will I said perhaps it will be wonderful perhaps even though it won't be like you think perhaps that won't matter perhaps. (1994:391)

The difference, the constantly repeated 'perhaps', might have something to do with the novel's lack of fixed direction, with its having to make concessions to modernist fiction, to realism and to postmodern forms and not going far enough (the theme of Lodge's other novel) in any direction. The novel is many things at once. It is an interface. It is a maze. It is a labyrinth with an exit. Adam Appleby gets lost in the stacks of the British Museum but finds his way out. In the postmodern novel the labyrinth does not always have an exit.

Ironical also is the fact that a novel that deconstructs a tradition also creates another literary tradition, which is not to say that the novel is too closely identified with that tradition. In the end (in both senses) James Joyce is preferable to Rolfe or Greene. But the paradoxical nature of this exercise of building and unbuilding, of constructing and deconstructing, reads a bit like a Chestertonian paradox on the laughter of God, something like the title of the chapter Adam Appleby had written for his thesis: 'The Divine Wisecrack'. The chapter never got to be used in Appleby's thesis. I should like to think that 'The Divine Wisecrack' transformed itself into the novel, and that Appleby discovered, not that he had written a dissertation, but that he was a figure within a fiction. This is a bit like Persse McGarrigle in Lodge's *Small World* (1984; 1985rpt) who writes a book on Eliot's influence on Shakespeare. It is of course a matter of phrasing. Persse McGarrigle writes a book on how our reading of Shakespeare is inevitably mediated by Eliot's reading of Shakespeare. 'The Divine Wisecrack' is not the thesis which never got to be used. Yet the paradoxical logic of a 'Divine Wisecrack' certainly underlies the construction of Lodge's novel: the falling down becomes the building up, modernism is expressed through realism, postmodern fragmentation is contained within order. The route was through Joyce's ribald and ordered cosmos, not via

Greene's realist spiritual borderlands. The emphasis is not on *claritas* as a spiritual manifestation but on the wholeness of an integrated art. Perhaps the novel is not an interface but the central concourse of an interface. It goes everywhere but it is also a centre. The novel still retains its centre. The playing at postmodernism is a game. A serious and not so serious game. Perhaps.

POST-CATHOLIC AUTHORITY:

David Lodge's *How Far Can You Go?* (1980)

The Catholic novels we have discussed up to this point posited, no matter how inadvertently, a Christian aesthetic against the generalized logic of postmodernism. Spark's blending of formalism and realism in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961) was seen to be founded on a Christian aesthetic which could be theorized by neo-Thomism; it was the art of *claritas* and *integritas* written from the heady heights of narrative altitude. Lodge's *The British Museum is Falling Down* (1965), a similarly realist and formalist work, was seen as a concession to postmodernist deconstruction (unbuilding) at the same that this deconstruction worked as construction (building) of another literary tradition. The novel functioned as a type of literary picture gallery (or museum) of past histories, a collage that deconstructed the tradition at the same time that it inserted itself within it. Architectural logic determined the structure of the novel, which suggested a mechanized version of Thomist *integritas*. The loftiness identified by Maritain as essential to a Christian perspective had likewise disappeared: the novel was written from within the City, the irony and detachment of the narrative altitude were substituted by a more farcical use of the comic mode. What we have in both cases is Catholicism as a distinct vision; this is translated in literary terms by the very distinctive narrative strategies that these works adopt. The Catholic vision existed in opposition to that of the world. The Church was still an alternative society in the City rather than of the City. The preconiliar Catholic novel reflected its difference from rather than its approximation of the modes, styles and forms of the City.

With the Second Vatican Council (1962-5) new dimensions were introduced for Catholic Christian writers that would shift, as it were, the carpet from under their feet. Certainties long held disappeared, such as the idea that only in the Catholic Church was there salvation; long esteemed practices, such as saying the mass in

Latin, were revoked; saints were removed from the canon, the Church's official list of saints. David Lodge's *How Far Can You Go?* (1980) begins in the far-off days of the "year of grace nineteen hundred and fifty-two" (1982rpt:1) and the setting scene is an early-morning weekday mass in honour of St Valentine, one of the saints later to be removed from the canon. The novel traces the lives of a group of Catholic university students in London and also their chaplain. In particular the novel looks at the various ways these young Catholics coped with the Church's rather strict teachings on matters sexual and their responses to this. These ranged from strict adherence to the Church's teaching that sex was permitted only after marriage (the attitude of Michael and Miriam, probably the central characters in the novel), the *laissez faire, laissez passer* approach informed by the more casual 'Italian' so-called attitudes (the character Polly), the option of life-long celibacy (Ruth, the religious), and the effects of sexual repression on guilt-inflicted Violet and closet homosexual Miles. The novel follows the characters' change of attitudes as they grow older and are confronted with the changes in society, the reforms of Vatican II and the later readherence to the ban on unnatural methods of birth control following Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae Vitae*. The novel casts its net quite wide and explores the many different versions of Catholicism, conservative, liberal and radical, that were to become commonplace in the postconciliar period. The novel also glimpses the attitudes of the younger generation, the children of the central characters, grown into young adulthood, and likewise looks at their different responses, sometimes permissive, otherwise preserving the chaste demeanour of their parents' generation.

The central question for these young Catholics living in the preconciliar days of the 1950s, the one that gives the title to Lodge's novel, was: 'how far can you go?' The question refers to how far was it possible to go in matters of sexual temptation without falling into mortal sin and thus condemning themselves to eternal damnation and Hell. But the question also takes on other significances in the novel. It becomes a question of how far theologians could allow their speculations to stray so far from the boundaries of orthodoxy that they amounted to a rejection of the orthodox system. The issue is explored again, with greater complexity, in Lodge's *Paradise News* (1991). The other significance of the 'how far can you

go?’ question refers to writing practice. There is a link between the theologians’ ‘how far can you go?’ and that of the writer:

For we all like to believe, do we not, if only in stories? People who find religious belief absurd are often upset if a novelist breaks the illusion of reality he has created ... But in matters of belief (as of literary convention) it is a nice question how far you can go in this process without throwing out something vital. (1982rpt:143)

The question could be rephrased in another way: to what extent could the writer break the realist work’s ‘illusion of reality’ without superseding and abandoning the practice. To break the ‘illusion of reality’ is also to reveal the processes of construction, to exhibit the formalist concerns of the work. *How Far Can You Go?* (henceforth abbreviated as *How Far*) is a realist work insofar as it is readable, has a narrative texture that is relatively uncomplicated, and gives readers a ‘window’ into the lives of the characters inhabiting the narrative space. At the same time it problematizes its ‘illusion of reality’ by means of various authorial interventions: the narrator addresses his readers, speaks to them, discusses his characters and the advisability of opting for certain names to assign to them, gives hints and previews into the future lives of these characters. Lodge’s narrator has the habit of sounding just like the David Lodge who writes books, which in itself is a warning about the way the distinction between author and narrator becomes, in this novel, curiously uncertain. The narrator in the novel comments, for example, on one of his previous works:

I have written about this before, a novel about a penurious young Catholic couple whose attempts to apply the Safe Method have produced three children in as many years, and whose hopes of avoiding a fourth depend precariously on their plotting a day-by-day graph of the wife’s temperature ... It was intended to be a comic novel and most Catholic readers seemed to find it funny, especially priests who were perhaps pleased to learn that the sex life they had renounced for a higher good wasn’t so marvellous after all. Some of these priests have told me that they lent the book to people dying of terminal diseases and how it cheered them up, which is fine by me ... Healthy agnostics and atheists among my acquaintance, however, found the novel rather sad ...

Why this novel should have been translated into Czech and no other foreign language I cannot explain, for I should have thought that Czech Catholics would have more important things to worry about than problems of conscience over birth control ... (1982rpt:73-4)

These authorial interventions seem like self-reflexive 'postmodern' exercises in the demystification of realism. They are, but at the same time to call them 'self-reflexive' or 'postmodern' does not fully explain what the novel is trying to do. The novel is about Catholics and how they responded to the Church's teachings. It is about developments in theology and also about being Catholic in Britain. Lodge's novel is a very churchy book. As in *The British Museum is Falling Down* (1965) we should be on our guard for a relation between a depiction of a version of Catholicism and the manner in which this translates itself into literary terms. Such a relation would not be unexpected from Lodge. A self-conscious novelist, Lodge was also (until his retirement in 1987) an academic with an interest in literary theory and narratology and also in British Catholic fiction. That Lodge would rework the Catholic literary tradition in a novel about the changes in the Church is consistent with his approach to the tradition in *The British Museum*. Because the changes in the postconciliar Church raised issues which had not previously been taken up or had been unforeseen by Catholic writers who had remained in the Church, it is natural that Lodge's appropriation of the tradition should be substantially different from that carried out in his earlier novel.

"The Catholics for an Open Church Paschal Festival was going to be ... a showcase for the pluralist, progressive, postconciliar Church" (1982rpt:209), Lodge's narrator informs us. The festival, the transcript of which makes up the greater part of the last chapter in the novel, is one of many new approaches to the liturgy explored in *How Far*. There were also the house masses, the singing of folksy tunes at mass, the new English translations of the liturgy and also the appearance of a Pentecostal-type worship in the Charismatic Renewal movement. These changes were pluralistic insofar as they allowed for various approaches to the liturgy that reflected the cultural and spiritual needs of different types of Catholics.

The 'spirit' of the immediate postconciliar period was also one of dialogue. Many ideas, not all of them endorsed by the Church but silently tolerated, circulated especially among the intelligentsia. (We are of course referring to Great Britain; liberation theologies had a very real, immediate and political, appeal to the disfavoured in Third World countries.) There were all types of new theological

speculations, many of them challenging to Church's traditional claims to authority. Hans Küng, who is quoted at the beginning of the novel, is probably the best-known of these theologians. There were also attempts to integrate Marxism and Catholicism. *Slant*, the Marxist Catholic working group at Cambridge (which in real-life included Terry Eagleton), is included as one of the theological (or theologico-political) options open to intelligent Catholics. The idea of the Church was of a progressive, outward-looking community.

Many educated, middle-class Catholics expected that the Church would, in turn, relax its attitude to sexual morality and, in particular, to contraception. Pope Paul VI's 1968 encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, much against the expectations of many Catholics, endorsed the traditional Catholic teaching on birth control. This becomes the central crisis in *How Far*. Catholics who had begun to use 'unnatural' methods of birth control such as the 'pill' had to return to the old observation of Church teaching. Those Catholics who in their conscience continued to use, or began to use, these methods of contraception other than the Rhythm Method were consciously disobeying the Church's moral teaching. In doing so they were also putting into question the Church's authority. According to Lodge/Lodge's narrator, *Humanae Vitae* "compelled thoughtful Catholics to re-examine and redefine their views of fundamental issues: the relationship between authority and conscience, between the religious and lay vocations, between flesh and spirit" (1982rpt:120).

The claim to authority and authoritiveness has been a qualifying feature of Catholicism. The Church conceives of itself as 'the body of Christ': "Just as a human body, though made up of many parts, is a single unit because all these parts, though many, make one body, so it is with Christ" (1 Co, 12:12). The Church, the *ekklesia*, the community of believers, is a continuation of the Incarnation of Christ. It claims also to have the authority of Christ. In practical terms that authority does not reside in the People of the God, the *ekklesia*, but at the apex of the Catholic Church as an institutional pyramid. Authority becomes in particular papal authority. Some of this authority is based on the Church's Petrine claims, the idea that the pope or bishop of Rome is successor to Peter. The pope is the final arbiter of authority particularly as it relates to 'faith and morals'. The Church is also heir to an Italo-Roman legalistic tradition, whose source of

authority is the Law. This finds itself expressed in Canon Law, for example, often used for disciplinary control.

To be fair, the Church has traditionally maintained the 'primacy' of conscience. Newman's exposition of the Church's teachings on conscience in response to Gladstone's assertion that "every convert and member of the Pope's Church places his loyalty and civil duty at the mercy of another" (quoted by Newman, 1964d:357) remains, to this day, one of the finest expositions, at least in English, of the Church's other tradition. His concluding words to the article, although doctrinally sound, were likely to irk the curial custodians of the Church:

I add one remark. Certainly, if I am obliged to bring religion into after-dinner toasts (which indeed does not seem quite the thing), I shall drink — to the Pope, if you please, — still, to Conscience first, and to the Pope afterwards. (383)

The fact remains that the 'primacy of conscience' has always been marginal in relation to authority because it follows that in pursuing the dictates of conscience one will still have to bear the consequences of not heeding ecclesiastical authority. Authority until relatively recently could also mean 'silencing' or 'excommunication'. The 'primacy of conscience' exists, then, in relation to an ultimate institutional authority.

The Roman Church's insistence on authority, be it doctrinal or moral, was echoed in Christian aesthetic thinking and in neo-Thomist theory. Jacques Maritain spoke of the 'purity of vision' and altitude from which a represented world should be viewed; this suggested some measure of authoritiveness about the distinction between good and evil on the part of the writer. It is no coincidence that writers who have used the authorial or omniscient convention in this century have been, Lodge tells us in an article he wrote on Spark, 'professed Christians' (1971:119).

Lodge's authorial interventions in *How Far* are done in the tradition of earlier Catholic Christian writers. At the same time that he uses the convention he problematizes it, puts it into question, interrogates its function. Omniscience suggests and rests on authority; in problematizing narrative omniscience, Lodge

problematizes the notion of authority, and especially ecclesiastical authority. This is how Patricia Waugh interprets Lodge's use of the authorial convention. She writes: "... [it] expresses formally some of the doubts and concerns expressed thematically, in the text, about sexual morality and finally the Catholic Church itself" (1988:75). What is interesting about Lodge's use of the omniscient convention is that it draws, not on Greene or Mauriac's impersonal third-person narration, but on Spark's altitude and high-handed poise in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. Lodge's novel becomes a reworking of the Sparkian use of the convention, which Lodge uses for metafictional and self-reflexive ends.

The trajectory is also interesting. *The Prime* was published in 1961. Ten years later Lodge published an article on Spark's use of the omniscient convention in *The Prime*. He wrote it as a "personal act of amends" (1971:124) for having misunderstood the complexity of the novel when he first reviewed it. The article dissects Spark's use of the convention and at the same time suggests her gifted artistry. The article is one of the most useful and illuminating *entrées* into Spark's fictional method. Reading Lodge's novel, published roughly ten years later, it becomes clear that Lodge was also using, even if unintentionally, Spark's novel as a springboard from which to rehearse his own aesthetic ideas. What he points to Spark's having done in her novel are the things he comes to use himself. His comments about the nature of omniscience in Spark are, likewise, revealing about the nature of omniscience in his own work. Our discussion of omniscience in Lodge's novel follows on from our earlier discussion of Spark's narrative altitude. At the same time our approach will heed the way Lodge's utilization of the authorial convention is mediated by his earlier exposition of the Sparkian method.

We recall that in *The Prime* omniscience works through the narrative control of time, particularly in the way the narrative voice gives away information about the future and tells the future before its time. Traditional suspense ('What will happen next?') is substituted by a more 'moral' enquiry into the reasons for a particular course of action ('Why has this happened?' or 'Why was Miss Brodie betrayed?'). Lodge in his article notes that Spark's use of the authorial convention does "not serve the purposes of a pat moralism or a reassuring providential pattern" (1971:122). Lodge is careful to notice the self-reflexive potential of Spark's use of

narrative omniscience. He tells us that the features of Spark's narrative method "unsettle, rather than confirm the reader's ongoing interpretations of events, [by] constantly readjusting the points of emphasis and the principles of suspense in the narrative" (Ibid). This becomes one of the principles underlying Lodge's own creative use of the narrative omniscience. His own way of 'readjusting the suspense' of the narrative reveals an interest in giving away the future before its time, as for example, when in the course of narrating the lives of characters Dennis and Angela in the year of 1952 he inserts two sentences about a remark Dennis will make in 1974, which by implication informs us that they have since got married and have recovered from their Church-instilled hang-ups:

At a well-wined dinner party in 1974 Dennis was to describe their courtship as the most drawn-out foreplay session in the annals of human sexuality. He was alluding to the infinitely slow extension of licence to touch which Angela granted him over the years, as slow as history itself. By November 1952, when *The Mousetrap* opened in the West End, he was allowed to rest one hand on a breast, outside her blouse. (1982rpt:31)

The manner in which Lodge shifts 'the points of emphasis' takes however a more self-reflexive turn than they do in Spark's novel. We read:

... and a couple of immobile old ladies who are neither sitting nor kneeling, but wedged into their pew in a position halfway between the two postures, wrapped up like awkward parcels in coats and woolies, and looking as though they were left behind by their families after the last Sunday mass and have been there ever since. We are not, however, concerned with the old ladies, whose time on this earth is almost up, but with the young people, whose adult lives are just beginning. (1982rpt:2)

The manner in which Lodge describes the old ladies at mass, "wrapped like awkward parcels", makes them seem neither real nor significant to the story. In informing us that they have been 'left behind' at church by their families, he is also saying that they will be similarly left behind or forgotten by the narrative. He then says that the old ladies are of no real interest as they are about to die. The emphasis is shifted from the old ladies to the young people at mass, the protagonists of the novel. The interest of the passage lies in its tone, which mimics Spark's high-handed dismissiveness.

Similarly to what we would expect in Spark, the narrative persona in Lodge's novel asserts his right and authority to control his fiction. This is not done with Sparkian *hauteur*, but in a deceptively friendly manner. The phrase "genial reassurance" (1971:122), which Lodge himself uses to refer to the nature of Henry Fielding's use of the omniscient convention, comes to mind as the most revealing about Lodge's method. We read, for example:

Looking, as it were, over his shoulder, at the congregation, you can remind yourselves who they are. Ten characters is a lot to take in all at once, and soon there will be more, because we are going to follow their fortunes, in a manner of speaking, up to the present, and obviously they are not going to pair off with each other, that would be too neat, too implausible, so there will be other characters not yet invented, husbands and wives and lovers, not to mention parents and children, so it is important to get these ten straight now. (1982rpt:14)

The tone of Lodge's narrator is, generally speaking, friendly, 'genial'. The reader, in Fieldinguesque style, is addressed with eighteenth-century courtesy: "And is that so surprising — would you, gentle reader? Did you, gentle Catholic reader?" (1982rpt:10). The geniality of Lodge's handling of the omniscient mode serves a function; we could say that it is proportionate to its function. The genial tone creates an easy transition between passages of pure narration and those which are explanatory of Christian doctrine, social history or some aspect of literary construction which the narrator feels needs to be explained. We observe in the following passage how the unity of tone in Lodge's authorial mode of address allows for a smooth transition from narration to explanation:

Before we go any further it would probably be a good idea to explain the metaphysic or world-picture these young people had acquired from their Catholic upbringing and education. Up there was Heaven; down there was Hell. The name of the game was Salvation, the object to get to Heaven and avoid Hell. It was like Snakes and Ladders: sin sent you plummeting down towards the Pit; the sacraments, good deeds, acts of self-mortification, enabled you to climb back towards the light. (1982rpt:6)

What the authorial mode of address also does is to foreground what Lodge himself, in an article in which he refers to the passage just quoted, calls "the quaint

obsolescence of the system of belief described” (1986b:58-9). The tone, ingratiating and courteous, is then adequate to describe the preconciliar Catholic world-view as it is understood by Lodge’s narrator.

The blithe geniality of tone with which the authorial mode is put to use in *How Far* creates the sense that the narrator enjoys this display of narrative authority, even if he does not treat his readers with any sort of disdain, but rather with propriety and caution. We are in Mauriaquian territory, at least as it was understood by Sartre: “*M. Mauriac a l’omniscience pour tout ce qui touche à son petit monde*” (cited by Tadie, 1997: 79). The suggestion is of a god-author lording over his little empire. But towards the middle of the novel, in a very significant passage where he calls omniscience by its name, Lodge undermines the logic of omniscient authority. The passage refers to Pope Paul VI’s 1968-encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, the document which restated the traditional Catholic teaching on birth control. The narrator says how impossible it is, even for the omniscient novelist, to know what goes on in a Pope’s mind. We read:

The omniscience of novelists has its limits, and we shall not attempt to trace here the process of cogitation, debate, intrigue, fear, anxious prayer which finally produced that document [*Humanae Vitae*]. It is difficult to enter into the mind of a Pope as it must be for a Pope to enter into the mind of, say, a young mother of three, in a double bed, who feels her husband’s caressing touch and is divided between the desire to turn to him and the fear of an unwanted pregnancy. (1982rpt:114)

The passage says a number of things. First of all it states that the ‘seeing all’ of the omniscient narrator is never omniscient. The novelist can never see all. If the writer opts to use the authorial mode it is with the knowledge that it is merely one of many narrative strategies at hand. As a narrative strategy it serves its purpose. It deconstructs the Church’s claim to authority.

Let us look at the way this is done. Firstly, the narrator says that there are limits to his own narrative omniscience and then, in the same sentence, proceeds to enumerate a list of reasons why the Pope took the decision he took: “debate, intrigue, fear ...” (114) is really the answer to the question. The sub-text refers to the various public discussions, the initial positive report on birth control issued by

the papal commission which was made up of theologians, doctors and lay experts, the counter document produced by Cardinal Ottaviani, then head of the Holy Office. David Willey, a journalist and broadcaster, writes: "The experts agreed that what matters is the pattern of a couple's sexual behaviour. The old guard at the Vatican panicked. They saw the threatened change in the Church's attitude to sex as a challenge to the very basis of papal authority rather than a fresh look at birth control" (1993:162-3).

These were the reasons why the Pope took the decision he took; Lodge does not of course reproduce Paul VI's exact thoughts on the matter — he hints at them. But the limits to the novelist's omniscience are also the Pope's: the Pope could not penetrate into the minds of ordinary Catholics and understand the close tension between sexual desire and fear of pregnancy. That Lodge's narrator can partially — by means of deduction, not omniscience — understand the Pope's reasoning, whilst the Pope (or the Church) cannot understand the feelings or the needs of a young mother, undermines the idea that the Church can ever have the last word. It is with sheer irony that Lodge pursues his critique of the Church's claims to authority by undermining the authoritativeness of his narrative authority; the self-interrogating authorial voice, more than an exercise in self-reflexiveness, is also proportionate to the function it performs, and is coherent with it. At the same time, in challenging the Church's own claims to authority, Lodge thereby endorses the conscientious disobedience of his characters in the period that followed *Humanae Vitae*:

All that self-denial and sacrifice of libido ... would depress me ... now, if I didn't know that my principal characters would have made a *sensible decision* long ago to avail themselves of contraceptives. (1982rpt:74; my italics)

The critique of ecclesial authority is not the only use to which omniscience is put. We recall how Lodge had noted the self-reflexive potential of Spark's use of the omniscient convention. In Spark omniscience was used in the interests of a formalist, anti-illusionist architectural construction beneath the realist texture. Following on from Spark, but opting for a different angle of approach, Lodge uses the omniscient convention to bare the novel's own processes of construction. Thus

the omniscient convention, whose presuppositions are ultimately authoritarian, is put to self-reflexive uses. Lodge, for instance, uses the authorial mode of narration to establish the fictiveness of what is narrated. Early in the novel the narrator summons a character to existence and then rehearses some doubts about the name to assign to the character: "Let her be called Violet, no, Veronica" (1982rpt:15). He opts for Violet, against all odds, as it is not the sort of name usually given to Catholic girls of Irish descent. It is a matter of the narrator's preferences: "I like the connotations of Violet — shrinking, penitential, melancholy ... " (Ibid). The narrator's authority over his fiction and the underlying fictiveness of the scene are at once established.

In another, much longer, passage the narrator uses the authorial mode to introduce a discussion, ostensibly of purely academic interest, on how married sex can be represented in novelistic terms. He covers the various narratological formulae:

It is difficult to do justice to ordinary married sex in a novel. There are too many acts for them all to be described, and usually no particular reason to describe one act rather than another, so the novelist falls back on summary, which sounds dismissive. As a contemporary French critic has pointed out in a treatise on narrative, a novelist can (a) narrate once what happened once or (b) narrate *n* times what happened once or (c) narrate *n* times what happened *n* times or (d) narrate once what happened *n* times. Seductions, rapes, the taking of new lovers or the breaking of old taboos, are usually narrated according to (a), (b) or (c). Married love in fiction tends to be narrated according to mode (d). *Once or twice a week, perhaps, if they happened to go to bed together at the same time, and Angela was not feeling too tired, they would make love.* (1982rpt:150)

The formulae are direct borrowings from Genette's theoretizations on frequency as one of the temporal aspects of the novel and of the different types of frequency that can occur in a novel, the *singulative* (telling once what happened once or telling *n* times what happened *n* times), the *repetitive* (telling *n* times what happened once) and the *iterative* (telling once what happened *n* times) (Rimmon-Kenan, 1987:56-58). This foregrounding of narrative construction, the articulation of its commitment to *iterative* mode of temporal organization rather than any other one, once again reinforces the novel's self-reflexiveness, the sense that fiction is a mediated process, a process of selection and combination, one subject to many

possibilities. The point of all this is to create a narrative that is also discursive by nature, however much the structure, generally speaking, is one of traditional narration. The rationale is that narratives are discursive sets and that they merely masquerade themselves as a stories. Realism works through the erasure, the absence of the markers of its construction, hence its transparency, the sense that fictional representation, the story, represents, as if transparently, the world outside the text. Lodge foregrounds the discursive through breaks in the narrative which are used for the exposition of arguments. Take the following as an example:

Why?

It is not out of a sense of duty, for Catholics are bound to hear mass only on Sundays and holydays of obligation ...

To begin with the simplest case: Dennis, the burly youth in the dufflecoat, its hood thrown back to expose a neck pitted with boil scars, is here because Angela, the fair beauty in the mantilla, is here. (1982rpt:3)

Thus, while the novel never eschews all the categories of realist narrative (readability, cinematographic scope, verisimilitude), the use of the omniscient mode for self-reflexive ends turns the novel into a simultaneously discursive text. In that sense the novel approximates the 'postmodern'. Insofar as Lodge's mode may be described as realism, it needs to be said that it is realism unlike that of Greene's, whose theoretical correspondence in neo-Thomism was the work of art so profoundly grounded in the representation of nature, of the material, that *claritas* would follow from it as a spiritual manifestation.

A change has occurred to Christian realism when it is compared with the realism of, say, Greene or O'Connor. The realism of these writers represented a material world that could be interpreted in theological terms. The doctrinal and the theological in Lodge's novel become, not the language through which the discourse can be interpreted, but part of the discourse itself. Insofar as religion has become the subject, rather than the object of discourse, David Lodge's novel can rightly be considered a "Catholic anti-novel" (Bergonzi, 1980:50).

But to what extent is the 'Catholic anti-novel' a postmodern novel? It is true that realism is never dispensed with, but the novel does deconstruct narrative authority,

and it is genuinely self-reflexive and discursive. We recall that one of the definitions of postmodernity was an “incredulity towards metanarratives” (Lyotard, 1987:xxiv). One of the features of the postmodern is the decanonization of master codes and the consequent relativization of competing models. Postmodern culture is hence polymorphous, its voice polyphonic, its vision pluralist. Although the first part of the proposition — decanonization — is valid for Lodge’s novel, the consequences are missing. The authority of the Catholic Church, like the authoritativeness which is insisted upon by Christian aesthetics, is deconstructed, but the Catholic Church is not posited as one of many competing visions. The vision is of a more progressive and enlightened Church. The argument of *How Far* is towards a more enlightened Christianity rather than a repudiation of it, a post-Catholic Christianity rather than a denial of Catholicism. Christian belief in a postconciliar (postmodern?) age is compared to the double consciousness of reading a fictional text, accepting the metaphor as if it were real, yet knowing all along that it is a fictional construct. So too with Catholic belief, it has changed from what it used to be, but exists only in relation to what it used to be (or perhaps, like the double consciousness of the fictional text, it is a metaphor that is provisionally accepted as valid):

But Christian belief will be different from what it used to be, what it used to be for Catholics, anyway. We must not only believe, but know that we believe, live our belief and yet see it from outside, aware that in another time, another place, we would have believed something different (indeed, did ourselves believe differently at different times and places in our lives) without feeling that this invalidates belief. Just as when reading a novel, or writing one for that matter, we maintain a double consciousness of the characters a both, at it were, real and fictitious, free and determined, and know that however absorbing and convincing we may find it, it is not the only story we shall want to read (or, as the case may be, write) but part of an endless sequence of stories by which man has sought and will always seek to make sense of life. And death. (1982rpt:239-240)

There is certainly no nostalgia for the preconciliar Church. Lodge is clearly out of sympathy for a society where the Church plays “a dominant or militant cultural role” (1986a:37). The allusion is obviously to Joyce and Ireland. He continues: “History suggests that the role of the literary intellectual in the latter situation is not an easy one” (Ibid). There is in other words a repudiation of a certain model of

the Church: the triumphalist, conservative, autocratic preconciliar Church. Translated into literary terms this suggests a commitment to a liberal Christian vision rather than a radical postmodernism. The manner in which Lodge deconstructs authority is important. He works from within the tradition, here exemplified by Spark's use of the authorial convention. The reference point of his novel is another Catholic novel. *The Prime* is also one of Spark's most consciously Catholic novels and its vision is dogmatically orthodox. Lodge recognized this in his article on Spark:

Buried in this largely comic novel there is a severe and uncompromising dogmatic message: that all groups, communions and institutions are false and more or less corrupting except the one that is founded on the truths of Christian orthodoxy — and even that one is not particularly attractive or virtuous. (1971:135)

The intertextual relation with *The Prime* cannot be made without allusion to that novel's uncompromising vision. Just as Lodge playfully utilizes Sparkian omniscience in order to interrogate ecclesial and narrative authority, so too is the new vision of a plural Church presented from the starting point of orthodoxy. What is aimed at, what is suggested as an ideal vision, is the reconstruction rather than the denial of orthodoxy. It is a question once again of 'how far can you go?' Take the example of Austin Brierley, the student chaplain who had celebrated the mass for the feast day of St Valentine in the opening chapter of the novel; he becomes spokesperson for the most genuine, all-embracing radical vision of the postconciliar Church:

He prophesied a time when the whole elaborate structure of bishops and priests and dioceses and parishes would melt away, house-eucharists would replace the huge anonymous crush of the parochial Sunday mass, and mutual counselling and consciousness-raising groups would replace Confession and Confirmation. (1982rpt:142)

The phonological significance of Austin Brierley should not be lost on the reader. The name is reminiscent of Aubrey Beardsley and the allusion is to a *vision* of the Church that had appealed to more than a few convert writers towards the close of the nineteenth century. Thomas Woodman writes:

This period also saw the most extreme refraction of Victorian aestheticism and the most exhibitionist way of opposing bourgeois Victorian values, the *fin de siècle* movement. The appeal of the Roman Church in such circles is well known. Lionel Johnson and Ernest Dowson, Aubrey Beardsley, John Gray and eventually Wilde himself were all converts. Despite the extreme moral respectability of Victorian Catholicism the Church was seen as attractively exotic and unpuritanical, and a certain Catholic privileging of suffering had its own masochistic attraction. (1991:14)

It is a vision of an incense-charged, pierced-Sacred-Heart religion touched up with a certain sado-masochistic element of gratuitous suffering. It is an extreme vision and liberal Catholics are likely to find it off-putting. The vision of the latter-day Austin Brierley is no less extreme, it is the pendulum gone in the opposite direction. It is significant that Brierley is a character marginalized from the broad Catholic community, by his bishop, his parishioners. Austin Brierley's position is another instance of going too far, ecclesiastically speaking. Towards the end of the novel we are informed that Austin Brierley "still regards himself as a kind of Catholic, but, partly in the interests of his research, goes to a different church or chapel each Sunday — Catholic, Anglican, Orthodox, Free Church, Quaker meeting house, in rotation" (1982rpt:242). This is Miss Brodie all over again: "She always went to church on Sunday mornings, she had a rota of different denominations and sects which included the Free Churches of Scotland, the Established Church of Scotland, the Methodist and the Episcopalian churches and any other church outside the Roman Catholic pale which she might discover" (*The Prime*, 1986rpt:85). The criticism of Miss Brodie was precisely her inability to find an ordering structure that would have disciplined "her soaring and diving spirit" (Ibid).

Lodge's novel suggests that going too far has inherent dangers since it tends towards the abolition of the system altogether. The novel does not suggest the replacement of orthodoxy. It is a critique of authority. It suggests a freedom of conscience in the place of authority. The vision is post-Catholic since authority is one the foundational cornerstones of the Catholic system. That is the religious sub-text of the novel. It is of course difficult to separate religious from literary concerns in a novel that conceives them as integrated. The religious critique is carried out through the formal structure of the novel rather than through any overt

criticism. In what way does the form of the novel coincide with the Aesthetics of Order which, we have seen, underlaid much of Catholic narrative fiction?

Most of this chapter has been devoted to an analysis of the way the novel transformed narrative altitude into a self-reflexive interrogation of narrative authority. Altitude was conceived of as necessary in order to represent an ordered world from a certain authoritative (or moral) vantage point. Lodge uses such an altitude of perspective but *au contraire*, not for any moral reason but in order to show how the toy works. The self-reflexive ends to which his use of the omniscient convention is put is consistent with his intention. The order involved is the logic of construction. It is of course an inverse order: the order of construction rather than the order of the artwork as end result.

This constructionist interest does not necessarily place Lodge's novel in the formalist lineage of Catholic novels. What we have here is not constructionism in the interests of art as an ideal order, such as one finds in Spark's *The Prime*. Lodge's novel needs to be seen in the context of the Catholic realist novel of a writer such as Graham Greene. *How Far* is a reworking of the realist tradition. It is the realist novel turned upside down, looked at from the perspective of its construction. The Sparkian displays of narrative altitude are used, self-reflexively, to reflect on realist construction, on how far it is possible for a realist text to articulate its own fictiveness. It is in this sense that the novel belongs to the line of realist novels. It is a realism in crisis. No longer is it the realism that expresses the 'spiritual'. Lodge's art does not move towards any sort of spiritual illumination within the text. The spiritual however is part of the novel's discourse.

The metafictional exercises in the novel serve their ultimate constructionist purpose, and the work can be said to be proportioned in the Thomist sense. It is also whole insofar as its proportionality collaborates with this overall metafictional strategy. Yet it is a work *sans* that type of *claritas* or radiance evident in the work of Graham Greene, François Mauriac and Flannery O'Connor. In revealing or exposing its 'illusion of reality' the novel effectively prohibits the expression of its own *claritas*. The suggestion is that *claritas* is also a perpetuated illusion. It needs as its reference a sense of Heaven and Hell, of darkness and light, salvation and

damnation. Those references have become diluted. Lodge's narrator tell us that the Catholic conception of Hell vanished sometime in the 1960s (at about the time of the Vatican Council):

At some point in the nineteen-sixties, Hell disappeared. No one could for certain when this happened. First it was there, then it wasn't. Different people became aware of the disappearance of Hell at different times. Some realized that they had been living for years as though Hell did not exist, without having consciously registered its disappearance. Others realized that they had been behaving, out of habit, as though Hell were still there, though in fact they had ceased to believe in its existence long ago. By Hell we mean, of course, the traditional Hell of Roman Catholics, a place where you would burn for all eternity if you were unlucky enough to die in a state of mortal sin. (1982rpt:113)

There is no nostalgia for the old order, but at the same time the new dispensation lacks the conviction and force of the old one. That would seem to be the price one pays for destroying or deconstructing the illusion. That would also seem to account for why *How Far*, an otherwise elegantly written and intelligent novel, lacks the dramatic quality of the preconciliar Catholic novel. The postconciliar novel is obviously not one for phantoms and shadows.

6

RADICAL (ANTI-)POSTMODERNISM:

Muriel Spark's *Not to Disturb* (1971)

Who is this obscuring my designs
with his empty-headed words?
The Book of Job (38:2)

Muriel Spark's novels published in the late 1960s and early 70s, *The Public Image* (1968), *The Driver's Seat* (1970), *Not to Disturb* (1971) and *The Hothouse by the East River* (1973), show a shift of emphasis in Spark's aesthetic thinking. Highly economic, metafictional in style, darkly comic, novellas more than novels, these works also lacked the overt Catholic frame of reference evident in earlier works such as *The Prime* (1961). The novels written after *The Takeover* (1976), with *The Abbess of Crewe* (1974) as a transitional novel, return to the 'lighter' mode of her earlier work. This is Spark's 'middle period' and the four novels cover various international settings: Italy, Geneva, New York. This is also the period after the Second Vatican Council, and although these novels make no mention of its reforms, Spark's satire on some aspects of the postconciliar Church in later books,³⁰ shows that she was not uninterested in these events.

The novels from this period received high praise from critics like Frank Kermode (1971) and Malcolm Bradbury (1972), but many others were confused, like the anonymous reviewer cited by Ruth Whittaker who said of *The Driver's Seat* (1970): "[it] will take you 60 minutes to read and cost you sixpence a minute" (1982:129). The reviewer clearly expected more. Some critics were downright hostile, and the language they used was not without malice: "... it is easy to see the most recent novels, *The Driver's Seat*, *Not to Disturb*, *The Hothouse by the East River* or *The Abbess of Crewe* for example, as representing the final decay of a

small and over-praised talent ... there is nothing to be seen but what is to be seen, and that is precious little, though terribly stylish" (Harrison, 1976: 227-228). The reason for these aspersions was not religion — these novellas are very silent on religion, at least at the level of content — but the fact that her writing had moved towards a highly metafictional mode at the same time that it took on the mannered and stylized overtones of Firbankian comedy. Add to this the elegant international settings — Roman film studios, a penthouse in New York, a baronial château in Switzerland — and we have the appearance of a rather superficial world:

The filmstar Rome of *The Public Image*, the northern and southern cities of *The Driver's Seat*, the dolce vita of the modern aristocracy in *Not to Disturb*, seem to have common roots in a Euro-mart, trendy, polyclass bohemian scene which is taking shape for her as a stylized society, not unlike that of, say, Antonioni's films. (Bradbury, 1972:247)

Some critics have taken the depiction of this 'stylized society' to be an index to Spark's artistry. I quote from Bernard Harrison again: "Her books are too spun-out. They seem all surface, and a rather dry, sparsely furnished, though elegant and mannered surface at that" (1976:225). It is very easy to take the *trompe l'œil* as an indication of all there is when, by definition, it is something covering something else. It is all too easy to read superficially. Marthinus Nijhoff, the celebrated Dutch modernist poet, once wrote: "*Lees goed, er staat niet wat er staat*"³¹ (in Leal, 1994:43). Spark herself has called readers "a very meagre species" (cited by Whittaker, 1982:149). Spark's work demands to be read at various levels. She is a disturbing writer who challenges many aesthetic preconceptions. One of the reasons why I chose to focus on *Not to Disturb* (1971) in this chapter was that its title seemed particularly apt; it says many disturbing things about the form of the novel, and yet, like the Psalms, it admonishes us not to be disturbed (Hynes, 1988:172).

Not to Disturb is a complex novel. On one level it is a 'postmodern' in the sense that it exhibits many of the features of the 'postmodern' as they have been theorized. Many of the characteristics of the 'postmodern text' delineated by Ihab

³⁰ Catholic political activism in the period following Vatican II is satirized in *The Abbess of Crewe* (1974). The Charismatic Renewal movement is similarly satirized in *The Takeover* (1976).

³¹ "Read well, what is there is not there" (my translation).

Hassan in his 'catena of postmodern features' (1987:445-6) are applicable without too much difficulty to Spark's novel: these include indeterminacy, decanonization, irony, hybridization, carnivalization and constructionism. We will encounter these features, sometimes under different names, in our discussion of *Not to Disturb*. What makes the novel interesting is that the *presuppositions* underlying her aesthetic vision are radically at odds with what the postmodern novel is trying to achieve. The convergence between postmodern and Christian aesthetics becomes then, not a convergence as such, but what Thomas Woodman in his study on British Catholic fiction calls the "intriguing overlap between traditional Catholic and fashionable modern concerns" (1991:161). In looking at Spark's novel we will also be looking at the manner in which two theoretical systems — poststructuralist theory and theorizations on the postmodern, on the one hand, and neo-Thomist aesthetics, on the other hand — overlap at the same time that they diverge from each other. These theoretical systems are not contained in the novel; they are merely the discourses through which we can explicate the practice.

I have said that *Not to Disturb*, together with the other novels from the same period, lacks the Catholic frame of reference of Spark's earlier novels. Catholicism, which Spark had once defined as "a norm from which one can depart" (1961:60), has receded invisibly into the background. But we should also not deem novels Catholic in terms of the number of references to the Catholic Church. Flannery O'Connor's novels about Bible Belt Protestants are a case in point. There is a difference between theology and the Church as institution. *Not to Disturb* is set in Geneva. It explores ideas of destiny and predestination. We are not far from John Calvin's Helvetian Convention. Lister, the master plotter and central character in the novel, behaves as if he were one of the elect of the Calvinist God of Providence. There are echoes of Miss Jean Brodie.

Spark's story is about Lister's script-writing. It is a text about another text. Lister creates plots and adjusts them according to the needs of contingency. The outline of his central plot is as follows: Lister presumes (takes it for a fact) that Baron Klopstock, his wife, and their mutual lover, the predictable eternal triangle, will enact the actions that will arise out of the situation they have placed themselves in. The result will be death, the completed circle. Lister says it with a bit more flair,

using three unlikely spatial metaphors that create the sense of the improbable made possible, of chaos harnessed into (perfect?) form:

To put it squarely, as I say in my memoir, the eternal triangle has come full circle. (1971:39).

Lister does not of course organize the deaths. He is quite clear about one fact: “They have placed themselves, unfortunately, within the realms of predestination” (61). The three who are gathered in the library with the notice that they are not to be disturbed have thus willed their own predestination. The Catholic and Calvinist conceptions of providence seems to be in close agreement.

Lister’s role is that of an artist or creative agent, not an agent of predestination. He and the house servants wait for the death to unfold and make contingency plans for its outcome. The death, still to be realized when the action of the novel begins, is as good as over. The *fact* of the death is accepted by the house servants and their plans to sell their stories to the press proceed from the assumption that the death has already taken place. The events surrounding the death — in that future still to be realized — are thus referred to as though they had already occurred. The characters refer to the future in the past tense:

‘Number One,’ says Lister. ‘He walked to his death most gingerly.’ (15)

This extraordinary inversion of temporal order takes on a comic dimension when it is juxtaposed with a future in the usual sense. When Heloise, the house-maid, asks Lister, using the conventional present tense as a future plan, if the Baron might want his dinner (“Suppose the Baron wants his dinner?”) Lister responds to the projection into the future with an explanation in the past tense: ‘Of course he expected his dinner ... But as things turned out he didn’t live to eat it’. He then adds: “He’ll be arriving soon” (11). The last sentence refers to the Baron’s imminent arrival, in conventional time.

When one of the characters says that he has to see the Baron, and after Lister has given one of his usual future-narrated-in-the-past answers, the character’s response

is one of immediate confusion: "I can hear his voice. What d'you mean?". Lister remarks: "Let us not strain after vulgar chronology" (66). Spark would certainly endorse the view that such a vulgar sense of cause and precause is applicable only to this side of the eternal divide. God's foreknowledge does not make the customary distinctions between past, present and future. Lister, likewise, dispenses with the traditional distinctions; it is all the same, "what is to come, or has already come, according as one's philosophy is temporal or eternal" (17). He adds, as a concession to the vulgarized use of the language about time: "To all intents and purposes, they're already dead although as a matter of banal fact, the night's business has still to accomplish itself" (Ibid).

Lister, when he treats the *as if* dead — "where 'dead' means more than 'as good as dead'" (Hynes, 1988:159) — as though it were a fact, is of course playing at God who has knowledge of events before their time. Lister's entire plot is based on his assumed foreknowledge that the trio in the library who are not to be disturbed will kill themselves. Hence he does not allow them to be disturbed. Providence — or predestination — will thus work itself out without any kind of intervention. The story Lister has already scripted for the newspapers and whose film rights he has already sold, will thus draw towards its inexorable conclusion.

Lister is an artist in control of the fiction he has scripted. When a pair is introduced into the narrative, demanding to see Victor Passerat, the baronial lover in the library, they are told that the trio in the library is not to be disturbed. As an artist Lister has an eye for those outwards lineaments of form which will make the story cohere. The inclusion of the pair in the narrative would disrupt the smooth surface of his plot. Hadrian, one of the servants, reports the incident to Lister. We read:

'The girls in the car, demanding what's happened to their friend, Passerat,' Hadrian says. 'I told them that he was with the Baron and Baroness and they were not to be disturbed. They said they had an appointment. One of them's a masseuse that I haven't seen before.'

'And the other?' says Lister.

'The other didn't say. I didn't ask.'

'You did right,' Lister says. 'They don't come into the story.' (51)

Lister can exclude the pair because they *follow on after* the story — they are friends of Victor Passerat's. The inclusion of the pair in the story would have set up a chain of causal reactions that would have altered the story as it was: they would interrupt the discussion in the library, they would rescue Victor Passerat, who would not die, and neither might the Baron and his wife, and the servants would have no story to tell. For Lister there are two types of contingency. There are those "events that arise from and those that merely follow after each other. Those that arise are preferable" (111). When it is discovered that the madman in the attic is in fact heir to the Klopstock fortune, Lister arranges for Heloise, the pregnant house-maid, to marry the lunatic. This is an event arising from the narrative, not causally from another event.

The fortuitous arrival of a Reformed clergyman in the middle of the night, and who might have saved the Baron had events been allowed to follow causally from each other, is used to Lister's advantage. The clergyman performs the marriage ceremony. The scripts are amended. The form in outline, the predestined plot, remains unaltered and the servants are richer for it.

Lister's script-writing, the changing of plots according to the needs of contingency, the exclusion of events for the sake of formal purity, all these are things which occur within the formal structure of a fictional text and they reflect on the art of producing fictions. Lister's world is a metafictional world and it is shot through with other fictional references. An earlier definition of metafiction seems especially relevant here to Spark's endeavours. Mas'ud Zavarzadeh defines metafiction as,

... a narrational metatheorem whose subject matter is fiction systems themselves ... [it] exults over its own fictitiousness, and its main counter-techniques are flat characterization, contrived plots, antilinear sequence of events, all foregrounded as part of an extravagant over-totalization, a parody of interpretation which shows up the multiplicity of the real and the naïveté of trying 'to reach a total synthesis of life within narrative. (cited by Brooke-Rose, 1980:161-2)

Lister and his band do not only play at making fictions, the world they inhabit is entirely *fictional*. This fictional world is constructed according to the rules of

literary form, especially of Jacobean drama and the Gothic novel. The language the characters utilize is also curiously artificial. We will now look in more detail at how the use of a 'literary' language and of fictional forms in the novel transforms the fictional space into one that is entirely metafictional.

The book is divided into five sections, as Aristotelian drama proposes, and it is narrated, as drama is enacted, in the present tense. The dramatic convention is strictly adhered to, even up to the point that it includes the unities of time (from night to dawn) and place (the baronial château). The novel makes constant allusions to Jacobean drama, especially to John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*, from which the first spoken words in the novel are taken. Webster's play expresses, in the words of Christopher Caudwell, "the final corruption, the malignantly evil and Italiante [*sic*] death of the first stage of the bourgeois illusion" (1977:93). Similarly, the inversion of social relations and the corruption of the ruling classes are thematic concerns of *Not to Disturb*.

The novel has also all the trappings of the Gothic novel, rendered here in parody and with extravagance. There is the madman in the attic. There are mysterious sounds, such as "a human bark followed by an owl-scream" (1971:53). Natural phenomena are described in glittering metaphors suggestive of overly ominous portents:

The instrument wheezes again. (26)

The answer fairly prolonged and intelligible apparently to Lister, is otherwise that of a bronchial and aged raven ... (75)

The house-telephone rings. Lister answers it and it hisses back through its wind-pipe. (99)

Spark's images (the "owl-scream" and the "aged raven") draw also from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, another Jacobean drama about the corruption of power.

There are also constant allusions to other authors. There is Sigmund Freud: "How like ... the death wish is to the life-urge! How urgently does an overwhelming

obsession with life lead to suicide!" (19). There is Shakespeare's Ophelia, speaking before she crashes into madness (words which T.S. Eliot would later incorporate in *The Waste Land*): "Good night, ladies. Good night, sweet, sweet, ladies" (18). The famous statement attributed to Marie Antoinette: "Let them eat cake" (47). The "No eggs in the house?" (20) from George Bernard Shaw's *St Joan*. Thomas à Kempis' *Sic transit gloria mundi* (25) from *The Imitation of Christ*. There are extracts from Andrew Marvell's "To his Coy Mistress" (101). The list is by no means exhausted.

The diction of the characters is also strangely elevated. Ruth Whittaker says that the novel is filled with the jargon to do with the production of fictions. All of this is spoken by the characters. It reads, she writes, "like an extract from a thesaurus: 'coalesce', 'coincidence', 'connect', 'construe', 'coordinate', 'correspond'" (1982:119). One critic has said that the younger staff speak "a brand of colloquialism that primarily marks them as Anglo-American" (Hynes, 1988:164). The point is valid insofar as the slang is a hybrid one, entirely of their own making and not like anything that is spoken. Peter Kemp talks about "new mintings" and a "cool idiom" (1974:139). Examples from the novel include: "There's no such thing as a trend" (1971:90), "Well he didn't coordinate" (90), "Mr Samuel is an artist, I'll say that, his perspectives coalesce" (93), "You should always do your own thing in a simulation. It all works in" (93), "Lister's got equibalance ... and what's more, he pertains" (95). The characters, as we have seen, also quote from poets of a bygone age with uncommon ease.

The rarefied diction, the allusions to other writers and the parodies of fictional sub-genres such as the Gothic novel and Jacobean drama, all these features suggest the extreme artificiality of the fiction. What comes to mind is Fredric Jameson's critique of postmodern literature as "the random cannibalization of all the styles of the past, the play of random stylistic allusion ..." (1984:65-6). The cannibalization of past styles in *Not to Disturb* certainly provides evidence for his argument. At the same time we are reminded of Newman's idea that British Catholic writers would always be repeating, whether they liked it or not, "the half sentences of dissolute playwrights and heretical partizans [*sic*] and preachers" (1964b:300). Spark's novel is of course doing that *literally*. In doing so it is suggesting that the

fabric of language had already been woven by others and it is thus that it creates the apparently 'seamless' texture of its own narrative. The allusion to older authors and the embedding of the styles from the past suggest a recognition, rendered here quite literally, that those discourses, phrases, words have entered into circulation. Spark uses them for her own ends, revitalizes them by recontextualizing them. They perform the same function as clichés which Spark uses to revitalize literary discourse,³² as for example when Lister refers to the dead bodies: "Here they come ... Klopstock and barrel" (1971:148). Lister's "Let them eat cake" (47) becomes then, as Peter Kemp says, "[a] satiric onslaught on the ancien régime" (1974:137). Allusion and parody are not used to produce a kind of literary *bricolage*, a term often used to designate postmodern art (Jameson, 1987:222; Feher, 1989:204; Lyotard, 1993:94). Rather, they are means towards an end, they serve a function, Thomist *proportio*. One of these is to create new meanings for well-known literary catch-phrases (under which category would be included most of her citations) *and* also to suggest the artificiality and fictiveness of the narrated world.

Thus when Lister says, "There remain a good many things to be accomplished and still more chaos effectively to organize" (1971:72), he is organizing his chaos only within a rarefied fictional world. His plot exists within another plot, which is the fictional text itself. *Not to Disturb* is Muriel Spark's text. Or, if we feel uncomfortable with designating the final authority as Spark's, we could say that Lister's text exists within another text narrated by a persona commanded by another real-life author; this would treble the number of texts at work. Lister's script is not a script as such but a game of Chinese boxes: "Like the baking-soda tin inside / The baking-soda tin / Inside the baking-soda tin" in a poem by Derek Mahon (1979:40). The final say belongs to Mrs Spark. In an extraordinary passage towards the end of the novel Spark leaves no doubts about who the author of the ultimate script is:

Meanwhile the lightning, which strikes the clump of elms so that the two friends huddled there are killed instantly without pain, zig-zags across the lawns, illuminating the lily pond and the sunken rose garden like a self-stricken flash-photographer, and like a zip-fastener

³² See Whittaker (1988:145-7) for a useful discussion on the way Spark revitalizes clichés in her other novels.

ripped from its garment by a sexual maniac, it is flung slapdash across Lake Lemán and back to skim the rooftops of the houses, leaving intact, however, the well-insulated telephone wires which Lister, on the telephone to Geneva, has rather feared might break down. (1971:143-4)

The extreme artificiality of the metaphors she uses to describe the lightning draws directly from the fact that a flash-photographer and sexual-maniac in a zip-fastener had earlier been described (and will appear later in the narrative, “The Swiss invented the zip-fastener ...” (153), making the comparison more callous still). In saying that the lightning (the tenor of a metaphor) is *like* a sexual maniac’s zip-fastener (the vehicle of a metaphor), she is also reducing characters in the novel to mere particles in a metaphor. Their control of the narrative space is denied by Spark, who includes the characters as any other kinds of vehicles for her metaphors. The controlling authority shifts away from Lister to the author of the superseding text. Yet at the same time Spark aids Lister’s efforts in killing the pair waiting in a car outside the château. She is the author behind Lister’s efforts. These displays of narrative authority have perturbed some of Spark’s critics — the pair in the car is killed off because it cannot have a narrative function, really. Linda Kuehl, for instance, refers to Spark as a “malevolent Hera paring her fingernails” (1971:379). (The choice of Joycean metaphor is, as we shall see, particularly relevant.) Even Ruth Whittaker, an even-tempered, judicious and intelligent critic of Spark’s, by no means one of her detractors, finds the passage particularly troubling:

This callousness is, of course, a literary joke about the novelist’s process of selection and rejection, but it is callous for all that. It reduces people to mere fictional components, tiny little constructs of words to be fitted into the text or not, as the author decides. Inevitably all authors make such a selection, but it is the gratuitous display of power, the revelling in it, which makes this incident so peculiarly disagreeable. (1982:120)

The criticism seems to lie in the fact that Spark is overdoing it. She peers over the world she has created, she demands to be seen. She does it because it serves a function. Rather than being ‘gratuitous’ the passage highlights the crucial differences between the two texts, Lister’s and the author’s. Lister’s predestined plots exist because Mrs Spark (or Mrs Spark’s Sparkian persona) allows them to

exist. The metafictional world which Lister inhabits is an entirely fictional world. Lister is a fictional construct, and so are the servants, the baronial couple, and Victor Passerat, whose name ('the victory which had passed away') already suggests his diminished end. They do not exist; they serve, at best, as marionettes (or paper dragons or pasteboard figures).

Here is also the significance of the metafictional play in the novel. *Not to Disturb* is a metafictional novel *par excellence*. In the postmodern novel metafiction is more likely to be a sign of a crisis in representation, a denial of totalizing patterns of authority. In *Spark* it functions as a way of contrasting the corrupt fiction-making of the servants with an ultimate authority beyond their control, such as by analogy is God's to the world's. To counterpoint the texts, to posit the two (or three) fictions against one another, does not however imply a *moral condemnation* of the servants' fiction-making.³³ It is all too easy to see this notion of a final divine authority (which really is outside the text and which exists only by analogy) in reductionist moral terms. Lister's fictions might be corrupt, but he is not an agent of evil. Evil is the wrong sort of term to apply to *Spark*'s moral vision. In an interview she gave in 1970, roughly in the same period as this novel was published, she had this to say about good and evil:

³³ The point is valid only partially. While *Spark* does not endorse the corrupt fiction-making of the servants, she does allow them to get away scott-free. At the same time we should be careful how we read *Spark*. One of the interesting features of this novel is that it purports to say a number of things at the one level while at another level it says some very different things. That is one of the reasons why *Not to Disturb* is a disturbing text. Lister is in many ways a typical Sparkian hero: intelligent, cunning, a maker of patterns. Yet I am not convinced that *Spark*'s sympathies are entirely with Lister. The aristocrats who have 'willed their own death' are Catholics. There is a suggestion that the Catholic house is the house of the aristocracy. The Catholic aristocrats are the arbiters of order, style and elegance. Their house is taken over by purveyors of corrupt and degenerate fictions, people who have no *legitimate* right to be there. This seems to me the central metafictional reflection of the novel. Lister perverts the word for pecuniary ends. At the same time the Catholic aristocrats are criticized for their lack of vigilance. One of the characters says this about the Baroness: "She used to keep her hair frosted or blond-streaked ... She shouldn't have let go her shake. Why did she suddenly start to go natural? She must have started to be sincere with someone" (1971:57). This is of course a joke: the Baroness will die because she "got sentimental" (115). But this 'getting sentimental' functions also as index to a lack of vigilance. In *Spark*'s *The Abbess of Crewe* (1974), written in the same period, we read: "Sisters, be sober, be vigilant, for the Devil goes about as a raging lion, seeking whom he may devour" (19). The words are repeated throughout the book. Who is *Spark* speaking to? We should not forget *Spark* has never objected to being called a Catholic writer. It would seem that the central concerns of this novel are only for the ears of her co-religionists, artists like herself, rather than members of that 'meagre species' called readers. The book functions, then, as a type of epistle to Catholic writers, an epistle about the dangers of perverting the word and using fictions for corrupt ends.

I don't believe in good and evil so much any more. No one makes pacts with the Devil, as they did in the Middle Ages. Now, there is only absurdity and intelligence. I'm sure that whoever was responsible for that massacre in Bel Air had no sense of actually doing evil, but rather they were vindicating something which was precious to themselves ... If we are intelligent, we will call it absurd. (1970:8)

If anything, Lister is a highly intelligent character. He recognizes that time is 'timeless' — his use of the past tense to designate the future is built around that assumption. Eternal time corresponds of course to his own private notion of predetermined time, it is not God's. Yet insofar as he understands the existence of an eternal dimension, even if he abrogates it by using it for his own good, he is exercising his intelligence. While we cannot call him an 'evil' being — Spark herself would be loth to use the term — he is certainly diabolic in the sense that he unleashes, demon-like, the inherent potential in a situation: Lister is a catalyst, events are organized around his superior plot-making. Lister functions as do similar 'diabolic' presences in Spark's work: he is like Dougal Douglas (or Douglas Dougal) in *The Ballad of Peckham Rye* (1960) who, similarly, causes all the disorder inherent in a situation to be realized. The idea is that such 'diabolic' presences are necessary to create some order out of chaos, just as original sin — the *felix culpa* ('happy fault') in the old liturgy for the Easter vigil — is necessary for salvation. (*Not to Disturb* is also about a vigil and the servants are indeed vigilant.)

One reason why Spark would endorse Lister's behaviour, even though he uses his 'intelligence' for his own ulterior ends, is that the world around him is absurd. His plot-making is a legitimate response to the absurdity. *Not to Disturb* is a novel about "the production of art in a society as degenerate in integrity and coherence as that portrayed in Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*" (Waugh, 1988:113). That society built entirely of artifice is like another work of art, Webster's play. The fictional space within *Not to Disturb* is a world of the simulacra. The entire book is built around suggestions of artifice. The décor is artificial, portraits were copied from originals, photographic cameras and tape-recorders abound. It is all stage-management. "Simulation", writes Peter Kemp, "is, in fact, the subject of this book

as well as the technique employed for it" (1974:134). This simulated world is suggestive of postmodern artistic production: a multiple relay of small fictions (*les petits récits?*), mirrors that signify other mirrors, the recourse to travesty, pastiche, artifice, and surface gloss.

Lister's fiction-making creates sense out of this incoherent and fake world. Lister's failings lie in the fact that he does not recognize that his fiction-making is merely form, the form of Spark's work. Patricia Waugh writes:

What Lister sees as his self-determined predestination is thus revealed to be merely an aspect of literary form. What we see, in our everyday lives, as self-determined predestination is also revealed to be merely an aspect of eternal form. We too, Spark implies, are created by a higher authority. (1988:114)

Lister's script exists within Spark's (which exists within God's). We recall the Leonine definition of God as the author of the world and the world as God's script (in John XXIII, nd[c.1963]:17). The creation of a metafictional world thus has a definite representational significance in that it suggests, similarly, the existence of another world against which this is measured. The idea of an eternal order is not likely to be accepted by all of Spark's readers, but those are her terms of reference and it is within these terms that the novel is understood. Such a dual-vision was defined by Flannery O'Connor, clearly influenced by Scholastic thought, as *anagogical*. It has to do, she writes, "with the Divine life and our participation in it" (1984d:72). She adds that "it is this enlarged view of the human scene that the fiction writer has to cultivate" (73).

Spark's novel creates an *anagogical* dimension by inserting the script-producing antics in an entirely *metafictional* world within an ordered whole, reminiscent of a cosmic Order. When Lister talks about organizing chaos more effectively, the intention is equally applicable to Spark's art, whether in the normative pattern of authorial mode or in the structural organization of the novel. This attempt to contain Chaos within the semblance of a cosmic Order has a Thomist ring to it. Umberto Eco notices a similar conception at work in James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*:

... *Finnegans Wake* encloses Chaos within the framework of an apparent Order and thereby places us in the same situation as the apostate Stephen who uses the words of Thomas Aquinas in order to refuse family, country, and church.

The only faith that the aesthetics and metaphysics of the Chaosmos leaves us is the faith in Contradiction. (1989a:87)

That Joyce adhered to Thomist dictates in a work that supposedly renounced them, that the represented world is a Chaosmos, the Chaos of the Cosmos or the Cosmos of the Chaos, as it were, is ultimately a contradiction at the heart of his work. For Spark it would be less of a contradiction. The Catholic cosmography is still a point of departure for Spark. There is an underlying providential order in the universe. The “deserts of vast eternity” (*Not to Disturb*, 1971:101) in Andrew Marvell’s poem are already present within the world of visible things.

Order is not the only point of contact between Spark and Joyce. The works of the apostate Irish Catholic and the Edinburgh-born convert share many other formal assumptions. In his *Portrait* (1916) Joyce has Stephen discuss the formal criteria of beauty. Stephen uses Thomist concepts to construct his own “esthetic philosophy” (1966rpt:179). One of the things he develops from his Thomist sources is the notion of an ideal “esthetic stasis” (206). We read:

— Pity is the feeling which arrests the mind in the presence of whatsoever is grave and constant in human sufferings and unites it with the human sufferer. Terror is the feeling which arrests the mind in the presence of whatsoever is grave and constant in human sufferings and unites it with the secret cause ...

— The tragic emotion, in fact, is a face looking two ways, towards terror and towards pity, both of which are phases of it. You see I use the word arrest. I mean that the tragic emotion is static. Or rather the dramatic emotion is. The feelings excited by improper art are kinetic, desire or loathing. Desire urges us to possess, to go to something; loathing urges us to abandon, to go from something. The arts which excite them, pornographical or didactic, are therefore improper arts. The esthetic emotion (I used the general term) is therefore static. The mind is arrested and raised above desire and loathing. (204-5)

Joyce was working from Aristotle’s definition of terror and pity in *Rhetoric*. In Aristotle both pity and terror are conceived as ‘sorrows’. Terror he defined as “a

sorrow or a trouble produced by the imagining of an evil, that could arrive, bringing pain and destruction” (cited by Eco, 1989a:32). Pity is “a sorrow caused by a destructive and painful evil happening to an unmeriting person and that ourselves or somebody linked to us could expect to suffer” (Ibid). Pity and terror are cathartic experiences, “a purification effected through the kinetic simulation of passion in order to obtain a purgation through shock” (Eco, 1989a:28). Poetry in Aristotle, Paul Ricœur tells us, was never identified with eloquence, the function of *rhetoric* after all, but with the purification of the passions of terror and pity (nd:19).

Joyce’s reading of catharsis differs from the Aristotelian formulation. Joyce speaks of the *arrest* of emotions, the *seizure* of the feelings of pity and terror. The interpretation is purely rationalistic. We have an echo of this in Spark’s novel *The Driver’s Seat* (1970), a dispassionate, coolly observed account of a woman who organizes the conditions whereby she can be murdered by a ‘sexual maniac’. The novel ends with an image of policemen beholding the stabbed corpse, their “holsters and epaulets and all those trappings devised to protect them from the indecent exposure of fear and pity, pity and fear” (1970:160). The Aristotelian formula is a reminder of what the art form cannot allow us to feel: pity and fear. Similarly, the first spoken words of *Not to Disturb*, taken from Webster’s *The Duchess of Malfi*, suggest an enactment of Aristotelian catharsis: “Their life a general mist of error. Their death, a hideous storm of terror” (1971:5). The death however occurs behind closed doors. The reader is informed of it only after the event, precluding any kind of cathartic identification with the death. Death is no ‘storm of terror’. The novel ends with the words: “[O]utside the house the sunlight is *laughing* on the walls” (159; my italics). Peter Kemp, in his analysis of the novel, writes: “Literary genres, classically employed to arouse pity and fear, or create terror, are here disordered to provoke contempt” (1974:138).

The Joycean conception of stasis, Eco explains, “transforms an actual experience into a linguistic equivalent of reality” (1989a:29). Stasis becomes therefore a variation of *claritas*, the whatness, the quiddity of a thing (Ibid: 32). Aesthetic pleasure is the apprehension of a ‘luminous silent stasis’. Pity and terror do not exist as cathartic experiences but as ideal linguistic states. Joyce writes: “Beauty ...

awakens, or ought to awaken, or induces, or ought to induce, an esthetic stasis, an ideal pity or an ideal terror, a stasis called forth, prolonged, and at last dissolved by what I call the rhythm of beauty” (1966rpt:206).

Viewed in these formalistic terms, *claritas* as a spiritual manifestation within the representational world is therefore not possible. It would suggest that the characters inhabiting the fictional space can undergo real experiences. Spark’s metafictional exercises prove the contrary. If *claritas* is present it is in the artwork, the ordered whole. Joyce talks of stasis or the ‘rhythm of beauty’ as “the first formal esthetic relation of part to part in any aesthetic whole or of an esthetic whole to its part or parts or of any part to the esthetic whole of which it is part” (1966rpt:206). The *form* of the novel, what Malcolm Bradbury with reference to Spark’s work calls “a suspended aesthetic stasis” (1972:242), is the repository of the Thomist qualities of wholeness, proportion and radiance. The clear theoretical premises underlying Spark’s formalist approach to fiction in *Not to Disturb* and in the works of that period are in close accord with the geometrical limpidity of the Thomist conception of the artwork, less so with the neo-Thomist idea of a spiritual life within the text.

What is interesting is how this aesthetic with its Thomist sub-stratum converges with novelistic manifestations of what has been called ‘postmodern’. Spark’s ordered fictions have no place for catharsis as it had been formulated by Aristotle. Catharsis becomes stasis, a kind of *claritas*. Similarly, one of the features of the ‘postmodern condition’ has been the steady disappearance of catharsis as a mechanism in art. Ferenc Feher writes:

The postmodern condition is characterized by the conspicuous paradox of health being at its pinnacle while catharsis, the chief mechanism of art, is steadily losing in prestige. The polemics of Deleuze and Guattari against catharsis are well-known. The targets are the two sacred-ceremonial attributes of art, the priestly and the healing functions, functions traditionally intertwined in earlier cultures. (1989:203)

The routes that lead to this convergence are obviously different. Spark’s aesthetic draws from a Christian understanding of art. For her the tragic emotion is

impossible. It is impossible because it is a false emotion. It is false because represented worlds are false; fictions, Spark has said elsewhere, are “a pack of lies” (1959:210). Distrust of fictional worlds has a long history in Christian thought. It is found in Augustine and continues up to Newman, himself a novelist and always a relevant influence in Spark. I quote from Newman:

... literature is ... the untutored movements of the reason, imagination, passions, and affections of the natural man, the leapings and the friskings, the plungings and the snortings, the sportings and the buffoonings, the clumsy play and the aimless toil, of the noble, lawless savage of God's intellectual creations.

It is well that we should clearly apprehend a truth so simple and elementary as this, and not expect from the nature of man, or the literature of the world, what they never held out to us. (1964b:303)

The tragic emotion is false because it is hypocritical. The narrator in Spark's *Loitering with Intent* (1981), a novelist looking back at her youthful days and talking about the ‘secrets of her craft’, says: “it seems to me a sort of hypocrisy for a writer to pretend to be undergoing tragic experiences when obviously one is sitting in relative comfort with a pen and paper or before a typewriter” (1982rpt:59). In her address to the American Academy of Arts and Letters Spark took a slightly different angle: the literature of emotion is false because it offers itself up as a substitute for life: “the art and literature of sentiment and emotion, however beautiful in itself, however striking in its depiction of actuality, has to go. It cheats us into a sense of involvement with life and society, but in reality it is a segregated activity” (1971:24).

For Spark the critical intervention of art in the real world is ultimately illusory. It can be an excuse for a complacency in the face of real-world problems. Spark's radical conception of art's non-referentiality restates Maritain's distinction between *Agir* and *Faire*. Art is in the realm of the Making, it cannot be a substitute for actual and sometimes necessary intervention in the world. Art is a *segregated activity* when it purports to hold up a mirror to the world at whose image we can sometimes cry and laugh. A *desegregated* art would deny that mirror and also the evocation of those sentiments. There is a close connection between Maritain's

ideas and Spark's aesthetic, particularly as is evident in the novels from the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Spark's solution to what she sees as the falsity and essential dishonesty that is implicit in creating a literature of 'sentiment and emotion' — the domesticated tragic emotion — is to call for a literature that does not evoke emotional responses, neither pity nor terror, but demystifies power. "I advocate", she writes, "the arts of satire and ridicule. And I see no other living art form for the future" (1971:24). In calling for a literature of 'satire and ridicule' Spark is in line with much Christian writing. Comedy and satire imply that things are seen from a vantage point. Things are funny insofar as they depart from a norm. Spark's ordered world, the theoretical clarity of her art, narrative altitude, all these things imply a certain degree of confidence. Bradbury refers to Spark's "assurance of manner" (1972: 241). The pose is certainly one of authoritativeness. Hoyt calls it, "a pose of Neo-Classicism" (1965:130).

Hoyt's remark is apt. Neo-Classicism describes an attitude, the sense of a stable social or political order which need not correspond to an actual order. The underside of the Augustan heroic couplet was the horror depicted by Hogarth. The Augustan manner reflects an opted-for vision. It is a vision that may well serve in the interests of power. For philosopher Jean-François Lyotard neo-Classicism is impossible in a postmodern age. The way out for art is through experimentation rather than through the 'correct images' of neo-Classical art (1993:75). By neo-Classicism Lyotard is of course referring to a *confidence* in representation and not, in a French context, a return to Racine. Neo-Classicism is suspect because it creates the 'correct images' of a stable order and thus serves in the interest of Power which needs to perpetuate images of that order for its own political survival. According to Lyotard, the world is too destabilized to be represented by such ordered images:

Classicism seems to be out-of-bounds in a world in which reality has been so destabilized that it no longer constitutes material for experience, but rather for surveys and experimentation. (1993:17; my translation).

A destabilized world requires the destabilized forms of the 'experimental avant-garde' (1993:75). "[C]apitalism", Lyotard writes, "inherently possesses the power to derealize familiar objects, social roles, and institutions to such a degree that the so-called realistic representation can no longer evoke reality except as nostalgia or mockery" (74; my translation). We are simultaneously close to and removed from the Sparkian world. Spark would not contest the notion that the world has become destabilized or derealized. Insofar as it is possible to view the fictional world in terms of our recognition of its forms being similar to those of the world outside the text, where the phantoms and shadows of the fictional world stand as a generalized metaphor for, not a representation of, the other world of substantial forms, then it is possible to say that Spark also represents a world that is derealized and destabilized.

This provides for an interesting juxtaposition. On the one hand there are the metafictional displays, the baroque layering of language through multiple stylistic and textual allusions, the antics of the characters in the plot, the extravaganza of the presentation. These pyrotechnic feats exist within a structure that contradicts them. The postmodern is inserted within a framework of Order. It is an Order that substitutes the Aristotelian triad of *poiësis-mimêsis-katharsis* for a purely formalistic wholeness, proportion and radiance. This Order is formalist because it is not conceived as the embodiment of a spiritual light, but is static, resides in itself. It is through the structure of the work that Spark hints at another Order. It is through altitude that she laughs at the absurdity of this one. The Aesthetics of Order provide for a ludic conception of the world and art.

The reference is also to the play, humour and irony of the Creator in the last chapters of *The Book of Job* (38-42).³⁴ The idea of a playful God with his own designs is certainly close to Spark's conception of the artist. It is not the usurpation of a God-role but it is a conception used in the interests of creating an *anagogical* dimension in the work. Thus Lister's words are, ultimately, empty-headed. He cannot see the superintending design. The critic studies the design from outside the text. That itself is no guarantee that the marvels in the text are easily understood.

³⁴ The title of Spark's first novel was *The Comforters* (1957); the reference is to Job's comforters. Her novel *The Only Problem* (1984) is a subtle reworking of *The Book of Job*.

CONCLUSION

At the beginning of Chapter One the philosopho-theological notion of a unified self was contrasted with the schizophrenic condition. Schizophrenia was taken as the most extreme manifestation of division. The division was said to be manifest in the radical split experienced by the schizophrenic subject: the mind is dissociated from the self, what little sense of self remains is overwhelmed by disembodied voices outside the self. The schizophrenic experience is naturally fragmentary.

Postmodernism is not the schizophrenic condition on a grand scale. It is all too easy to make a comparison based on *apparent* similarities. The decline of the subject of humanism is also the realization that the subject is *constituted* by political structures, by ideology. Even language constitutes the human person within it. Jacques Lacan writes that language "can no longer be conceived as being constituted by man, but rather as an order which constitutes him" (1966:46; my translation). This is not the same as the almost total annihilation of self that we observe in the schizophrenic. If there is a connection it is at the level of simulation. Postmodernism simulates the schizophrenic condition. The schizophrenic condition is characterized by the hearing of many voices. These voices are disembodied in the sense that they do not arrive from a source from within the self but come from various unknown and outside sources. Postmodern art simulates that sense of many voices removed from a centre, a point of origin. Postmodern novels are often historicist, they call upon voices and styles from the past, they re-utilize them, recycle them. Linda Hutcheon calls such novels "historiographic metafiction" (1986:180), Christine Brooke-Rose prefers to talk of "palimpsest history" (1992:127).

It is not only the voices of the past which are called upon. The marginalized also tell their stories. Stories no longer emanate from the centre (the imperial tradition, the master language, the master code). Many of the interesting developments in the novel (especially) since the 1960s have come from hitherto marginalized sectors.

The new influences on the form of the English novel are African-American, Jewish American, Caribbean, Indian and Pakistani, Irish, Latin American. (And the Catholics? Bradbury reminds us “to what an extraordinary extent it is the English Catholic novelists who have contributed self-conscious aesthetics to the English literary tradition and have, in so doing, given those aesthetics a casuistical, or Jesuitical, streak” (1972:241-2). Are the Catholics also marginal?) “*Ex margine lux?*” asks Ferenc Feher (1989:203).

One of the words much bandied in critical discourse on the postmodern is the word *polyphony*. The word got into circulation via the work of Mikhail Bakhtin who contrasted monologic to dialogic or polyphonic writing. Polyphony seems a useful concept to describe the variety of discourses, the play on sounds, the decline of master codes with the resultant presence of many voices, from the past, the margins.

But polyphony is also something else. I recall during one of my Honours seminars one of my lecturers discoursing on the polyphonic nature of the postmodern novel, the multiple points of view, the indeterminate centre. For some reason I said: “Polyphony is a musical term. It refers to a very specific kind of music”.

Why? How?

I explained that polyphony referred to the many voices that came to be added to plainchant, thus transforming the harmonies. Its most sublime (I did not use this word at the time) expression was in the work of Palestrina, at the time of the Counter-Reformation.

I could see that my lecturer was surprised with my statement. It seemed to involve a reconceptualization of postmodern polyphony. Was Palestrina a postmodern composer?

I then said: “It is usually called *harmonic polyphony*”.

“Ah! That’s the catch”, said my lecturer. “We don’t want harmony, do we? Disharmonic polyphony, that’s my motto”, said my lecturer, very pleased with her reformulation.

It is useful to distinguish between different kinds of polyphony. There is a difference between harmonic and (as my lecturer would have it) dis-harmonic polyphony, between disembodied voices and unified voices that arise from a source, between polyphony that engenders a fragmentary discourse and polyphony in the service of order.

The four novels we have discussed can also be categorized as polyphonic. They play with stylistic inheritance, appropriate other texts, incorporate sub-genres (the Gothic novel, Jacobean drama, the Angela Brazil-type girls story, medieval romance, fantasy, academic discourse). The stories within stories are a constant feature in all four novels. Many things happen in these novels. They are also comic novels, to lesser and greater degrees, sometimes they are witty, sometimes farcical. (*How Far Can You Go?* is perhaps the exception. "I did say this wasn't a comic novel, exactly" (1982rpt:112), the narrator informs us.) These are works that, through satire, demystify power — the Church as institution, the moneyed classes. Bakhtin would call these works carnivalesque, a concept he associated with polyphony. The carnivalesque is derived from the idea of the carnival or feast of fools as a satiric and parodic (and bawdy?) way of resisting a dominant 'monologic' viewpoint (Lodge, 1987:92). Some authors have seen the carnivalesque as one of the signs of the postmodern (Hassan, 1987:445), although for Bakhtin it was a constant throughout history.

What makes the work of Lodge and Spark interesting is that their polyphony operates from a principle of harmony. *Harmony* we recall was also one of the translations of Thomist *proportio*. Harmony (or proportion) here means that the novels work towards something. These are teleologically oriented novels. The metafictional exercises work towards this sense of closure. *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* ends in the middle but that is also the end, the heart of the question. The polyphony is not dis-harmonic but harmonic. Harmony works towards order. The authority upon which, in Catholic terms, order has traditionally been constituted is of course destructured in Lodge's *How Far Can You Go?*. But at the end of the novel it is still the author who says, "Reader, farewell!" (1982rpt:244). Spark's novels, and Lodge's other novel, are structured around principles of order.

Harmonic polyphony also means that these carnivalesque exercises exist within a monologic ('ordered', 'dominant') discourse that ostensibly contradicts these manifestations. Spark is of course satirizing the world, not the theoretical premises that allow her to satirize the world. Even Lodge's *The British Museum is Falling Down*, another carnivalesque, farcical text, never escapes from the ultimate monologic discourse of a liberal Catholicism. All stories are harmonized around the liberal Catholic vision; that which is funny or farcical (the portraits of the Irish parish priest, Mrs Rottingdean, Father Wildfire) is funny because it deviates from the norm, in this case liberal Catholicism.

We could perhaps establish some kind of link between a Catholic-informed perspective and the harmonic nature of the polyphony in these texts. Musical polyphony was closely identified with Catholicism. (Palestrina was after all a cleric.) Catholic connoisseurs of the arts are almost certain to invoke the name of Palestrina as a foremost exponent of Catholic high-art. We read this in Antonia White's (rather offensive?) statement: "After all we've got Giotto and Dante and Mozart and Palestrina so why shouldn't other people have 'Hark, hark my soul' and the rest?" (1983:108). James Joyce, no friend of the Church, wrote an eloquent passage in *Ulysses* where the singing of the Creed in Palestrina's *Mass for Pope Marcellus* becomes the triumphalist affirmation of the one holy catholic and apostolic church and where the mathematical ordering of the composition (the twelve voices) becomes the symbol of a celestial order (the twelve apostles):

The proud potent titles clanged over Stephen's memory the triumph of their brazen bells: *et unam sanctam catholicam et apostolicam ecclesiam*: the slow growth and change of rite and dogma like his own rare thoughts, a chemistry of stars. Symbol of the apostles in the mass for pope Marcellus, the voices blended, singing alone loud in affirmation: and behind their chant the vigilant angel of the church militant disarmed and menaced her heresiarchs. (1922, 1984rpt:27)

The Church militant has since changed. With Vatican II the triumphalist vision of the Church became something of an anachronism. The modern heresiarchs are not the disbelievers (*Gaudium et Spes* (1966:21) had very kind things to say about atheists) but the systems — communism, capitalism. The Church still rages against sin but also against organized systems of sin. But if the vision of the Church has

changed, the belief in a cosmic order has changed less radically. An earlier vision placed the Church, the visible and invisible Church, within the cosmos. The Church Triumphant is not heard of much in Christian rhetoric nowadays. The cosmos has returned to invisibility (and to silence?). The cosmic order is also a providential order. This is a theological conception, not an interest in the Church as eternal institution. Novelistic order is ultimately a semblance of such a providential order, the sense that there is harmony, that "the clumsy play and the aimless toil" (Newman, 1964b:303) ultimately makes sense. The Catholic novel is that clumsy play. It is also the order. Because this novel says things such as these which are generally not accepted other than by Christians (Catholic or Protestant), it uses the current forms as the building bricks for its own structure. The Catholic novel can be postmodernist, it can be realist. Sometimes, because it has to say different things it has to resort to new strategies. Formal innovation follows the Catholic novel—particularly the Sparkian variety—at close distance. Formal innovation coincides of course with a sense of underlying order, which is very traditional. It is this sense of order that makes it different. The Catholic novel is at odds with the world. If it is postmodernist it also because it is anti-modern (not anti-modernist necessarily; literary form can be appropriated), if it is post-Catholic it is because it is not necessarily postmodern. The chant of the Church Militant might not be sung with the vocal harmonies of Palestrina anymore but the Catholic novel still suggests that there is something out there. If its polyphony rings discordant to ours ears it is also because we no longer believe. Accept it provisionally. As a metaphor. As fiction.

ANNEXURE TO CHAPTER THREE

SEGMENTATION OF THE TIME UNITS in Muriel Spark's

The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie (1961)

- 1 [1935/6] The boys, as they talked to the girls from Marcia Blaine School ... (p 5) →
- 2 [1932/3] At that time they had been immediately recognizable as Miss Brodie's pupils ... (p 5) →
- 3 [1935/6] By the time they were sixteen, and had reached the fourth form ... (p 6) →
- 4 [1930/1] ... she was famous for her vowel sounds which, long ago in the long past, in the Junior school, had enraptured Miss Brodie ... (p 7) →
- 5 [1935/6] But now, the boys with their bicycles were cheerfully insulting Jenny Gray ... (p 7) →
- 6 [1930/1] ... and the Brodie set was left to their secret life as it had been six years ago in their childhood ... (p 8) →
- 7 [1935/6] Sandy looked with her little screwed-up eyes at Monica's very red nose ... (p 9) →
- 8 [1930/1] Six years previously, Miss Brodie had led her new class into the garden for a history lesson ... (p 10) [UNIT 8 [1930/1], between pp 10-14, includes three anticipations of the future which are also anaphoric since they refer to what has already been stated (not flashforwards, since they do not narrate the future before its time): (i) "Rose Stanley who six years later had a great reputation for sex" (p 13), (ii) "Jenny, later famous in the school for beauty" (p 13) and (iii) "Mary Macgregor ... who was later famous for being stupid" (pp 13-14).] →
- 9 [1944] Mary Macgregor, although she lived into her twenty-fourth year ... (p 15) →
- 10 [1930/1] But at the beginning of the nineteen-thirties, when Mary Macgregor was ten ... (p 15) →
- 11 [1958] It was twenty-eight years after Eunice did the splits in Miss Brodie's flat that she, who had become a nurse ... (p 26) →
- 12 [1930/1] It is time now to speak of the long walks through the old parts of Edinburgh where Miss Brodie took her set ... (p 27) [UNIT 12 [1930/1], between pp 27-33, includes three anaphoric anticipations of the future: (iv) "Monica Douglas, later famous for being able to do real mathematics in her head" (p 27), (v) "Rose Stanley ... who had not yet won her reputation for sex" (p 28) and (vi) "little Eunice Gardiner, who, twenty-eight years later, said of Miss Brodie ..." (p 28).] →

- 13 [1958] Similarly, there were other people's nineteen-thirties. So that, in her middle age, when she was at last allowed those visitors to the convent ... (p 33) →
- 14 [1930/1] "We will not go into St Giles," said Miss Brodie, "because the day draws late ..." (p 35) [UNIT 14 [1930/1] , between pp 35-41, includes one anaphoric anticipation of the future: (vii) "... said Rose, who later, while still in her teens, was to provoke Miss Brodie's amazement and awe ..." (p 38).] →
- 15 [1931/2] The days passed and the wind blew from the Forth ... (p 42) [UNIT 15 [1931/2] includes two anticipations of the future: (viii) "In later years, sex was the only thing in life" (p 44) and (ix) "Monica Douglas, later famous for mathematics and anger" (p 50).] →
- 16 [1958] Later, when she was famous for sex ... When she visited Sandy at the nunnery in the late nineteen-fifties ... (p 55) →
- 17 [1946] She knew it even before Miss Brodie had told her so one day after the end of the war, when they sat in the Braid Hills Hotel ... (p 56) →
- 18 [1931/2] In the late autumn of nineteen-thirty-one Miss Brodie was away from school for two weeks ... (p 56) →
- 19 [1946] In that year after the war when Sandy sat with Miss Brodie in the window of the Braid Hills Hotel ... (pp 59-60) →
- 20 [1931/2] After her two weeks' absence Miss Brodie returned to tell her class that she had enjoyed an exciting rest ... (pp 60-61) →
- 21 [1946] A few weeks before she died, when, sitting up in bed in the nursing home ... (p 63) →
- 22 [1931/2] The headmistress invited Sandy, Jenny and Mary to tea just before the Easter holidays ... (p 63) →
- 23 [1932/3] "I have enough gunpowder in this jar to blow up this school," said Lockhart in even tones ... (p 75) →
- 24 [1958] Once, in later years, when Sandy was visited by Rose Stanley ... (p 77) →
- 25 [1946] And Miss Brodie, sitting in the window of the Braid Hills Hotel ... (p 77) →
- 26 [1932/3] The Brodie set might easily have lost its identity at this time ... (p 77) →
- 27 [1958] "I feel I'm past it," said Jenny. This was strangely true, and she did not experience her early sense of erotic wonder in life until suddenly one day when she was nearly forty ... (p 80) →
- 28 [1932/3] "Mr Lowther's housekeeper," said Miss Brodie one Saturday afternoon ... (p 81) →
- 29 [1958] It was twenty-five years before Sandy had so far recovered from a creeping vision of disorder ... (86) →
- 30 [1932/3] It was after morning church on Sundays that Miss Brodie would go to Cramond ... (p 86) →
- 31 [1938] All this was conveyed to Sandy by the headmistress herself at that subsequent time when Sandy looked at her distastefully through her little eyes ... (p 94) →

- 32 [1932/3] "But I must organize the dear fellow's food before I go home tonight," Miss Brodie said in the summer of nineteen-thirty-three ... (p 94) →
- 33 [1935/6] "Why, it's like Miss Brodie," said Sandy ... (p 99) →
- 34 [1938] ... it always seemed afterwards to Sandy ... She acted on this principle when the time came for her to betray Miss Brodie. (pp 101-102) →
- 35 [1935/6] Jenny had done badly in her last terms examinations and was mostly, these days, at home working up her subjects ... (p 102) →
- 36 [1938] ... and in the event it was Sandy who slept with Teddy Lloyd ... (p 110) →
- 37 [1935/6] It was some time before these things came to pass, and meanwhile Miss Brodie was neglecting Mr Lowther ... (p 110) →
- 38 [1938] Miss Mackay, the headmistress, never gave up pumping the Brodie set ... (p 115) →
- 39 [1958] When she was a nun ... (p 121) →
- 40 [1938] In the summer of nineteen-thirty-eight, after the last of the Brodie set had left Blaine, Miss Brodie went to Germany and Austria ... (p 122) →
- 41 [1946] After the war Miss Brodie admitted to Sandy, as they sat in the Braid Hills Hotel, "Hitler was rather naughty ..." (p 122) →
- 42 [1938] ... but at this time she was full of her travels and quite sure the new régime would save the world ... (p 122) →
- 43 [1958] Her name and memory, after her death, flitted from mouth to mouth ... 'There was a Miss Jean Brodie in her prime' (pp 127-8).

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