

EPIPHANY AND FEMININE SUBJECTIVITY IN THE NOVELS OF  
CHARLOTTE BRONTE, D. H. LAWRENCE, AND DORIS LESSING

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## SUMMARY

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The purpose of this thesis lies in establishing the importance of moments of epiphany in developing ways of understanding feminine subjectivity in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*, D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*, *The Rainbow*, and *Women in Love*, and Doris Lessing's *Children of Violence* series. The comparisons and contrasts in these texts' treatment of the feminine subject are elaborated. Epiphany's place in different narrative structures is considered, as is the issue of how the implicit gendering of those narrative patterns constructs the feminine subject, sometimes in ways that may conflict with the gender of the characters concerned. The conclusions of the thesis suggest that an understanding of feminine subjectivity in the novels considered is invaluable aided by examining the novels' epiphanies; and elaborate the previously implicit evaluative comparison of the three writers' novels from the perspective outlined below.

The critical and theoretical approach of the thesis relies on the combination of a feminist commitment to understand and change patriarchal relations with poststructuralist theories about language and the subject that suggest the importance of language in constructing our ideas. Psychoanalytic models and theories are frequently

used as they best address the issues I find interesting in these texts.

The thesis is divided into four chapters. The first is a history of epiphany's development as a concept from its appearance in the work of Joyce to its use as a critical term. The second deals with epiphany's disruption of established models of feminine subjectivity in *Villette*. The third discusses the differentiation of feminine and masculine epiphanies and languages in *Sons and Lovers* and *The Rainbow*, and that pattern's collapse in *Women in Love*; and the fourth chapter deals with the various models of the feminine subject in *Children of Violence*, and considers why they do not productively conflict with, or question each other.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used throughout the thesis.

- D James Joyce, *Dubliners* (London: Grafton, 1987)  
 P James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (London: Grafton, 1987)  
 SH James Joyce, *Stephen Hero: Part of the First Draft of 'A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man'*, edited with an introduction by Theodore Spencer, revised edition with additional material and a foreword by John J. Slocum and Herbert Cahoon (London: Jonathon Cape, 1969)  
 U James Joyce, *Ulysses* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982)
- JE Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, edited with an introduction by Q. D. Leavis (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981)  
 PR Charlotte Brontë, *The Professor*, introduced by Margaret Lane (London: Dent, 1969)  
 S Charlotte Brontë, *Shirley*, edited with an introduction by Andrew and Judith Hook (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985)  
 V Charlotte Brontë, *Villette*, edited by Mark Lilly and introduced by Tony Tanner (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985)
- R D. H. Lawrence, *The Rainbow*, edited with an introduction by John Worthen (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988)  
 SL D. H. Lawrence, *Sons and Lovers*, edited with an introduction by Keith Sagar (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986)  
 WL D. H. Lawrence, *Women in Love*, edited with an introduction by Charles L. Ross (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986)
- MQ Doris Lessing, *Martha Quest* (London: Grafton, 1986)  
 PM Doris Lessing, *A Proper Marriage* (London: Paladin, 1990)  
 RFS Doris Lessing, *A Ripple from the Storm* (London: Grafton, 1989)  
 LL Doris Lessing, *Landlocked* (London: Grafton, 1986)  
 FGC Doris Lessing, *The Four-Gated City* (London: Grafton, 1988)

## INTRODUCTION

Aims and Objectives

The aim of this thesis is to establish that moments of epiphany make a crucial contribution to ways of reading feminine subjectivity in the novels of Charlotte Brontë, D. H. Lawrence and Doris Lessing. By looking at these three writers' different use of epiphanies I will set up some revealing comparisons and contrasts in their approaches to the feminine subject. This will be related to the issue of how epiphany operates in and through the narrative process. I will also address the question of how each writer's use of epiphany to discuss feminine subjectivity works - how can it be read from my specific feminist perspective?

The original contribution of the thesis lies in the link it makes between epiphany and the feminine subject in fiction, one which has not been considered before. The thesis will also examine the way that the term 'epiphany' has been unproblematically incorporated into accepted critical practice, and consider how it functions to construct the subject through *narrative*: I will consider the way that moments of epiphany can be part of a narrative of growth or *bildung*. J. H. Buckley, in his book *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding* remarks: 'In book after book ever since *Wilhelm Meister* some such vision, a sharp epiphany or a more gradual imaginative enlightenment, has been essential to the hero's initiation and continuance'.<sup>1</sup> This point is not expanded in his book,



however. Karen Lawrence, in an article about gender and narrative voice in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Jacob's Room* comments that:

Joyce accepts the central notions of identity and vocation in the *Bildungsroman*: Stephen Dedalus has a calling. *A Portrait* moves in the direction of a goal (even if Stephen's aspirations are ironically deflated at times and we may question the greatness of his ultimate destination). Moments of revelation mark the stages of Stephen's journey toward identity, moments when he feels that the prophecy of his name coincides with events in the real world. The basic idea of growth and development, however problematic, is, nevertheless, ultimately accepted.<sup>2</sup>

The place epiphany has in this, and other types of narrative structure will be fully considered in the thesis, as will the question of how certain narrative structures might be implicitly gendered, and how the writers I discuss and women readers might endorse, alter or deconstruct those structures. Teresa de Lauretis addresses this question in her article, 'Desire in Narrative'.<sup>3</sup> She comments:

Femininity and masculinity are...positions occupied by the subject in relation to desire, corresponding respectively to the passive and the active aims of the libido. They are positionalities within a movement that carries both the male child and the female child toward one and the same destination: Oedipus and the Oedipal stage. That movement, I have argued, is the movement of narrative discourse, which specifies and even produces the masculine position as that of mythical subject, and the feminine position as mythical obstacle or, simply, the space in which that movement occurs. (p.143)

I intend to discuss the relationship that characters have to the narrative process, and how that may produce a subject position that conflicts with their gender, for example women characters like Lucy in *Villette* can occupy both a 'masculine' and 'feminine' narrative position. De Lauretis points out the 'splitting of the female subject's identification into the two mythical positions of hero

(mythical subject) and boundary (spatially fixed object, personified obstacle)' (p.123). She is discussing the feminine cinema spectator, but I will establish that her comments hold true for the subject positions occupied by feminine characters in a novel and feminine readers, and will consider the implications of this.

The purpose of this thesis is not to discuss why epiphany has become so important in the novel, as this has been dealt with elsewhere. Morris Beja's book *Epiphany in the Modern Novel*<sup>4</sup> discusses epiphany's importance to twentieth century fiction. In his introductory chapters he situates the increasing use of moments of epiphany by novelists as a part of other changes like the secularisation of religious experience; the loss of faith in reason; the fascination with psychology; and the invasion of the novel by poetic characteristics. He finds epiphany's roots in conversion experiences; mystical enlightenment; a changing understanding of time; Kantian and Schopenhauerian philosophy; and the influence of the Romantic Movement on ideas about the artist and literature. He comments:

Men [sic] had become less preoccupied with God and more interested in man [sic], less amazed by supernatural visitants than by the power of the poet, less concerned with the object perceived than with the perceptive subject, less appreciative of grace and more fascinated by the imagination. (p.32)

Beja's book sees epiphany as a part of changing views about literature, and the individual's place in the world. Whereas he examines what epiphany is and why it has come about, this thesis moves on to discuss the link between epiphany and feminine subjectivity, and would preferably be

read in the context of feminist readings of novels, language, and narrative.

### Critical and Theoretical Approach

On beginning the research that formed the basis for this thesis my critical approach centred on looking at the texts I was going to consider and examples of epiphany in them. My interest in the link between the feminine subject and moments of epiphany developed from reading the texts increasingly in relationship to a growing interest in theory, and particularly feminist theory. The texts did not dictate my theoretical approach, but neither is this thesis a study that takes a particular theory and applies it rigorously to a set of texts. Both the critical approach and the analysis of the texts changed and developed in close relationship to each other. Writing this introduction after the body of analysis in the chapters has been completed, however, it is possible to isolate some theoretical aspects and issues that are important in the thesis.

Two critical approaches, feminism and poststructuralism, are very important in the thesis. In her book *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*,<sup>5</sup> a good example of the way these issues have been linked, Chris Weedon defines feminism as the 'shared political aim of understanding and contesting patriarchal relations' (p.146), which she earlier defines as 'power relations in which women's interests are subordinated to the interests

of men', adding, 'these power relations take many forms' (p.2). As a general definition of feminism her comments seem appropriate to the aims of this thesis.

Some important issues in poststructuralist theory, which I would ascribe to, are as follows. Firstly, the idea of language as *constitutive* of our notions of the world and not *descriptive* of them. Secondly, the importance of the relationship between power and language, which in practice restricts an indefinite freeplay of language leading to the dominance of some discourses over others. Lastly, the necessity of discussing language and its conflicting forms from a politically committed perspective. This way of linking poststructuralist theory and feminism is also important.

If 'discourse constitutes rather than reflects meaning', as Weedon puts it (p.51), it is obviously important to consider why particular theories or theorists have been used in a thesis. I have frequently taken a psychoanalytic approach to an issue or used a psychoanalytic model to theorise it. This is because I feel that psychoanalytic theory is a discourse that best addresses the issues that I find interesting in the texts I am looking at. Subjectivity, sexuality and desire were and are extremely important, for a variety of reasons, both at an individual and social level, in nineteenth and twentieth century western society, when and where the writers I am discussing wrote. They became important *prior* to the appearance of psychoanalytic theory, which developed partly to attempt to explain them, although psychoanalysis has helped to maintain and ensure their prominence in the

twentieth century. To analyse effectively these aspects, then, requires a theory which also accepts the importance of them, and which has the power to link their function in the individual and social arenas. I would suggest that psychoanalytic theory, when linked with a poststructuralist understanding of language and a feminist commitment, does theorise these issues in a useful way. As Elizabeth Grosz writes:

We must also place psychoanalysis in the context of a history of misogyny where feminists may be able to subvert and/or harness strategically what is useful without being committed to its more problematic ontological, political, and moral commitments.<sup>6</sup>

A part of this explanation of my critical and methodological approach should also involve defining the way I am using some of the terms in this thesis, most importantly, 'epiphany' and 'subjectivity'. To begin with subjectivity, I initially want to stress the difference between the poststructuralist subject and the humanist self. The idea of conflict and instability in the subject is important, as is the point that rival ways of understanding the subject are produced *by language*. Ways of understanding the subject can and do change, as I hope to elaborate in my thesis. It is in this sense, and with these aims, that I am using the term subjectivity.

To turn to epiphany, I wish to stress that *defining* epiphany is not the purpose of this thesis. Morris Beja's definition (after Joyce's in *Stephen Hero* (SH p.216) [see list of abbreviations]) in *Epiphany in the Modern Novel* is satisfactory, although I would be happy with *revelation* as well as *manifestation*:

*A sudden spiritual manifestation, whether from some object, scene, event, or memorable phase of the mind - the manifestation being out of proportion to the significance or strictly logical relevance of whatever produces it. (p.18)*

This is what I mean when I use the term, but I do not want to set up an exclusive definition which is different from that which other critics and readers of literature might use. What interests me is the way the word is now commonly used when discussing literature, or even everyday life, and the implied definitions *others* use.

My own approach to writing this thesis has been to pay close attention to the specific passages in the texts where the epiphanies happen, and to consider various ways of reading these. This also involves discussing what other critics writing on Brontë, Lawrence and Lessing have said, both about these passages, and the issues of subjectivity, epiphany, and narrative in the novels I am considering.

At a wider level, I have used various writers, such as Jacques Lacan, Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Teresa de Lauretis to elaborate particular readings. I want to use writers that all use models of desire, language and subjectivity in ways that are worthwhile to consider from my specific feminist perspective (this does not mean that I will always agree with them).

The choice of novelists considered in this thesis is very diverse. However I do not feel a need to justify this by making links between them other than the obvious one: that they all use epiphany and all treat the feminine subject, although it would be very easy to do so. I could comment on the chronological progression of the writers in the thesis; each novelist's use of realism, and the

tensions within it; the use of the bildungsroman form; and I could probably find several other common areas, but my initial reason for choosing the writers that I have chosen is that they were three novelists whose work I had read who used epiphanies integrally in their novels. As my work progressed I realised the importance of the connection between epiphany and the feminine subject, and the contrasting implications of reading each writer's work from my specific perspective. The reason for restricting myself to the novel, and not, for example, considering the short story, is that I think epiphany functions entirely differently in a short story, more often working to provide a single 'highpoint' or conclusion. (Consider, for example, 'The Dead' or 'Bliss'.) In the novel epiphanies work much more continuously in narrative to provide a more consistent approach to areas like subjectivity, and it is this aspect that most interests me.

Some feminist readers might question the reasoning behind discussing a male writer, and male characters (who I write about predominantly in the chapter on Lawrence, but also in the chapter on Lessing) in the thesis. I would suggest that comparison with female writers and characters will prove fruitful. I would also remark that understanding how the biological sex of a writer affects the text is a very complex issue. It will inevitably affect perceptions of authorship, literature, the novel and textuality both at author *and* reader level. I hope that by including a male writer I will contribute to an understanding of this issue, although I can also appreciate the usefulness of strategic separatism in some areas of feminist thought and practice.

D. H. Lawrence is unarguably a controversial figure for feminist literary studies, but what could be defined as 'recalcitrant' (for feminist readers) texts need a discussion that can clarify why and where they are most resistant to those readers.

Some selectivity had to be used when deciding which of the three writers' novels to consider, or this thesis would have been impossibly long. Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* is the only one of her novels that I discuss. My decision not to consider Brontë's other novels is based on the absence in those texts of both epiphany (as I define it) and the problematic feminine subject. I will suggest that the epiphany functions in *Villette* to destabilise conventional ways of reading feminine subjectivity, so that the absence of the same degree of complexity in the feminine subjects of Brontë's other novels is closely connected to the absence of epiphany. Moments in *Jane Eyre*, for example, that could be called 'proto-epiphanic' are occasional and not integral to the narrative's construction of Jane as a feminine subject. One such scene is Jane's lingering outside Thornfield Hall after helping a tall dark stranger (who turns out to be Rochester) back on to his horse:

I lingered at the gates; I lingered on the lawn; I paced backwards and forwards on the pavement: the shutters of the glass door were closed; I could not see into the interior; and both my eyes and spirit seemed drawn from the gloomy house - from the gray hollow filled with rayless cells, as it appeared to me - to that sky expanded before me - a blue sea absolved from taint of cloud; the moon ascending it in solemn march, her orb seeming to look up as she left the hilltops, from behind which she had come, far and farther below her, and aspired to the zenith, midnight dark in its fathomless depth and measureless distance; and for those trembling stars that followed her course, they made my heart tremble, my veins glow when I viewed them. Little things recall us to earth: the



clock struck in the hall; that sufficed. I turned from moon and stars, opened a side-door, and went in. (JE p.148) [see list of abbreviations]

This scene, like many epiphanies, stresses the surfacing of ambition and desire in the feminine subject. Jane's curious emotion is seen to be a delayed result of the altercation with the mysterious stranger, transferred to a response to the night sky. The passage also suggests the polarisation of ideas about interiority and exteriority (Thornfield Hall as opposed to the 'measureless distance' of the sky) that is important in positioning Jane throughout the narrative. What it does not do is actualise the *split* subject in the way that *Villette* does. The 'I' of the passage still narrates a unified self. This is also apparent in another 'epiphanic' scene: the moment when Jane mysteriously hears Rochester's voice calling her. This device is essential for the movement towards marriage with him and closure of the novel, which may make it inappropriate to define it as an epiphany (usually not immediately relevant to the twists and turns of plot). However, the narration of the piece is also representative of the ideas about subjectivity in the novel. A good example follows Jane's hearing the disembodied voice:

I broke from St John, who had followed, and would have detained me. It was *my* time to assume ascendancy. *My* powers were in play and in force. I told him to forbear question or remark; I desired him to leave me: I must and would be alone. He obeyed at once. Where there is energy to command well enough, obedience never fails. I mounted to my chamber; locked myself in; fell on my knees; and prayed in my way - a different way to St John's, but effective in its own fashion. I seemed to penetrate very near a Mighty Spirit; and my soul rushed out in gratitude at His feet. I rose from the thanksgiving - took a resolve - and lay down, unscared, enlightened - eager but for the daylight. (JE p.445)

This sort of autonomy and consistency at the level of character, plot, and narrative is unthinkable of Lucy Snowe in *Villette*. As Penny Boumelha writes of *Jane Eyre*:

The idea of a...natural character...figures prominently in the novel, reinforced by the use of physiognomy and phrenology to describe and delimit the characters; these pseudo-sciences offer a reading of character that, for the skilled reader, is immediate and unchangeable, though it is possible to fail to fulfil the potential they imply.<sup>7</sup>

A notion of the subject as unified, unchanging essence is important in *Jane Eyre*, whereas in *Villette* this idea is problematised in Lucy's epiphanies.

*Shirley* is a very different novel from *Jane Eyre*, with its detailed social background, doubling of heroes and heroines, and chapter headings reminiscent of Fielding: consider, for example Chapter 18, 'Which the Genteel Reader is Recommended to Skip, Low Persons being Here Introduced' (S p.314) [see list of abbreviations]. However, there are many places where an 'epiphanic strain' emerges, although again this is not integral to the novel in the way that it is to *Villette*. Most of these incidents centre on the character, Shirley. One scene, where Shirley and Caroline are inside listening to the storm, prefigures Lucy's comparable reaction in *Villette*:

Shirley sat at the window, watching the rack in heaven, the mist on earth, listening to certain notes of the gale that plained like restless spirits - notes which, had she not been so young, gay, and healthy, would have swept her trembling nerves like some omen, some anticipatory dirge: in this her prime of existence and bloom of beauty, they but subdued vivacity to pensiveness. Snatches of sweet ballads haunted her ear; now and then she sang a stanza: her accents obeyed the fitful impulse of the wind; they swelled as its gusts rushed on, and died as they wandered away. (S p.231)

This receptivity to nature has a very different effect on Shirley, however. She is in harmony with its forces, because of the secure, unproblematic sense of selfhood, the 'prime of existence and bloom of beauty' she possesses.

Shirley's self-confidence, and her close and harmonious relationship with nature, are again important in chapter eighteen, when she refuses to go into church because the evening is so beautiful. She remarks:

'Nature is now at her evening prayers: she is kneeling before those red hills. I see her prostrate on the great steps of her altar, praying for a fair night for mariners at sea, for travellers in deserts, for lambs on moors, and unfledged birds in woods. Caroline, I see her! and I will tell you what she is like: she is like what Eve was when she and Adam stood alone on earth'. (S p.314)

Shirley's comments, and those that follow on, which depict Eve as a powerful, beautiful woman, the mother of the Titans and, very importantly, not sinful (Shirley describes her as 'undegenerate' (S p.315)), suggest the unconventional strength which Brontë gives her character and Shirley's reluctance to accept masculine religious and mythical models. This is again stressed in the composition which Shirley wrote in her childhood, which Louis Moore has memorised, the title of which was: '"And it came to pass when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose"' (S p.455). This verse, from Genesis vi, 1-2, which is also important in *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*, is interpreted by Shirley as a paean to Eve. The oddly visionary, and specifically female-centred quality of Shirley's relationship with nature and

literature may suggest an epiphanic quality, but the sense of authority and confidence Shirley has in this is very different from anything else in Brontë, and must be connected with Shirley's powerful position as a beautiful woman and a single female landowner. Her nickname - Captain Keeldar - may also suggest that, as an honorary man, she gains a masculine authority of interpretation. In another passage Shirley's visionary moods are discussed:

The still parlour, the clean hearth, the window opening on the twilight sky, and showing its 'sweet regent,' new throned and glorious, suffice to make earth an Eden, life a poem, for Shirley. A still, deep, inborn delight glows in her young veins; unmingled - untroubled; not to be reached or ravished by human agency, because by no human agency bestowed: the pure gift of God to His creature, the free dower of Nature to her child. This joy gives her experience of a geni-life...her eye seeks, and her soul possesses, the vision of life as she wishes it. (S p.374)

Again, the close, visionary link that Shirley has with nature is seen to be connected to her happy and contented sense of subjectivity. On the same page, the narrator suggests that this may be one of Shirley's limitations: 'If Shirley were not an indolent, a reckless, an ignorant being, she would take a pen at such moments'. Although an explicit link is made in the passage between acquisitiveness, or 'love of property', and the act of writing down such moments, there is also the implication that Shirley lacks sensitivity: 'indolent she is, reckless she is, and most ignorant, for she does not know her dreams are rare - her feelings peculiar: she does not know, has never known, and will die without knowing, the full value of that spring whose bright fresh bubbling in her heart keeps it green' (S p.374). The narrator makes it clear that

Shirley's self-satisfaction means she lacks the something that would make her become a writer/the narrator of her story. She hasn't 'suffered for her art'! And maybe this is the reason why the novel does not use epiphany structurally to develop Shirley as a feminine subject: she is too unproblematic a self.

*The Professor* has more to offer readers than merely an early version of *Villette*. Brontë's treatment of a masculine protagonist and narrator is interesting, for example, and the theme of Englishness and 'foreignness' gets a different cast because of the half-Swiss heroine who longs to go to England. However, epiphany has no place in this novel. Scenes which in *Villette* would provoke an epiphany do not do so here. By way of example is the moment when Crimsworth, tired of correcting homework, looks out of his window into the pensionnat garden's allée défendue:

I sat down in the window-seat, rested my arm on the sill, and leaned out: above me was the clear-obscure of a cloudless night sky - splendid moonlight subdued the tremulous sparkle of the stars - below lay the garden, varied with silvery lustre and deep shade, and all fresh with dew - a grateful perfume exhaled from the closed blossoms of the fruit-trees - not a leaf stirred, the night was breezeless. (PR p.92) [see list of abbreviations]

The language of this passage is much more conventional than that of *Villette*. Its Romantic oxymoronic feel ('clear-obscure'; closed blossoms that give off perfume) takes a much more self-satisfied approach to the beauty of the night scene. One can only wonder whether this is due to the masculine narrator/hero? It is only in *Villette*, then, that epiphany has any integral function in the treatment of the subject.

To turn to D. H. Lawrence, my reasons for choosing to discuss *Sons and Lovers*, *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love* are that they could be said to be the most canonical of Lawrence's novels, and as such, have had a significant impact on literature which I think is important to analyse in terms of their use of epiphany and its relation to the feminine subject. The change after *Women in Love* with the leadership novels produces an almost totally different approach, which stresses male bonding and male power. This change in dynamic means that the feminine subject's place in the narrative also changes dramatically and becomes less interesting in relation to moments of epiphany. In *Lady Chatterley's Lover* moments of epiphany become indistinguishable from sexual experience. Although this is interesting in itself, it makes the novel very different from any of the others that I have chosen to discuss, with correspondingly different implications concerning the feminine subject that would take this thesis into a totally different area.

Doris Lessing's *Children of Violence* series was chosen because it is her most sustained and lengthy approach to the issue of feminine subjectivity in the realist form. This use of realism is what distinguishes it from the later science-fiction, which would need totally different terms of reference to understand. *The Golden Notebook* was not included because its play with form and structure also requires a totally different framework of analysis, which would take it beyond realism and *bildung* and into postmodernist fiction.

## Structure and Chapter Summary

I. The thesis is divided into four chapters. The first discusses the development of the term epiphany in a literary context from its first appearance in the work of Joyce. It then moves on to elaborate the critical use made of the term, initially by critics working on Joyce, and then considers its wider usage in relation to other writers' works. This discussion is contextualised by an awareness of changing approaches to literary studies: whereas initial discussion of epiphany centred on what exactly Joyce meant by it, and to what extent the critic could use the term extensively in relation to his work, later studies, which have incorporated more explicitly theoretical frameworks for studying literature, seem oddly blind when it comes to questioning exactly what is meant by using the term epiphany, assuming that there is an agreed definition which readers will share. Interestingly, the unproblematic way in which the term is frequently used actually disguises a wide variety of implied definitions, which I have considered. This opening chapter, which is not intended to be an original contribution to Joyce studies, provides a degree of background for the reader before moving on to a consideration of the way in which the novels of Charlotte Bronte, D. H. Lawrence and Doris Lessing treat epiphany and the feminine subject.

II. The second chapter is a consideration of the relationship between epiphany and the feminine subject in Charlotte Bronte's *Villette*. I discuss the way in which the feminine subject in *Villette* is initially constructed on a

binary oppositional model, split between two sets of personality traits (for example reason and imagination). Where exactly the divide is seen to fall, and which qualities are situated where, varies depending on who is writing about the novel, which suggests that the split is *not fixed* in the novel and could be seen as a function of narrative. This leads on to the point that there is a similar split in the *narrative of Vilette* between two narrative structures or patterns, between bildung and recurrent image patterns of nature and enclosure, for example. Both the opposing qualities of the split subject and the double narrative structures are implicitly gendered as masculine and feminine (for example reason and imagination are seen as masculine and feminine qualities respectively), and, importantly, both constructions of the subject are seen to be innate, pre-existing language and sociality. Most Brontë criticism does not move beyond recognising this, and then prioritising one side of the model as 'authentic', and repressed by the other. I see this as an inevitable consequence of using a binary oppositional model of gender. Instead of merely reiterating this common approach to understanding gender, I think the novel does more than that, and does it through its epiphanies. The epiphanies in the novel work to destabilise this gendered opposition by showing how unstable it is in language. The awareness of language in the novel's epiphanies is unavoidable, and constantly makes the reader understand that the feminine subject is constructed through language and is not innate; and that it will always be more than one half of a binary opposition.



III. The third chapter considers the ways in which epiphany constructs feminine subjectivity in D. H. Lawrence's three novels, *Sons and Lovers*, *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*. Each novel is considered in turn because there is a very definite change in the treatment of the feminine subject in each, and I particularly wish to distinguish my treatment of *Women in Love* from the other two novels. Initially I establish the importance of the issue of subjectivity in Lawrence's novels, both for characters and narrative. I discuss the sense of dissatisfaction that the characters feel with themselves in terms of a disjunction between self and other, and address the ways that the 'other' has been theorised by critics writing on Lawrence.

My analysis of *Sons and Lovers* and *The Rainbow* initially stresses the way in which epiphany functions to attempt to heal the split between self and other in these novels. I also trace critical perspectives on the 'subject-view' of these novels, considering how they instate the consistent, unified essential subject, who struggles to be recognised in the narrative process.

I then point out the deliberate 'gender blindness' of my analysis so far as a comment on that of many (though not all) critics writing on Lawrence. In contrast, I stress how the treatment of subjectivity and its relationship to epiphany in *Sons and Lovers* and *The Rainbow* is specifically sexually differentiated at the level of language and narrative. My comments on the subject so far have been more appropriate to a masculine narrative position (which some feminine characters may sometimes occupy). Femininity is

seen as a strong, powerful essence in these novels, and is sharply differentiated from a masculine ethic of bildung and progression. Instead, femininity becomes the object of the narrative's desiring quest. The language of the epiphanies is similarly gender differentiated. 'Feminine' epiphanies stress contrast, sharply defined boundaries and light and dark oppositions, whereas 'masculine' epiphanies are identified by their language of dispersal, lapsing, fluidity and process. These patterns are very different from those used by both Bronte and Lessing. The masculine epiphany confirms the progressive project of masculine bildung by merging the split between self and other in a way that reassures and confirms the character's sense of subjectivity. The feminine epiphany undermines the feminine subject by emphasising this split. I will discuss how, in *Sons and Lovers*, this pattern does fall across the gender of the characters concerned, with the possible exception of Gertrude Morel, and then show how, in *The Rainbow*, Ursula has to occupy both masculine and feminine narrative and subject positions. I will consider if this can be read as a productive split.

In *Women in Love* there is a very great change, with the disappearance of gender differentiated languages, epiphanies and narratives. The difference falls across the couples Ursula and Birkin as opposed to Gerald and Gudrun. The predominant language for epiphany becomes that of dispersal and self-loss, although ideas of the tearing of the subject and its split by the forces of the unconscious are reflected in imagery of rupture and leakage. This change leads to the loss of belief in a consistent,

individual subject. I will address the issues concerning the suggestion that femininity and masculinity have an equal relationship to desire and the unconscious.

IV. The final chapter in the thesis considers Doris Lessing's *Children of Violence* series and its treatment of the feminine subject and epiphany. This chapter also considers each novel in the sequence in turn, again to get a sense of the changing conception of the feminine subject in each novel, and in the series as a whole. In *Martha Quest* there are several rival ideas about the feminine subject: the self constructed by ideology and society; the liberal-humanist self; and the essentially female self linked to the female body. I will address the question of the narrative voices in the novel and how they establish these ways of understanding the feminine subject. The moments of epiphany in the novel seem to be points where these rival ideas conflict.

In *A Proper Marriage*, this tension in the approaches to the subject continues, but the one extremely significant epiphany in the novel is clearly situated as part of Martha's essentially female self, which is closely connected to her reproductive processes and female body. I will examine the problems inherent in this theorisation of subjectivity and consider to what extent such a view of the feminine subject actually endorses liberal-humanist doctrine about the self.

*A Ripple from the Storm*, the third novel in the sequence, transfers all the epiphanies from Martha to Jimmy, a white working-class airman. Martha's apparent contentment and absorption in the Communist group in the

colony seems to smooth over all the tensions in the conception of her as a subject, although the reader is made aware that this is only temporary. Jimmy's epiphanies are very different from Martha's, and I will discuss the way that these differences result from his gender, class, race and position in the colony.

*Landlocked* offers a much more Modernist version of the subject, with the disappearance of the belief in the essential self (in whatever form), and an atmosphere of pervasive nihilism and absurdity. Gender as a determining factor in subjectivity in any form is completely absent from this novel.

The fifth and concluding novel in the sequence, *The Four-Gated City*, displays a surprising change in tone. Although apparently about breakdown of the personality, the growing use of a collective unconscious and the necessity for the 'chosen few' to integrate it with the conscious through an individuation process means that the novel covertly reinstates liberal-humanist individualism, elitism and totalitarianism. Gender again has no significant effect on ways of understanding the feminine subject in the novel. I conclude the chapter by speculating on why it is that the rival ways of understanding the feminine subject in the series do not productively conflict with and destabilise each other.

Without pre-empting myself, I intend to suggest in the Conclusion to the thesis the relevance of the link between epiphany and the feminine subject in creating an understanding of the relationship between femininity, subjectivity, and narrative. I will also discuss the

different ways in which the three novelists considered in this thesis treat the feminine subject by using epiphany, and will elaborate what has been up to that point a deliberately *implied* evaluative comparison between them.

#### Notes

N.B Full references for books and articles mentioned in this and subsequent chapters are only provided for the first quotation or citation. Subsequent quotations are referenced in the text. If there is no possibility of confusion only page numbers are given. If there is a possibility of confusion and only one work by an author is mentioned in the chapter then the author's name is used, followed by the page number. If more than one work by a particular author is mentioned in the chapter then the title is used, followed by the page number.

1. J. H. Buckley, *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), p.281.

2. Karen Lawrence, 'Gender and Narrative Voice in *Jacob's Room* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*', in *James Joyce: The Centennial Symposium*, edited by Morris Beja and others (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), pp.31-38 (p.32).

3. Teresa de Lauretis, 'Desire in Narrative', in *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*, by Teresa de Lauretis (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984), pp.103-157.

4. Morris Beja, *Epiphany in the Modern Novel* (London: Peter Owen, 1971).

5. Chris Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989)

6. Elizabeth Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1990), p.7.

7. Penny Boumelha, *Charlotte Bronte, Key Women Writers* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), p.71.

CHAPTER ONE: EPIPHANY IN JOYCE'S WORK AND CRITICAL  
TREATMENT OF THE CONCEPT OF EPIPHANY

Introduction

This chapter discusses how a 'Joycean' concept of epiphany has been defined by critics and extended to become a literary term for certain kinds of experience in fiction. Predominant critical debates of the twentieth century have played their part in the reception, analysis, and discussion of this term; for example, ideas about intentionality, the use of biographical material, narration, and the development and use of more contemporary theoretical approaches to literature. Epiphany is a concept, or sign, that has now passed into the critical vocabulary of the Academy. This has allowed it to take on the almost transparent quality of much critical terminology: it is used with an implicit assumption that there is an agreed signified attached to the signifier, which disguises the debate that has gone, and is still going, into its formation. This is characteristic of most language, but the extensive documentation available in the case of a literary concept provides a unique insight in to the changing use of the term. I will be looking at Joyce's own specific references to the term; articles and books that discuss it in relation to his work, and the work of others; and references to the term in literary and critical contexts that are not specifically directed at this issue. This is in some ways the most interesting (though the most

arbitrary in the case of material gathered) of the information discussed here, because it provides an insight into prevailing definitions of the term where the term itself is not what is being discussed and an agreed definition is assumed. This is how epiphany is usually used when approaching the writers I am discussing in my thesis, so I include an analysis of the term in connection with Charlotte Bronte, D. H. Lawrence, and Doris Lessing in this chapter. Despite the assumption of a fixed definition of epiphany there are large differences in the way the word is used that suggest the 'différance' (suggesting here difference and deferral) of meaning. The approach of this chapter is broadly historical and chronological, although within that outline recurring thematic approaches to epiphany are stressed.

James Joyce and Epiphany: 'A Sudden Spiritual Manifestation' (SH p.216)?

The reasons why Joyce chose to use the term 'epiphany' can only be speculated on. In Greek mythology epiphany signified the manifestation of a hidden divinity, and in Greek drama the appearance of a god on stage. In Christian liturgy the Feast of the Epiphany on January the sixth celebrates the visit of the Magi to the newborn Christ. Joyce's appropriation of the term was simultaneously an attempt to secularise and broaden it by translating religious terminology and experience into 'everyday life',

and also to spiritualise that life with some of the ritual of the Catholic church.

The references to epiphany in Joyce's work are brief in comparison to critical response to them. The early notebooks entitled *Epiphanies*<sup>1</sup> were probably composed between 1900-4,<sup>2</sup> and are the first appearance of the term in his work. The notebooks consist of brief pieces of dialogue or prose, barely filling half a page of paper, which have no explanatory context. They can be divided roughly in to two types: the narrative and the dramatic, and their sequential numbering can allow the collection as a whole to be read as a coherent narrative. They make up an extremely personal record of significant moments that Joyce considered it worthwhile to note down. To give an example:

( Dublin: at Sheehy's, Belvedere Place )  
 Joyce - I knew you meant him. But you're wrong about his age.  
 Maggie Sheehy - ( *leans forward to speak seriously* )  
 Why, how old is he?  
 Joyce - Seventy-two.  
 Maggie Sheehy - Is he? (p.171)

Without a good deal of biographical and extra-textual material it is impossible for us to recognise this for what it is: a discussion following a parlour game where the object is to give clues about a particular character so the other person can guess his identity - in this case Ibsen.

The personal nature of these experiences is important: Stanislaus Joyce likened the *Epiphany* notebooks to an artist's sketch-book - recording events and thoughts which Joyce considered significant.<sup>3</sup> Joyce certainly resented outside interference. In a letter to Stanislaus written in 1903 Joyce mentions showing the *Epiphanies* to 'AE' (George W. Russell) and writes: 'However I shall take them back as



my latest additions to "Epiphany" might not be to his liking. And so help me devil I will write only the things that approve themselves to me and I will write them the best way I can'.<sup>4</sup> It seems as if Joyce wrote *Epiphanies* with nothing but the expression of personal feelings in mind.

As Joyce began his major works, he included many of these epiphanies as brief, sometimes significant, moments in his fiction.<sup>5</sup> In *Stephen Hero* epiphany also becomes part of Stephen's aesthetic theory, defined as 'a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself'(SH p.216). Epiphany is not specifically mentioned in *A Portrait*, although the aesthetic theory remains. In *Ulysses*, Stephen derides the collection of epiphanies, and ironically remembers, and rejects, his own opinion of their importance (U p.46) [see list of abbreviations].

The major example of epiphany in *Stephen Hero*, and the only one explicitly defined as such, occurs when Stephen is walking through Eccles Street. This epiphany does not appear in *Epiphanies*, but it displays many of the characteristics of the 'dialogue' type: the exchange, between a man and a woman, is brief, many of the words are indistinguishable and replaced by ellipses, and the meaning is obscure, although it can be guessed that it involves an 'improper' sexual suggestion on the part of the gentleman:

The Young Lady - (drawling discreetly)...O, yes...I was...at the...cha...pel....  
 The Young Gentleman - (inaudibly)...I...(again inaudibly)...I...  
 The Young Lady - (softly)...O...but you're...ve...ry...wick...ed....(SH p.216)

However, because the experience is in the narrative context of a particular kind of novel: the *bildungsroman*, the epiphany is different from those in the notebooks. The experience's effect on Stephen is explained, introduced, and fitted into our conception of him as protagonist and hero:

He was passing through Eccles' St one evening, one misty evening, with all these thoughts dancing the dance of unrest in his brain when a trivial incident set him composing some ardent verses which he entitled a 'Vilanelle of the Temptress'. A young lady was standing on the steps of one of those brown brick houses which seem the very incarnation of Irish paralysis. A young gentleman was leaning on the rusty railings of the area. Stephen as he passed on his quest heard the following fragment of colloquy out of which he received an impression keen enough to afflict his sensitiveness very severely. (SH p.216)

This passage shows that Stephen was in a state of emotional turmoil which affected his receptivity to the moment, his 'sensitiveness' is an influential precondition of the experience. His views about women, Ireland, and sexuality can be seen from this introduction. The epiphany elaborates Stephen's role as disaffected, artistic 'Hero' misunderstood by his environment. It also suggests the way in which women are frequently the object of such experiences.

The theory of epiphany which Stephen then goes on to expound is as follows:

This triviality made him think of collecting many such moments together in a book of epiphanies. By an epiphany he meant a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of 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. (SH p.216)

A distinction emerges between considering epiphany as an objective observation of the 'vulgarity of speech or of gesture' in scenes like the one Stephen has just experienced, or as a subjective 'memorable phase of the mind'. This distinction becomes crucial to critical discussion of the epiphany. The definition also suggests that the theory is explicitly a part of Stephen's desire to join a distinctly masculine intellectual and artistic world. After this there is a confusing barrage of definitions. Stephen tells Cranly that the Ballast Office clock is capable of an epiphany (SH p.216). He obviously chooses this example because of its mundanity, to emphasise the arbitrary, impersonal nature of the experience: if the clock can do it so can anything, regardless of the person watching. But a few sentences later, still using the same example, Stephen seems to offer a more detailed, and different, explanation: 'Imagine my glimpses at that clock as the gropings of a spiritual eye which seeks to adjust its vision to an exact focus. The moment the focus is reached the object is epiphanised' (SH pp.216-217). This simile suggests an internal camera that has to find the 'correct' aperture to catch the object as it epiphanises. The emphasis is on the observer's experience as a creator of the picture as well as a passive recorder of it.

Stephen goes on to link epiphany with his aesthetic theory, modelled on Aquinas's three qualities of beauty and three phases of artistic apprehension (SH p.217), which views it as a mode of objectively perceiving the beautiful in anything: 'It is just in this epiphany that I find the third, the supreme quality of beauty' (SH p.217). Epiphany

occurs in the third mode of apprehension of beauty: the first involves recognising that the object is one integral thing, separated from its surroundings; the second that the object is an organised composite structure - a thing in itself - and finally, 'we recognise that it is *that* thing which it is. Its soul, its whatness, leaps to us from the vestment of its appearance. The soul of the commonest object, the structure of which is so adjusted, seems to us radiant. The object achieves its epiphany' (SH p.218). Here the impersonality of both the object and the experience itself is stressed. Epiphany results from a developmental progression of ways of apprehending the beauty of an object. The question of subjective involvement centres on *how* exactly the structure of the object becomes adjusted for an epiphany.

I hope to have made a distinction between the collection of epiphanies that Joyce made, the theory that Stephen offers, and his experiences of epiphany as a protagonist within the text of a novel relying on ideas of bildung and individuation. Early Joyce critics found this a problem, primarily because they presupposed Stephen's theories and experience of epiphany to be an exact correlative of Joyce's. This has a lot to do with ideas about authorship and narration which have subsequently been questioned: for example the notion that a writer's work should be treated as a coherent whole, expressing the same ideas throughout, and that the writer of an 'autobiographical' narrative is synonymous with the protagonist of that narrative. As Colin MacCabe writes: 'The reason for the failure of the critics to give an

account of Joyce's texts is not some congenital inability on their part but that literary criticism itself cannot cope with Joyce's texts because those texts refuse to reproduce the relation between reader and text on which literary criticism is predicated'.<sup>6</sup>

The 'flaws' in the theory of epiphany, and between theory and practice in *Stephen Hero* function as ways of situating Stephen within the particular narrative context of that novel, which is significantly different from the context of the *Epiphanies*: the *Epiphanies* rely on our knowledge that they were a personal record, that they were never published, and that they were given the title that they have by Joyce. *Stephen Hero* relies on our knowledge that it is part of the genre known as the *bildungsroman*, that it was not finished, and was subsequently replaced by *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, for which it provided a model, although *A Portrait* differs significantly in content, narrative approach and style.

The narrator's distance from Stephen and his theories can be seen in the response of Cranly to Stephen's concept of epiphany. When Stephen tells him that the clock of the Ballast Office is capable of an epiphany, Cranly 'questioned the inscrutable dial of the Ballast Office with his no less inscrutable countenance' (SH p.216). The use of the word 'inscrutable' and, more importantly, its repetition with the words 'no less' show the reader that the clock is not revealing anything to Cranly, who is not susceptible to such things. Cranly provides a differing perspective on Stephen's experience, and character, and

makes continued interjections into his explanation that betray a consistent lack of interest:

-Yes, said Stephen. I will pass it time after time, allude to it, refer to it, catch a glimpse of it. It is only an item in the catalogue of Dublin's street furniture. Then all at once I see it and I know at once what it is: epiphany.

-What?

-Imagine my glimpses at that clock as the gropings of a spiritual eye which seeks to adjust its vision to an exact focus. The moment the focus is reached the object is epiphanised. It is just in this epiphany that I find the third, the supreme quality of beauty.

-Yes? said Cranly absently.

-No esthetic [sic] theory, pursued Stephen relentlessly, is of any value...(SH pp.216-217)

These interjections, and the use of the words 'absently' and 'relentlessly' create an impression of Stephen's tendency to 'go on'.

Cranly can also be read as an unsympathetic character: the force of philistinism against which Stephen must struggle, but an equally important reading of the scene suggests Stephen's naivete and inexperience:

Having finished his argument Stephen walked on in silence. He felt Cranly's hostility and he accused himself of having cheapened the eternal images of beauty. For the first time, too, he felt slightly awkward in his friend's company and to restore a mood of flippant familiarity he glanced up at the clock of the Ballast Office and smiled:

-It has not epiphanised yet, he said.

Cranly stared stolidly down the river and held his peace for a few minutes during which the expounder of the new esthetic [sic] repeated his theory to himself all over again. (SH p.218)

Stephen is divided: he doesn't like to appear precocious in front of a friend who obviously isn't interested, yet also feels that such a feeling is a hypocritical injustice to true beauty. He makes a joke and then carries on mulling his theory over. His self-centred preoccupation is apparent in the phrase 'the expounder of the new esthetic': its

scholarly tone ironically implies that the theory has been widely accepted in academic circles.

The dismissive reference to epiphany in *Ulysses* is the last concrete reference we have in the Joyce canon:

Remember your epiphanies on green oval leaves, deeply deep, copies to be sent if you died to all the great libraries of the world, including Alexandria? Someone was to read them there after a few thousand years, a mahamanvantara. Pico della Mirandola like. Ay, very like a whale. When one reads these strange pages of one long gone one feels that one is at one with one who once... (U p.46)

This shows a definite disillusion on Stephen's part with both the recording of epiphanies, and their literary worth. He has outgrown them. They seem arcane, archaic, and intellectually elitist.

We can see the direct influence of the concept of epiphany in *A Portrait of the Artist* in Stephen's aesthetic theory. Although the term itself is not used, it is recognisably the same theory as in *Stephen Hero*. The method of apprehending beauty still follows a three-point path corresponding to Aquinas's three qualities of beauty and three phases of artistic apprehension. It is the third point we are most concerned with:

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. This supreme quality is felt by the artist when the esthetic [sic] image is first conceived in his imagination. The mind in that mysterious instant Shelley likened beautifully to a fading coal. The instant wherein that supreme quality of beauty, the clear radiance of the esthetic image, is apprehended luminously by the mind which has been arrested by its wholeness and fascinated by its harmony is the luminous silent stasis of esthetic pleasure, a spiritual state very like to that cardiac condition which the Italian physiologist Luigi Galvani, using a phrase almost as beautiful as Shelley's, called the enchantment of the heart. (P p.193) [see list of abbreviations]

The apprehension of the beautiful in particular objects is apparently an objective experience: the artist perceives the 'whatness' of a thing; the mind is caught and fascinated by the 'wholeness' and 'harmony' of the object, not its own workings. But the concern in the passage, and throughout *Portrait*, with language - the ways the theory has been discussed before and Stephen's own use of words - undermines the stress on the 'objective'. Stephen is caught by Shelley's and Galvani's descriptions, and his lucid, enthusiastic prose, with its own artistic embellishments, stresses how much the theory is a part of the attempt to create and develop a conception of him as an artist through the novel's narrative process.

Critics have also looked for *examples* of epiphany in *A Portrait*. Several scenes originate from the *Epiphanies* collection, like the one at the beginning of the novel where Stephen is told to apologise (number 1 in the collection). The 'Apologise' epiphany is one of a number of brief scenes in the novel that establish Stephen as protagonist and narrative 'focaliser'. He is a young child who has done something wrong and is being asked to apologise. The scene ends the depiction of home-life that lasts about a page before progressing to Stephen's school-days:

He hid under the table. His mother said:

-O, Stephen will apologize.

Dante said:

-O, if not, the eagles will come and pull out his eyes.

*Pull out his eyes,*

*Apologize.*

*Apologize,*

*Pull out his eyes.*



*Apologize,  
Pull out his eyes,  
Pull out his eyes,  
Apologize. (P pp.7-8)*

Although the scene develops the link between violence and apology/repentance, which will become important to Stephen, it is principally defined as an epiphany because of our knowledge that it appeared in the *Epiphanies* collection. It is an effective vignette of a childhood experience of being punished, and suggests the resentment that is already being associated in Stephen's mind with authority figures. This is also Stephen's first 'poem', or at least his first awareness of language and his own ability to control properties like rhyme. As David W. Robinson writes:

The named individual, at the moment he recognizes between himself and his (linguistic) world a gulf of difference, enters into the game of language as another player, not merely a victim. Stephen's first poetic acts, his composition of the rhymes on the first two pages, ensue from these initial attempts to fix him through names. In response, he has grasped the language used to name him and wrenched it into new shapes, becoming himself an imposer of identities.<sup>7</sup>

This reading seems to over-emphasise Stephen's control of the language process, when in fact he seems to be playing with sound in a more pre-symbolic way. It is the narrator and reader that make the associations between apology and violence significant.

Many scenes in *Portrait* that don't appear in *Epiphanies* have also been defined as 'classic' examples of the genre - typically the wading girl at the end of Chapter Four. It is interesting to analyse this passage, again with the definition of epiphany in mind: Stephen's experience is in no way an 'objective' perception of the beauty of the girl. As object she acts as stimulus, but Stephen's reading of her again suggests his own concerns with sexuality, and

an understanding of himself as artist, coupled with an attempt to break away from authority figures and institutions. His views about women and feminine sexuality are also implicit in the scene. The experience does follow three stages, but these do not correspond to Stephen's guide-lines in *Stephen Hero*. The passage is split into three by the interruptions of sound:

(1) The first faint noise of gently moving water broke the silence, low and faint and whispering, faint as the bells of sleep; hither and thither.

(2) He halted suddenly and heard his heart in the silence. (P p.156)

According to his aesthetic theory, firstly the object should be revealed as a thing, distinct from its surroundings. Stephen does in fact describe the girl and delineates her from the background of the seashore: 'A girl stood before him in midstream, alone and still, gazing out to sea' (P p.155). But the description then continues to elaborate Stephen's very personal response to the girl:

She seemed like one whom magic had changed into the likeness of a strange and beautiful seabird. Her long slender bare legs were delicate as a crane's and pure save where an emerald trail of seaweed had fashioned itself as a sign upon the flesh. Her thighs, fuller and soft-hued as ivory, were bared almost to the hips where the white fringes of her drawers were like featherings of soft white down. Her slateblue skirts were kilted boldly about her waist and dovetailed behind her. Her bosom was as a bird's soft and slight, slight and soft as the breast of some dark-plumaged dove. But her long fair hair was girlish: and girlish, and touched with the wonder of mortal beauty, her face. (P pp.155-156)

Suzette A. Henke's reading of Stephen's description of the girl in this scene is excellent in emphasising the amalgamation of what she terms 'a plethora of metaphorical features from pagan, Christian, and Celtic iconography'.<sup>8</sup> She also discusses Stephen's epiphany as 'exclusively

specular, as he takes refuge in a masculine, visual sexual economy' (p.75), and emphasises that the girl is 'represented as a fantasized paradigm of psychic cohesion, the Other whose realistic fragmentation would threaten the poet's idealized aesthetic project...her difference assures psychological stability to the speaking/seeing subject, the authorial I/eye who frames and appropriates her figure' (pp.75-76).

At this point the experience diverges completely from the theoretical guide-lines that Stephen has provided us with in his earlier 'incarnation' in *Stephen Hero*. According to the second stage of the theory, the observer is supposed to recognise that the object is a thing in itself - an organised composite structure. However Stephen leaves the object entirely behind, and runs off across the strand retaining a mental image of the girl as a symbol of life itself:

To live, to err, to fall, to triumph, to recreate life out of life! A wild angel had appeared to him, the angel of mortal youth and beauty, an envoy from the fair courts of life, to throw open before him in an instant of ecstasy the gates of all the ways of error and glory. (P p.156)

Henke's analysis is insufficient in that it does not elucidate the way that the epiphany functions as a part of the narrative progression, or bildung of the novel. As Karen Lawrence writes:

Joyce accepts the central notions of identity and vocation in the *Bildungsroman*: Stephen Dedalus has a calling. *A Portrait* moves in the direction of a goal (even if Stephen's aspirations are ironically deflated at times and we may question the greatness of his ultimate destination). Moments of revelation mark the stages of Stephen's journey toward identity, moments when he feels that the prophecy of his name coincides with events in the real world. The basic idea of

growth and development, however problematic, is, nevertheless, ultimately accepted.<sup>9</sup>

Stephen wants to succeed in life, and interprets the epiphany as an indication of his increasing autonomy. He tries to reject the symbolic order that religion, nationalism, and family provide in order to experience life 'in the raw', and in the final stage of the epiphany Stephen experiences what can only be described as a moment of personal revelation:

His soul was swooning into some new world, fantastic, dim, uncertain as under sea, traversed by cloudy shapes and beings. A world, a glimmer, or a flower? Glimmering and trembling, trembling and unfolding, a breaking light, an opening flower, it spread in endless succession to itself, breaking in full crimson and unfolding and fading to palest rose, leaf by leaf and wave of light by wave of light, flooding all the heavens with its soft flushes, every flush deeper than other. (P p.157)

Suzette Henke's analysis elucidates the metaphorical implications of this: 'The boy's fantasy re-creates a repressed vision of female genitalia spreading in luxuriant rose-pink petals before his aroused phallic consciousness' (p.76). This language of lapsing and swooning is also representatively 'epiphanic', which has interesting implications for a discussion of epiphany as a gendered phenomenon.

However, the positioning of Stephen as moving towards an autonomous subjectivity through such moments in the narrative does not go unquestioned. Another narrative works to undermine his self-confidence, although to what extent this can be seen as dominant is debatable. This second narrative works, for example, in the complete contrast in tone of the opening of the next chapter, and arguably of the final chapter itself, where we see Stephen as a student

involved in the rather tedious political and intellectual incidents of student life. This is not what we expect after the great moments of the preceding chapter. Nor, after the language closing that chapter, do we expect this:

He drained his third cup of watery tea to the dregs and set to chewing the crusts of fried bread that were scattered near him, staring into the dark pool of the jar. The yellow dripping had been scooped out like a boghole and the pool under it brought back to his memory the dark turfcoloured water of the bath in Clongowes. (P p.158)

This return to mundanity is apparent in the eating/excretion imagery which emphasises bodily functions as a reaction against the stylized, artistic language of the previous chapter.

The language in the wading girl scene is also very self-conscious, and is, to a certain extent, aware of its own literary precedents and linguistic background. Certain slight archaisms are present throughout, for example the use of 'he turned way from her' [my italics] (P p.156). The *Oxford English Dictionary* mentions the use of 'way' adverbially for 'away' as 'an adverbial accusative to the word go and its synonyms...from an early period *my, his* (etc.) way in these collocations were often nearly equivalent to 'away', and with this weakened sense they were formerly used with other verbs of motion...in present literary use *to go, wend one's way* survive as archaisms'. Other archaisms, or formal usages include 'save'; 'fashioned' and 'upon'. This suggests that the narrator and the reader become aware that language is being used self-reflexively, again suggesting a 'density' which appears in passages like the following:

He climbed to the crest of the sandhill and gazed about him. Evening had fallen. A rim of the young moon cleft the pale waste of sky like the rim of a silver hoop embedded in grey sand; and the tide was flowing in fast to the land with a low whisper of her waves, islanding a few last figures in distant pools. (P p.157)

Words like 'crest' and 'cleft' suggest Stephen's self-conscious tone, as does the new moon as a fairly hackneyed image of rebirth. We can detect the purple tinge to the prose, and Stephen's epiphany.

One echo in the passage is that of Walter Pater. In his comments on the Mona Lisa he writes:

She is older than the rocks among which she sits; like the vampire, she has been dead many times, and learned the secrets of the grave; and has been a diver in deep seas, and keeps their fallen day about her; and trafficked for strange webs with Eastern merchants. and [sic], as Leda, was the mother of Helen of Troy, and, as Saint Anne, the mother of Mary; and all this has been to her but as the sound of lyres and flutes, and lives only in the delicacy with which it has moulded the changing lineaments, and tinged the eyelids and the hands.<sup>10</sup>

The syntax here is very suggestive of the description of the girl, and in Pater's conclusion to *The Renaissance* he seems to preempt Stephen's theory of epiphany:

Every moment some form grows perfect in hand or face; some tone on the hills or the sea is choicer than the rest; some mood of passion or insight or intellectual excitement is irresistibly real and attractive to us, - for that moment only. Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself, is the end. A counted number of pulses only is given to us of a variegated, dramatic life. How may we see in them all that is to be seen in them by the finest senses? How shall we pass most swiftly from point to point, and be present always at the focus where the greatest number of vital forces unite in their purest energy?

To burn always with this hard, gemlike flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life. (p.236)

However, we must be wary of making any too easy connections between the two writers. Richard Poirier, in an article on Pater, Joyce and Eliot, seeks to examine the nature of the relation between them. He suggests that a common link

between Joyce and Pater was their recognition of the way that language shapes experience. He writes:

All experience, even as it comes to the mind of the infant child, was already designed or mediated...The older artist knows that experience is always and forever mediated by the forms of language by which it is brought to consciousness, and this includes even the language he is now using.<sup>11</sup>

Regardless of whether or not this is true of Pater, it would suggest that Joyce's own use of language in such epiphanies is always a self-conscious one.

Stephen's wading girl epiphany is intrinsically personal, and suggests the way in which such moments structure him as protagonist and Hero progressing through the narrative towards some internalised goal of autonomy and self-determination. To an extent this is questioned by a narrative that suggests the impossibility of such ideas of bildung and individuation, and by the self-conscious language which makes the reader aware that the depiction of Stephen's epiphany relies on literary precedents. Epiphanies in such a narrative work differently both from the examples in the *Epiphanies* collection and from the definition Stephen provides in *Stephen Hero*.

Another moment in Joyce's fiction that has been termed an epiphany occurs at the end of 'The Dead' in *Dubliners*, itself set on the Feast of the Epiphany. Gabriel Conroy interprets his wife's innocent teenage love-affair to his own disadvantage: he believes his own conception of love to be vastly inferior - he has never loved a woman in the way that Michael Furey loved Gretta; and the close relationship he thought he had with his wife seems non-existent - he had no knowledge of this important experience in her life and

had no idea that she was troubled. Gabriel's sense of himself as an autonomous subject relies on Gretta's functioning as a stable feminine Other. His appropriation and definition of her exclusively in the role of 'his wife' implodes as a result of his discovery of an 'excess' that does not fit with this definition. This leads to a radical deconstruction of her positioning in the 'wifely' role, and also, of his own role as husband: 'It hardly pained him now to think how poor a part he, her husband, had played in her life. He watched her while she slept as though he and she had never lived together as man and wife' (D p.199) [see list of abbreviations]. The ambiguity of this language is striking. The realisation is said to hardly pain him, when in fact it is *exactly* what pains him. It is not merely shock working here, but the distancing he experiences between his sense of himself and the role of husband. The phrase 'lived together as man and wife' suggests living *like* man and wife without being married, in other words living 'in sin'. And is it Gretta who *sleeps*, or Gabriel who *watches* 'as though he and she had never lived together as man and wife'? The loss of a stable role within the institution of marriage leaves Gabriel lacking a subject position. This results in an epiphany:

Generous tears filled Gabriel's eyes. He had never felt like that himself towards any woman but he knew that such a feeling must be love. The tears gathered more thickly in his eyes and in the partial darkness he imagined he saw the form of a young man standing under a dripping tree. Other forms were near. His soul had approached that region where dwell the vast hosts of the dead. He was conscious of, but could not apprehend, their wayward and flickering existence. His own identity was fading out into a grey impalpable world: the solid world itself which these dead had one time reared and lived in was dissolving and dwindling.



A few light taps upon the pane made him turn to the window. It had begun to snow again. He watched sleepily the flakes, silver and dark, falling obliquely against the lamplight. The time had come for him to set out on his journey westward. Yes, the newspapers were right: snow was general all over Ireland. It was falling on every part of the dark central plain, on the treeless hills, falling softly on the Bog of Allen and, farther westward, softly falling into the dark mutinous Shannon waves. It was falling, too, upon every part of the lonely churchyard on the hill where Michael Furey lay buried. It lay thickly drifted on the crooked crosses and headstones, on the spears of the little gate, on the barren thorns. His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead. (D pp.200-201)

The language of dispersal and swooning signifies a severe confusion and loss of the self that is likened to death, in stark contrast to the more positive way such language functions to situate Stephen in his wading girl epiphany, although the concern with subjectivity remains. A reading of this epiphany must also take account of its placement at the end of a short story: the final short story in the collection; and of its reference to the title of that story. This suggests obvious issues of narrative closure in short story form, which relies on epiphany to close or climax each narrative rather than punctuate a developmental tale.

Again a competing narrative suggests Gabriel's luxuriating in his emotion. His 'generous tears', gloomy imaginings of the world of the dead; and the emphasis on religious symbolism identify his emotion as maudlin, but it is unclear who exactly calls his tears 'generous'. As Suzette Henke writes:

The ending of Joyce's tale is finely ambiguous. We have learned from the author's ironic sensibility in stories such as 'Araby' and 'A Painful Case' to distrust swooning souls and self-deceptive epiphanies - especially when, as in this case, the pre-Raphaelite

swoon is embedded in a Christological ambiance of crooked crosses, spears, and 'barren thorns'. Imitating the Christ-like role of Michael Furey, Gabriel may well be trapped in a self-indulgent replication of romantic asceticism. (p.47)

However, the 'author's [or narrator's] ironic sensibility' would be extremely difficult to pin down exactly, and the degree to which it would dominate a reading more sympathetic to Gabriel would depend on the reader's own positioning.

In my examination of the epiphany in Joyce's fiction I have emphasised the diversity of the term and its functioning in different narrative contexts. I have explained epiphany's beginnings as a personal record, which Joyce later extensively used for inclusion in *Stephen Hero* and *A Portrait*. In these contexts, as part of Stephen's theory of aesthetics and as a progressive moment of revelation, epiphany functions as part of the bildung and individuation processes in the narrative, which in several cases rely on woman as object.

Early Critical Definitions: "There's More Enterprise in Walking Naked"?

As a literary term epiphany has had a long and complex critical history. Although mentioned explicitly in only a small proportion of Joyce's work, the term has gained prominence as time has passed until it has become a major critical tool used to discuss Joyce and other writers. Analysis of the epiphany would not have been possible without several events in the publishing history of the

Joyce canon, which themselves suggest the early priorities of the academic environment and press. What I would like to identify loosely as the first 'phase' of epiphany criticism was concerned with debates about authorial intentionality, biography, accuracy, and scholarship. This type of broadly liberal-humanist criticism looked at issues such as the following: establishing an agreed definition of the concept; deciding whether epiphany was a subjective or objective phenomenon; identifying different *sorts* of epiphany; and deciding who the experience of epiphany actually applied to. Many arguments raged over the question of context, and whether or not the term could be applied in certain situations; and the importance and relevance of epiphany as a useful way of approaching the work of Joyce was seriously doubted.

As more contemporary theoretical approaches to literature became an increasingly established part of the academic environment more work showed a willingness to theorise epiphany. It has been discussed in psychoanalytic terms, related to the workings of narrative, and discussed as a gendered phenomenon, although not in a systematic or detailed way. This work has not, however, replaced the earlier more 'scholarly' approaches, so that the two can frequently be seen working in tandem; in, for example, collections of critical essays or journals.

However, as the epiphany has been increasingly familiarised as a critical term it is frequently used unproblematically in contexts where other issues are being examined. A very thoughtful and questioning analysis of Charlotte Bronte, for example, may use the term without any

recognition of the debate over the concept, although when analysed, or deconstructed, the particular implications of the word become apparent, and differ widely in different contexts. This would be true of nearly all terminology - there are words in this thesis of which the same could be said - but the 'naturalisation' of such a term, and its extension in to other areas than Joyce scholarship is specifically interesting.

The epiphany first emerged as an important critical concept in 1941, on the publication of Harry Levin's book, *James Joyce: A Critical Introduction*.<sup>12</sup> Levin was the first person to work with the manuscript of *Stephen Hero*, (at that time unpublished), which contains the only definition of epiphany, provided by Stephen Dedalus. Levin was also first to suggest that epiphany was important for the complete Joyce canon, and for literature as a whole: 'The doctrine, however, informs all of Joyce's work' (p.29), and 'though grounded in theology, it has now become a matter of literary technique' (p.31). Levin made several influential statements about epiphany. He used religious language to emphasise the 'spiritual' and 'mystical' elements of the experience, seeing it as a revelation: 'Sometimes, amid the most encumbered circumstances, it suddenly happens that the veil is lifted, the burthen of the mystery laid bare, and the ultimate secret of things made manifest' (p.28). He was also one of the first writers to make a connection between epiphany and symbolism: 'It follows that the writer, like the mystic, must be peculiarly aware of these manifestations. What seem trivial details to others may be portentous symbols to him. In this light, Joyce's later

works are artificial reconstructions of a transcendental view of experience' (p.29). Levin also recognised the significance of epiphany for the development of Modernist style and structure in prose writing: 'It has become Joyce's contribution to that series of developments which convert narrative into short-story, supplant plot with style, and turn the raconteur into a candid-camera expert' (p.31). Levin did make some mistakes, primarily because he did not take the *Epiphanies* collection into account. (At this time this was only available in two manuscripts, in two separate libraries).<sup>13</sup> He assumed that *Dubliners* is the collection of epiphanies that Stephen speaks ironically in *Ulysses* of sending to 'all the libraries of the world' (U p.46). On publication of the *Epiphanies* it became apparent that it was a collection such as this that Stephen refers to. However, Levin's work established the importance of the epiphany concept, and opened up many of the debates that would subsequently be followed by other critics.

The publication of *Stephen Hero* in 1944 was the next important event in the critical history of epiphany.<sup>14</sup> The definition of epiphany that Stephen offers on pages 216-18 had a significant impact because it was the only definition in Joyce's work. In his introduction to the volume, Theodore Spencer stressed the importance of epiphany: 'This theory seems to me central to an understanding of Joyce as artist, and we might describe his successive works as illustrations, intensifications and enlargements of it'.<sup>15</sup> Spencer also makes an attempt at definition: 'It is a theory which implies a lyrical rather than a dramatic view of life. It emphasises the radiance, the effulgence, of the

thing itself revealed in a special moment, an unmoving moment, of time' (p.23). The distinction between lyric and dramatic follows Stephen's aesthetic theory of epiphany in *Stephen Hero*. A 'lyrical' view of life suggests an intimacy and personality that seems to conflict with Spencer's emphasis on the experience as an objective perception of the 'radiance, the effulgence, of the *thing itself*' [my italics]. An emerging debate about whether epiphany is a subjective or objective experience can be identified here.

Also of great importance to early epiphany criticism was an article written in 1946 by Irene Hendry called 'Joyce's Epiphanies',<sup>16</sup> She discussed epiphany as an important *methodology* for approaching Joyce's work: 'Joyce's work is a tissue of epiphanies, great and small, from fleeting images to whole books, from the briefest revelation in his lyrics to the epiphany that occupies one gigantic, enduring "moment" in *Finnegans Wake*' (p.461). Hendry identified four major modes of epiphany in Joyce's fiction, developing from revelation of character in *Dubliners* to the use of particular images as symbols of character or object in *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*. She saw this progression as a movement 'from the first person to the third, from the personal to the impersonal, from the kinetic to the static' (p.451). Hendry also likened epiphany to the 'revelation of the religious mystic' (p.451), and linked the experience with Wordsworth's 'isolated moment of revelation' (p.454). Both these resemblances have had great significance for epiphany criticism.

The final stages in the publishing history of epiphany were as follows. In 1956 twenty-two of the forty epiphanies were published in a volume edited by Oscar Silverman.<sup>17</sup> This made widely available more concrete examples for analysis and revealed how extensively Joyce had used the collection as material for his other work. But it was only in 1965 that *all* the epiphanies were published by Robert Scholes and Richard M. Kain, following a consecutive numbering on the original manuscripts in faint pencil markings identified as Joyce's.<sup>18</sup> Since then, two further editions containing the epiphanies have appeared, one in *The James Joyce Archive* in 1978 (see note 2), and the second in 1991, edited by Richard Ellmann, A. Walton Litz and John Whittier Ferguson (see note 1).

Another important text was *My Brother's Keeper*, published in 1958, which contained Stanislaus Joyce's interpretation of the epiphany as a concept and as a collection. Stanislaus wrote:

Another experimental form which his literary urge took...consisted in the noting of what he called 'epiphanies' - manifestations or revelations. Jim always had a contempt for secrecy, and these notes were in the beginning ironical observations of slips, and little errors and gestures - mere straws in the wind - by which people betrayed the very things they were most careful to conceal. 'Epiphanies' were always brief sketches, hardly ever more than some dozen lines in length, but always very accurately observed and noted, the matter being so slight. This collection served him as a sketch-book serves an artist...But it was in no sense a diary. (pp.134-135)

Stanislaus Joyce suggests the connection between the epiphanies and Joyce's dreams. He mentions two epiphanies (numbers eight and sixteen in the collection) that Joyce dreamt:

The dreams are genuine, but they have undergone literary treatment...The literary treatment here consists in an attempt to reproduce dream impressions, as, for example, when a name is conveyed to us in a dream; there is no hint, however, that he considered dreams anything but an uncontrolled rehash of our waking thoughts, though he may have hoped they would reveal things our controlled thoughts unconsciously conceal...I could see what he was driving at: the significance of unreflecting admissions and unregarded trifles, delicately weighed, in assaying states of mind for what is basic in them. (p.137)

There is undoubtedly a sense in which Stanislaus understood the epiphany as parapraxis, which had a significant effect on more contemporary criticism. The comparison with a sketch-book was also widely referred to.

The history of the publication of the epiphanies and related material raises several issues that remain relevant. There is an obsession with accuracy and detail of transcription. In his article 'Epiphany and the Epiphanies' Morris Beja discusses Epiphany number six, the 'goat' epiphany which makes its way in to *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (P p.126). In his notes he writes that in the Scholes and Kain edition 'the fifth word, [of this epiphany] "stiff," is mistranscribed as "still"' (p.722). Such a concern with accuracy wants to *fix* the text in a way that corresponds with Joyce's presumed 'intentions' when the collection was an ongoing thing that was constantly being added to. Half of the extant epiphanies had been transcribed by Stanislaus anyway, so editors were already relying on his accuracy. The decision to number the epiphanies consecutively according to Joyce's faintly added pencil marks shows a desire to structure a progressive narrative. The publication of several editions of early Joycean material in various different combinations was justified on the grounds that Joyce's development as an



artist could be studied. A. Walton Litz's introduction to the epiphanies section of the 1991 edition of Joyce's shorter writings and poems includes the following comments: 'The epiphanies form a bridge between the early poetry and the early fiction, and *help us to understand the formative stages of Joyce's art*' [my italics] (p.157); and: 'They are the purest record we have of the events and feelings that haunted the young James Joyce when he left Dublin in October 1904 to forge in the smithy of his soul the uncreated conscience of his race' (p.160). These remarks betray an obsession with intentionality. There is also a conflation of Joyce with his character, Stephen, in the borrowing of the last but one diary entry of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* to describe Joyce's presumed feelings on leaving Dublin.

Aside from editing and publishing strategies, early interpretative criticism within the framework of liberal-humanist scholarship identified previously, was initially concerned to define epiphany more accurately by comparing it to other things. The religious derivation of the term encouraged critics to associate epiphany with spiritual experiences, primarily the religious or mystical. Irene Hendry wrote:

It [epiphany] is a revelation quite as valid as the religious; in fact, from our present secular viewpoint, it perhaps would be more accurate to say that the revelation of the religious mystic is actually an esthetic [sic] revelation into which the mystic projects himself - as a participant, not merely as an observer and recorder - and to which he assigns a source, an agent and an end, called God. (p. 451)

The situating of epiphany as a secularised religious term allows Hendry to explain away religious/mystical

experience, without discussing the way in which such religious roots are retained in an epiphany as particular ideas about the autonomous, transcendental subject. The idea that an epiphany is objectively perceived, and 'true' whereas a religious experience is not is pervasive in her analysis.

Dorothy Van Ghent, in her book *The English Novel: Form and Function*, comes to a similar conclusion:

Joyce's doctrine of the epiphany assumes that reality really does have wholeness and harmony...and that it will radiantly show forth its character and its meaning to the prepared consciousness, for it is only in the body of reality that meaning can occur and only there that the artist can find it. *This is essentially a religious interpretation of the nature of reality and of the artist's function. It insists on the objectivity of the wholeness, harmony, and meaning, and on the objectivity of the revelation - the divine showing forth.* [My italics]<sup>19</sup>

Van Ghent situates epiphany as a way of providing certainty in a world where there is a 'shocking disclosure of the failure of the social environment as a trustworthy carrier of values' (p.263).

The relationship between the religious term and the literary one was the basis of Florence Walzl's article, 'The Liturgy of the Epiphany Season and the Epiphanies of Joyce',<sup>20</sup> Walzl proposed that Joyce relied on his detailed knowledge of Catholic liturgy to structure *Dubliners*. She described how the sequence of liturgical epiphanies in the Epiphany season rites (January 1 to Candlemas), were used as an organising principle to shape each story in the collection, and the work as a whole. This article provoked a lot of controversy which will be discussed later.

Other critics explained epiphany by seeing it as an extended form of symbolism. The first major discussion of

epiphany as symbolism was in William T. Noon's *Joyce and Aquinas*, where he defined epiphany as follows: 'The Joycean epiphany in literature may be described as a formulation through metaphor or symbol of some luminous aspect of individual human experience, some highly significant facet of most intimate and personal reality, some particularly radiant point to the meaning of existence'.<sup>21</sup> Noon sees epiphany as an artistic representation of a significant, purely personal moment of the inner life and any act of literary composition necessarily involves the use of symbolism and is therefore epiphanic: 'All imaginative writers, dependent as they are on words, are necessarily interested in symbolic vision and in symbolic technique, and to the extent that they are so interested one may say that they are interested too in epiphanies' (p.78). Epiphany, for Noon, is a major literary technique which is dependent on symbolism.

William York Tindall also made a link between epiphany and symbolism in his book *A Reader's Guide to James Joyce*:

For Stephen, common things - to use Baudelaire's phrase - have 'the expansion of infinite things' and all their radiance. Like Baudelaire, then, he thinks this world a storehouse of things as other things, seeing this or that as revelation...Plainly Stephen's epiphany or radiance, a shining out or showing forth, is what we call symbolism and his radiant object a symbol.<sup>22</sup>

Seeing epiphany as a form of symbolism suggests a particular construction of the literary text which is discussed by Julia Kristeva in her essay 'From Symbol to Sign', where she distinguishes between the signifying practice of the symbol and the sign: 'in the case of the symbol the signified object is *represented* by the

signifying unit through a restrictive function-relation; while the sign, as we shall see, pretends not to assume this relation which in its case is weaker and therefore might be regarded as arbitrary'.<sup>23</sup> She also sees the symbol as 'a cosmogonic semiotic practice where the elements (symbols) refer back to one or more unknowable and unrepresentable universal transcendence(s)' (p.64). I hope to show in this chapter that despite attempts to see it as a symbol, epiphany actually functions in literary-critical practice as a sign.

Critics have also tried to define epiphany by using various aesthetic and metaphysical theories in comparison. Following Stephen's own comments in *Stephen Hero* epiphany has been compared with Aquinas's third condition of beauty: 'claritas' (which means radiance), and with the 'whatness' of a thing, or 'quidditas'. (See Noon's *Joyce and Aquinas* and Dolf Sorensen's *James Joyce's Aesthetic Theory: Its Development and Application*).<sup>24</sup> Other theories mentioned in connection with epiphany are Scotus's concept of 'thisness' or 'haecceitas';<sup>25</sup> Bullough's concept of 'psychic distance' (Hendry p.451); Plato's Theory of Forms;<sup>26</sup> Aristotle's dramatic theory of anagnorisis;<sup>27</sup> and the medieval *ars memoriae* (a method of remembering lists by visualisation).<sup>28</sup> I don't propose to discuss the relative merits of these in any detail but have mentioned them to show the extent and range of comparative studies of epiphany. Such work does not really discuss the way epiphany functions in particular narrative contexts.

Other critics have found it more useful to situate epiphany within literary movements like Romanticism and

Modernism. This is one of the more interesting avenues of approach. The link with Romanticism stems from the similarity between moments of epiphany and ideas of the sublime such as 'Wordsworthian' moments of revelation, which has been discussed recently by Robert Langbaum.<sup>29</sup> Epiphany is Romantic in its stress on the individual's relationship with the world, and its concern with aesthetic perception and the expressive role of the artist. Morris Beja noted that 'epiphany is largely Romantic, intuitive, and irrational'.<sup>30</sup> Langbaum termed epiphany 'the Romantic substitute for religion', which 'becomes the means of returning to and revalidating dogma as experience' (p.356). Patrick Parrinder noted the influence of nineteenth century romantic aestheticians like Oscar Wilde on Joyce's conception of epiphany: 'Like other Romantics before him, Stephen is asserting that the artist is a seer and that beauty is truth'.<sup>31</sup>

A Modernist explanation of epiphany situates it as part of a change of style. Harry Levin was the first to remark that epiphany 'has now become a matter of literary *technique*' [my italics] (p.31). Erwin R. Steinberg, in his book *The Stream of Consciousness and Beyond in Ulysses*, used the same term: 'Joyce's concept of the epiphany was part of the same aesthetic that produced the stream-of-consciousness *technique*' [my italics].<sup>32</sup> S. L. Goldberg went as far as to write that 'the real artistic (and dramatic) unit of Joyce's "stream-of-consciousness" writing is the epiphany. What he renders dramatically are minds engaged in the apprehension of epiphanies - the elements of meaning apprehended in life'.<sup>33</sup> In interpretations like

these epiphany is situated as one of a catalogue of 'effects' which created the Modernist novel. It becomes part of language. As Hélène Cixous commented: 'In Joyce's work, the art of language is essentially connected with his theory of the epiphany'.<sup>34</sup>

Aside from the issue of definition, which was an important one to early criticism, another related subject of dissension was the question of whether epiphany is a subjective or objective experience. As Beja summarised the problem: 'The issue is whether the stress must be on the object that reveals itself to the perceiver or on what Stephen calls the "spiritual eye" of the person experiencing the revelation' ('Epiphany and the Epiphanies' p.720). Does the experience occur independently of the observer, who merely records it, or is it reliant on the perceiver's particular situation and receptiveness? Beja points out that the 'objective' view goes with a stress on epiphany's role in Stephen's aesthetic theory in *Stephen Hero* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* ('Epiphany and the Epiphanies' p.720). In these novels the initial disparity emerges between the epiphany as it happens to Stephen and the theory he offers.

One of the major early works that discussed epiphany as an objective experience and connected it with the aesthetic theory was Hugh Kenner's *Dublin's Joyce*: 'That it is *things* which achieve epiphany under the artist's alchemical power, and not his own soul which he manifests, cannot be too much insisted upon',<sup>35</sup> and: 'What the scrutiniser comes to know is the thing itself in its irreducible otherness: other than himself, other than all

things. Its meaning is discoverable only within itself; it does not function as seed-crystal to jell a private configuration of thought' (p.145). Kenner discusses epiphany in the terms that Stephen uses when he *theorises* about it, not when he experiences it. He also uses the fact that the doctrine of epiphany does not appear in *Portrait* to argue for the novel's increased subjectivity.

Dolf Sorensen also writes on the aesthetic theory of Joyce, and concludes: 'The epiphany as Joyce explains it is achieved by the object itself, which implies total objectivity and passivity on the part of the beholder, who can only record these epiphanies with "extreme care"' (p.7). This suggests that the person experiencing an epiphany is almost a victim of an overpowering object. To these writers epiphany is an objective perception of the true beauty of any random object, uninfluenced by the observer.

Some critics come down on neither side of the 'subject/object' debate, but instead argue that epiphany involves a *conjunction* between the two. One early example of this was William York Tindall's *A Reader's Guide To James Joyce*: 'Involving the potency of a neutral object and the sensibility of a subject, epiphany is a transaction between object and subject that owes no less to the former than to the latter' (p.10). A more detailed explanation, that really describes what the writer thinks happens to the mind during an epiphany, is in Hélène Cixous's book *The Exile of James Joyce*. It is worthwhile to quote in full:

The nature of the epiphany is by definition twofold: as manifestation...it is an object that offers itself to the watcher, a free image. But not everything is

epiphanised, for some conjunction must be operative between subject and object; an object may exist for centuries before its 'soul' is manifested in this way. There is some sort of appeal made by the subject, to which the object responds; and from being merely a surface perceived by the senses and objectively delimited, the epiphany becomes a unique instant in the series of succeeding instants, the moment in time when it is suddenly perceived by a subject in its unity. In this moment and at this instant, what had been just an object among objects becomes suddenly a 'vision' apparent in its wholeness, detached by the watcher's gaze from the whole of which it forms a part - it becomes a particular thing by itself that radiates in the subject's mind. (pp.599-600)

This explains epiphany by suggesting that two components are necessary for the moment to occur. Any object is available to be 'epiphanised', but an element of subjective choice is necessary to the experience.

A wholly subjective interpretation of epiphany further emphasises the participant's influence on the experience. As the role of the subject becomes progressively more important, the epiphany is related more closely to the character's function within the text, and is no longer discussed in terms of the artist's experience. In Morris Beja's article, 'One Good Look at Themselves: Epiphanies in Dubliners', he connects the characters' ability to escape from their environment with their receptiveness to epiphanies: 'An epiphany need not, after all, be "objectively" accurate; as I have argued elsewhere, an epiphany is in its very conception and description a subjective phenomenon'.<sup>36</sup> The 'elsewhere' he refers to is his book on epiphany in the fiction of James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Thomas Wolfe and William Faulkner, *Epiphany in the Modern Novel*, where he says: 'Joyce's emphasis is generally on the perceiving consciousness, the subject who actively adjusts his "spiritual" vision to focus on the



object, which in turn, "is epiphanised" (pp.77-78). Another critic, Zack Bowen, goes even further: 'all epiphanies, some more subtly than others, are really, even if unstated, the epiphanies of the characters themselves' ('Joyce and the Epiphany Concept: A New Approach', p.106). The increased emphasis on epiphany as subjective can be connected with the twentieth century loss of certainty about a knowable world 'out there', and with the gradual permeation into critical vocabulary of post-structuralist theories about the author, narration, and artistic creation which split the narrator and characters' perspective from the author's, and fractured the unified conception of the artist.

Many quite vitriolic academic disagreements occurred in the early phase of epiphany criticism over various issues concerning the use of epiphany as a critical tool. Among these were the applicability of using the term in particular ways; of differentiating different sorts of epiphany; of establishing who they apply to; and discerning the attitude of the narrator towards such moments. Many of these discussions display a fierce concern with authorial intentionality.

One critic who was concerned to limit the use of the term, in accordance with what he assumed to be Joyce's own use of it, was Robert Scholes, the first to edit and publish, with Richard M. Kain, the complete *Epiphanies* collection. In an article published in 1964 he wrote: 'I hope to clarify to some extent what Joyce himself understood by the term: what it means in *Stephen Hero*, and what the forty extant examples of Joyce's own Epiphanies

indicate that it must have meant for Joyce' ('Joyce and the Epiphany: The Key to the Labyrinth?' p.67). Scholes tried to distinguish the *Epiphanies* volume, and its contents, from the concept as critics have since applied it to his work. He argued that although several epiphanies from this volume are repeated in *Stephen Hero*, and *Portrait*, once the *context* changes, they become little more than incidents (p.75). He did analyse the definition of epiphany in *Stephen Hero*, but restricted it solely to that novel, and argued that it does not appear again in Joyce's work (p.72). He denied that epiphany had any significance in the Joyce canon, let alone in literature by other writers: 'They [critics] have even been able to consider it what it never was in Stephen's theory, and certainly not in Joyce's mind, a principle of structure in fiction' (p.72). Scholes was adamant that most critical discussion of epiphany was a waste of time. The publication of Florence Walzl's previously mentioned article, 'The Liturgy of the Epiphany Season and the Epiphanies of Joyce' (see note 20), which took the 'structural' study of epiphany further than ever before, acted like a red rag to a bull, and provoked a long-running series of letters in PMLA throughout 1967.<sup>37</sup> In the first of these, a directly stated response to Walzl's article, Scholes lists 'as much as I have been able to discover about the Epiphanies in several years of investigation' and 'invite[s] others to refute or correct me where my facts are inadequate or my inferences illogical' (p.152). The most important of his numbered points are the following:

1. For Joyce the word 'Epiphany' designated a prose genre in which he worked.
6. No known Epiphany has been found in *Dubliners*.
7. Joyce never used the word Epiphany in connection with *Dubliners*, or as a term for a structural device in longer fiction. His own Epiphanies were all recordings of actual experiences or moods. None were invented. In fact, by his own definition, they could not be invented but had to be recorded.
8. Thus the term 'Epiphany' as all too commonly used in discussion of *Dubliners* and Joyce's other fiction has nothing whatever to do with the term 'Epiphany' as Joyce himself used it.
9. Since Joyce himself pre-empted the term to apply to one of the genres in which he worked, it would seem appropriate for critics to follow his lead. To use his word to refer to an aspect of his work other than the one he intended by it is to gain a spurious authority for many a tenuous *aperçu*, which might seem much less impressive if not cloaked in the borrowed raiment of Joyce's phraseology.
10. May I suggest that for critics as well as poets, 'there's more enterprise in walking naked.' (p.152)

Scholes's criticism of Walzl attacks her scholarship, and accuses her of disguising poor work by using the term epiphany. He justifies his reading by appealing to what Joyce intended epiphany to mean, to which he feels he has privileged access. One major fault in his article was that he failed to mention the *Stephen Hero* discussion of epiphany, which Walzl took into account in her response:

At the present time the term *epiphany*, in addition to its religious significations, has at least two distinct meanings in Joyce criticism. It may refer specifically to a certain type of brief prose work that Joyce composed between 1900 and 1904. It may mean *revelation* or *illumination* in certain literary and technical senses. In this latter meaning it is widely used in reference to all of Joyce's works...Joyce himself set the pattern for the use of the term *epiphany* as a spiritual or intellectual apprehension which represented an enlightenment. In the esthetic [sic] discussion of *Stephen Hero*...he defines epiphany as an apprehension that radiance is quiddity. (p.152)

Walzl's response is equally scholarly, and only slightly less intentionalist, but she also recognises the importance of the way critics have used the term: 'Thus following Joyce's lead either directly or indirectly, critics have

used the term *epiphany* to refer to an illumination of the essential nature of a thing, and by extension also, to an apprehension of the narrative or imagistic means which effect such a revelation' (p.153). One more letter from each combatant followed on, mainly going over old ground.

We can see that this argument began, as Scholes says in his third letter, because of 'a confusion of terminology' (p.154); or rather an issue of context. The situation in which something can be defined as an epiphany is narrower for Scholes than Walzl. As Beja puts it: 'For in itself an epiphany is very limited - it is, in the end, a mere fragment' (*Epiphany in the Modern Novel* p.86). Some explanatory context is always necessary - whether this is the fact that Joyce included such 'fragments' in a volume with the title *Epiphanies*; or whether it is the surrounding text and its liturgical elements in *Dubliners*. Plainly, Scholes and Walzl are discussing different sorts of epiphany - and for Scholes they are mutually exclusive.

Another major argument of early criticism centred on exactly who the experience of epiphany applies to. As Don Gifford writes:

But the term 'epiphany' has been overquoted to the point where it has become remarkably fuzzy; it is not clear whether the 'soul' which is made manifest is inherent in the object itself, or in the artist's response to the object's potential as metaphor, or in the response of a character within a fiction, or in the response of the reader to a revelatory moment in the fiction.<sup>38</sup>

Setting aside the subjective/objective question which I have already discussed, Gifford usefully distinguishes the three other ways in which critics have considered this issue: is it the artist, the fictional character, or the

reader who experiences an epiphany? Obviously this is related to the question of what happens when a reader reads a text. Among those who have considered epiphany as primarily an experience of the artist and the reader was William T. Noon: 'In order that the "epiphanic" moment of phenomenological experience may enter into poetry, the writer has no other choice than to represent the subjective experience within a symbolic structure of words' (p.74). In his analysis the artist experiences an epiphany, and is enabled to 'enliven' his experience for the reader to 'relive' by putting it in to words in a text. This process is essential for epiphany to occur: 'Only insofar as the poet or storyteller can turn the symbolic resources of his language to advantage will the literary experience "epiphanise", "seem to us radiant"' (p.83). This mimetic view of literature assumes a one-directional, reflective relationship between literature and 'reality', and between literature and the reader. It also assumes that epiphany is a real experience that happens to the 'poet or storyteller'. A writer who emphasised the *reader's* influence on epiphany is Robert Langbaum, in his article, 'The Epiphanic Mode in Wordsworth and Modern Literature': 'In art, epiphany is something that happens to the reader' (p.337). However, it seems illogical to privilege epiphany over other elements of a text as 'happening to the reader'.

A movement towards seeing epiphany as part of the construction of character in the text goes with an increasing interest in narration. S. L. Goldberg discusses epiphany as part of the stream-of-consciousness technique: 'The truth is that the "objects" [meaning objects capable

of epiphany] are presented to us only as Stephen sees them and they are what he sees' (p.244). Zack Bowen comments: 'all epiphanies, some more subtly than others, are really, even if unstated, the epiphanies of the characters themselves' ('Joyce and the Epiphany Concept: A New Approach', p.106). His discussion relates epiphany to the construction of character in Joyce's fiction.

A related disagreement over the use of the term epiphany was the relationship between the writer, narrator, and character in such moments. Those who viewed epiphany as the experience of the author directly translated into that of the character necessarily saw these perspectives synonymously: Joyce has the same aesthetic theory as Stephen. Irene Hendry commented: 'the esthetic [Stephen's in *Stephen Hero*] is actually Joyce's, which he followed faithfully in his own literary method' (p.449). More recent critical approaches, probably influenced by the permeation into critical practice of structuralist and post-structuralist theories of narrative such as Genette's *Narrative Discourse*<sup>39</sup> have been more willing to break the link between author, narrator and character and discuss epiphany as a method of constructing character in narrative. Zack Bowen's article, 'Epiphanies, Stephen's Diary, and the Narrative Perspective of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*',<sup>40</sup> argued that the novel displays an awareness that Stephen's epiphanies are not always to be judged by his estimation of them. This is mainly created by the change in tone that occurs with Stephen's diary entries at the end of *Portrait*. Bowen wrote: 'the reader should not accept unquestioningly the enlightenments which the

protagonists of the stories in *Dubliners* and Stephen Dedalus in *A Portrait* formulate as their own moments of truth' (p.485).

An important development for the early phase of epiphany criticism was the widening of the concept to cover the work of other writers. In 1971 Morris Beja's book, *Epiphany in the Modern Novel*, was published. (See note 30.) Beja saw epiphany as an important concept in literature of the twentieth century. His work was instrumental in developing the term as part of a critical vocabulary which could be used in connection with a wider range of fiction; although understandably, given the date of publication, he did not engage with more contemporary theory. Robert Langbaum's article in *New Literary History* in 1983, 'The Epiphanic Mode in Wordsworth and Modern Literature' (see note 29) looked at poetic uses of the concept, showing that the term was also being used to discuss other genres.

#### Contemporary Critical Definitions: Unproblematic and Agreed?

A move towards the incorporation into critical practice of different approaches to literature gradually became apparent in the increasing use of narrative, feminist and psychoanalytic theory to approach the work of Joyce, and to discuss epiphany. However, the increasing familiarity of the term and the widening contexts in which it can be used has also meant that critical discussion may try to use epiphany unproblematically. This is especially

the case where writers other than Joyce are being discussed.

A psychoanalytic approach to epiphany is indebted to Stanislaus Joyce's comments on it in *My Brother's Keeper*. Klaus Reichert, in his article, 'The European Background of Joyce's Writing', writes:

In his early concept of 'epiphany' he looked for something hidden, something underneath the glossy surface of the most commonplace things, something latent that might suddenly cut through to reveal an underside that had been kept 'repressed', but that alone could give an intimation of the truth of the phenomenon observed...his belief that latent entities can explain the specific appearance of manifest ones, or, more generally speaking, his search for hidden motivations of actions and expressions - all of this shows Joyce to be on the same 'track' as Freud...And there is another striking parallel worth mentioning: both Freud and Joyce discovered the significance of the apparently insignificant. It is minute gestures or facial expressions, sudden turns of phrase, unintentional actions, in short, things that usually go unnoticed or that are discarded as irrelevant, that have a revelatory quality precisely because they are not governed by intentions or the censorship of consciousness, and it is these that allow glimpses of the true nature of a person, of his or her repressed 'real' self, to the observer.<sup>41</sup>

The idea of epiphany as revelation of the repressed material of the unconscious is interesting, but Reichert's analysis seems to suggest that such moments can provide privileged access to a real self, even if this is in inverted commas! His analysis also seems best suited to the 'vulgarity of speech and gesture' (SH p.216), rather than an epiphany such as the wading girl experience where Stephen's unconscious concerns with feminine sexuality would best be analysed as constructs rather than his 'true nature'.

Rosemarie Battaglia mentions Stephen's epiphany on the library steps in *Portrait* in psychoanalytic terms as 'an



"oceanic feeling" described by Freud in *Civilization and Its Discontents* as a sense of the poet's merging with the universe in what can be called a parental embrace which overcomes feelings of infantile helplessness'.<sup>42</sup> This can be situated within her discussion of Stephen's desire for a presence in language that would overcome the split between Self and Other, which the text of *Portrait* does not provide. Her analysis combines Lacanian psychoanalytic theories with a Derridean approach to 'the metaphysics of presence' in language.

Another book that situates the *Epiphanies* collection, if not the concept, as part of a theory of the way language works in Joyce's texts is Colin MacCabe's *James Joyce and the Revolution of the Word*. MacCabe differentiates between the language of a realist text and the language of a Joycean text by terming them (respectively) neurotic, as opposed to psychotic, perverse discourses (p.27). He writes that 'Joyce's texts...lack any final and privileged discourse within them which dominates the others through its claim of access to the real' (p.27). He continues:

His earliest prose writings, the *Epiphanies*, lack any appeal to reality which would define what the writing produces. The conversations and situations which make up these brief ten-or twelve-line sketches, lack any accompanying explanation or context. In place of a discourse which attempts to place and situate everything, we have discourses which are determined in their situation by the reader. (p.28)

Although MacCabe is persuasive, the idea that the *Epiphanies* lack a context completely is insufficient. The collections in which they are available all introduce, discuss and extensively situate them as part of Joyce's early creative process, and this academic discourse has a

lot of power which must affect the reader's response and restrict the 'play' of language to some extent.

A concern with language and narrative in epiphanies structures the approach to Joyce's fiction in John Paul Riquelme's article, '*Stephen Hero, Dubliners, and A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man: Styles of Realism and Fantasy*'.<sup>43</sup> He identifies two 'languages' in Joyce's fiction: realism and fantasy, that correspond to Stephen's definition of epiphany: 'Joyce employs the two epiphanic modes of stark realism - "the vulgarity of speech or of gesture" - and visionary fantasy - "a memorable phase of the mind itself"' (p.104). He discusses the way in which these two languages work in *Stephen Hero, Dubliners, and Portrait* and are superseded in *Ulysses* by an 'allusive, parodic, internal dialogue' (p.106), that mocks the creation of epiphanies and the way they used Pateresque language.

In another article by Klaus Reichert, 'Fragment and Totality', epiphany is situated as a part of our understanding of fragments and totalities in fiction, and their mutual dependence:

There is a growing tendency in the writings of Joyce toward fragment and fragmentation. In *Stephen Hero* we see Joyce aiming at the retelling of a coherent whole that he himself had experienced in a discursive way: he writes *about* the totality of life, unfolds it, surveys it. Yet in the text of this novel he develops his theory of epiphany, which is about the writing of his next books. The point can be made that this theory of epiphany is a theory of fragmentation: a significant moment or a detail, a thing seen at some specific angle, can contain the totality of the meaning - he calls it 'essence' - of this life or thing. Note that there is a direct relationship between fragment and totality: they are mutually dependent: the one conditions the other: the fragment points to the totality of which it is a part, and the totality it is that gives meaning to that fragment.<sup>44</sup>

By demonstrating the reliance of fragment on totality and of totality on fragment Reichert demonstrates how both categories inhere in each other.

The relationship between narrative and feminism also provokes some discussion of the epiphany. Richard Pearce uses Nancy Miller's notion of the masculine 'ambitious' text and the feminine 'erotic' text, and discusses how these work within *Portrait*:

In *A Portrait* we encounter two dominant voices...arguing about the best way to tell a story. A conventional, official, authorial voice - like that of Stephen's father on the opening page - tells a story from the beginning. It subordinates characters and events to its logic and final goal, which is the development of an artist. And it suppresses the voices and stories of its female characters - especially as they express their physicality, or otherness. For the women either internalize the language of the fathers...or...are denied their physical reality. But a rebellious voice delights in disrupting the storyline, in creating holes, in flaunting its materiality, in seeking relationship rather than control. It is most evident in Stephen's epiphanies, which are organised by association or relationship, and his diary entries.<sup>45</sup>

This is an interesting idea, but Pearce does not actually discuss the working of the erotic, feminine text in the epiphanies. I would also question to what extent the epiphanies really do work in this way, even structurally. The wading girl epiphany does not display a rebellious text: the woman functions as object, not disruptive voice. The diary entries are also better discussed as part of the masculine 'ambitious' text because of the way they self-consciously situate Stephen as an emergent artist.

A discussion of the way that men and women experience 'naturalistic' epiphanies in various twentieth century *bildungsromans* questions whether men and women react in the same way to the 'object' of the epiphany. Annis Pratt

begins with Simone de Beauvoir's and Joseph Campbell's discussions of how men and women relate to nature: 'To Beauvoir's adolescent girl, nature is total existence; to Campbell's hero, woman is a container of truth. The hero comes to "know" woman and through her the natural world, which the heroine already possesses as an extension of herself'.<sup>46</sup> She then goes on to 'test' this premise in fiction. Her discussion of Sarah Orne Jewett's 'A White Heron' and *A Portrait* bears this out: whereas the heroine's relationship to nature is separate from her relationship with men, Stephen's wading girl epiphany is mediated through that girl (pp.478-480). When Pratt turns to other literature she argues that the pattern becomes more complicated. She finds some fiction suggesting that the woman's relationship with nature comforts her after failed love affairs (p.482) and supports and affirms her quest for self determination (p.483) in the same way that the man's does. Other examples show epiphany as 'a prelude or accompaniment to love, which in turn leads to further stages in the evolution of the female psyche' (p.485), again, a familiar pattern to that of fiction by men. She suggests, however, that this pattern is much more fully developed in fiction by women (p.487), and discusses this in Doris Lessing's *Children of Violence* series (pp.487-490). She attempts to rewrite de Beauvoir's notion of woman as immanence in a positive way as a 'visionary naturism' (p.488). Her conclusion tries to explain the rejection of sexual reciprocity as a result of the consequences for women of the lack of effective birth-control (p.490). This article is difficult to read as it discusses such a wide

range of fiction and makes so many different points. The recognition that epiphany functions differently for women and men is an important one, but is not related to questions of narrative structure. Pratt recognises that 'there is the possibility that we have come full circle back to the same old set of stereotyped assertions allocating earthiness and personalism to the female and "transcendence" and abstract thought to the male' (p.489), and this is the article's real danger.

Approaches to epiphany using more contemporary critical theory have not, however, superseded the earlier approaches. Vicki Mahaffey's article, 'Joyce's Shorter Works',<sup>47</sup> mainly goes over old ground when she discusses the epiphany, although she does make some interesting points. She makes a clear distinction between 'the prose bits to which Joyce gave that name' and 'the general concept' (p.190). She also points out the importance of context (p.193) for situating the epiphany, and remarks that 'their exposures are all designed to prove the power and authority of the self over the external world' (p.193), which stresses the way that epiphany supports and confirms a conception of movement towards an autonomous self in the character concerned. The discussion situates epiphany as, most importantly, a 'prose genre in which Joyce worked' (Robert Scholes, in Robert Scholes and Florence Walzl, 'The Epiphanies of Joyce' p.152), rather than a narrative phenomenon. Thomas B. O'Grady's article in the 1990 volume of *James Joyce Quarterly*, 'Conception, Gestation, and Reproduction: Stephen's Dream of Parnell',<sup>48</sup> describes the genesis and development of this epiphany from the

*Epiphanies* collection into *A Portrait*. In an appendix to his article, O'Grady writes: 'The evidence supporting Stephen's dream of Parnell having developed originally from Joyce's own epiphany is concrete and irrefutable' (p.300). Ideas about intentionality and creative development are still predominant here.

Many more contemporary theoretical approaches to Joyce and other writers are content to use the term epiphany as if its definition were unproblematic and agreed, although when such uses of the term are compared there are striking differences. Karen Lawrence's article, 'Gender and Narrative Voice in *Jacob's Room* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*' compares the masculine, patriarchal narrative of *A Portrait*, which relies on notions of *bildung*, self-development, and authoritative narration, with the feminine narrative of *Jacob's Room* which alienates its narrator from the protagonist and does not provide a traditional masculine ego. She remarks: 'Thus, in contrast to Stephen Dedalus, Jacob experiences no epiphanies, no rebellions, no real development in the course of the novel' (p.33). Lawrence suggests that the novel connects epiphany with rebellion *and* development in a causal way, but she does not make this explicit. In a later article, 'Joyce and Feminism', that discusses all of Joyce's fiction, she is more positive about *Ulysses*, suggesting that 'epiphanies...of women are rethought and rewritten. For example, the powerful image of the bird girl...is progressively deromanticized...into the limping Gerty MacDowell'.<sup>49</sup> Her definition of epiphany is not really

discussed here, though, and she assumes that later images of women are also epiphanic.

Vicki Mahaffey's discussion of *A Portrait* in her book *Reauthorizing Joyce*<sup>50</sup> is also concerned with questions of narrative. She comments on the oscillation between 'a realized network of meaning and potential networks of meaning, between the precision of definition and its inadequacy' as a central conflict in the novel (p.66). This conflict occurs in both social and linguistic terms. Mahaffey chooses to discuss the idea of 'stasis' that replaces epiphany in *A Portrait* as 'The apparent capriciousness of language as it gathers up and then empties itself of meaning' (p.68). Stasis is the balancing of these two forces. The only mention of the concept of epiphany is the following: 'Stasis - which replaces the more reverent term "epiphany" that Joyce used to mark the moment of revelation in *Stephen Hero*' (p.69). Epiphany is not fitted in to a discussion of *Stephen Hero* or any other of Joyce's work, as the concept of stasis is, but is dismissed as 'more reverent'.

Other books on Joyce that are written explicitly from a feminist perspective are Bonnie Kime Scott's *James Joyce*,<sup>51</sup> in the Feminist Readings series, and Suzette A. Henke's *James Joyce and the Politics of Desire*. Scott makes no mention of epiphany apart from a comment on the end of 'The Dead': 'We cannot know where Gretta travels in sleep, as "The Dead" focuses on Gabriel's self-conscious epiphany' (p.98). An agreed definition of the term as moment of revelation or knowledge is assumed here, and there is a suggestion that epiphany is a masculine preserve, but this

is again implicit. Suzette Henke's use of the term is more contradictory. Of 'Araby' she writes: 'Only at the end of the story does he begin to acknowledge, in a moment of epiphany, repressed torrents of sexual desire swirling beneath artificial cultural codes' (p.21). This implies an understanding of epiphany as a surfacing of unconscious, repressed material: a *beneficial* revelation, it is suggested. Of 'The Dead', however, she comments: 'The ending of Joyce's tale is finely ambiguous. We have learned from the author's ironic sensibility in stories such as "Araby" and "A Painful Case" to distrust swooning souls and self-deceptive epiphanies...Gabriel may well be trapped in a self-indulgent replication of romantic asceticism' (p.47). The suggestion that a narrative awareness of their 'self-indulgence' clings to the epiphanies contradicts the previous reading of them as bringing an 'authentic' sexuality to light. Her last remark on epiphany concerns *Exiles*:

As Bertha declares in *Exiles*, romantic epiphany 'comes only once in a lifetime. The rest of life is good for nothing except only to remember that time'. And it is precisely this act of poetic remembering, of re-collecting transitory moments of love and (imaginary) communion and recasting them in aesthetic form, that gives joy, delight, and ecstatic *jouissance* to the psychic horizons of an 'all too human,' and all too mortal, physicality. (p.163)

Henke uses epiphany to discuss Bertha's *carpe diem* approach to life, although Joyce does not use the term in the play. This seems to be a much more positive, but in a way a more naive reading, even if these transitory moments are 'imaginary'. The suggestion of a relationship between *jouissance* and epiphany is an interesting idea though, as it would put forward a way for women to access such



experiences, although it may also imply some sort of essential link between the two which would run into the same dangers as Annis Pratt's article on 'Women and Nature in Modern Fiction' does.

The permeation of the term epiphany into critical vocabulary is interestingly apparent in Mikhail Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*.<sup>52</sup> In his discussion of the chronotope of the threshold, Bakhtin is translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist as follows: 'the threshold and related chronotopes...are...places where crisis events occur, the falls, resurrections, renewals, epiphanies, decisions that determine the whole life of a man' (p.248). The term 'epiphany' is considered to be familiar and understandable. It is equated to some extent with resurrection, renewal and decision, but is meant to be slightly different in a way that would be understood by the reader: this is not a list of synonyms.<sup>53</sup>

The term epiphany has not been used at all extensively in connection with the writers I am looking at in this thesis. Where it is mentioned, it is again as a critical term whose meaning will be understood by the reader. For example, Annette Tromly, in a book on Charlotte Bronte, writes of 'Jane's narrative of a complex lifetime of doubt [being] resolved by a single moment of epiphany'.<sup>54</sup> She is referring to the moment when Jane hears Rochester's voice calling to her. Epiphany is used here as an alternative word to 'realisation' or 'anagnorisis', and is understood as such by the reader.

Judith Williams's book, *Perception and Expression in the Novels of Charlotte Bronte*,<sup>55</sup> uses the term twice.

Discussing Lucy's 'vision' of the nun in the garret she writes: 'This is the description of the near-epiphany of a demonic force; this household genius emanates from an infernal world underlying Lucy's everyday experience...she proceeds from a psychological rather than a moral or theological hell - from Lucy's imprisoned imagination and not, like Malevola, from an underworld' (p.112). Williams seems to use epiphany according to its traditional religious definition - Lucy's experience is only a 'near-epiphany' because it is psychological, not actual. The next time the term is used is to discuss the moment when Lucy, despairing of seeing Monsieur Paul again, hears footsteps, which she mistakes for the carpenter's, and then suddenly sees him standing in the door-way: 'This almost physiological description of her perception is significant; Lucy is at last truly seeing M. Paul, and the further suggestions...of an epiphany - the "master-carpenter" is only part of a whole image substructure radiating from the name "Emanuel" - reinforce the revelatory nature of this sight' (p.128). Epiphany is again taken to mean the revelation of a divinity: M. Paul is like a God to Lucy.

Criticism of D. H. Lawrence makes more specific mention of the epiphany, although again no integral approach has been made to its function in his work. Baruch Hochman refers to the stress in Lawrence's fiction on sexual fulfilment as 'an epiphanal moment wherein the individual confirms his being',<sup>56</sup> linking epiphany with the development of autonomous subjectivity. Hilary Simpson discusses Paul and Clara's successful sexual experience by the canal as a 'crucial epiphany',<sup>57</sup> and Mara Kalnins

refers to Ursula's 'epiphany in *Women in Love* when she recognises that "the body is only one of the manifestations of the spirit, the transmutation of the integral spirit is the transmutation of the physical body as well"'.<sup>58</sup> Epiphany is here equated with realization or recognition. Cornelia Nixon writes that Ursula's microscope epiphanies in *The Rainbow* 'are similarly "immoral and against mankind" because they deny the anthropocentric perspective and argue for the free expression of impulse instead of brotherly love, civic duty, patriotism'.<sup>59</sup> This sets epiphany in opposition to 'society' as embodying 'natural' forces of desire and violence.

Critical approaches to the work of Doris Lessing which mention epiphany specifically also seem to use it as a critical term with an agreed definition. Betsy Draine comments that 'Martha's task through...*Children of Violence* is to develop herself entirely as she is, as epitomized in the moment of her ecstatic epiphany of nature in *Martha Quest*'.<sup>60</sup> The implication here is that Martha's essential link with nature provides one of the few continuities in her perception of her self. In contrast, Anthony Chennells's article, 'Reading Doris Lessing's Rhodesian Stories in Zimbabwe' remarks on the continuities between experiences of epiphany and a colonialist attitude to the land: 'A person becoming spiritually renewed by the epiphanies afforded by the veld belongs to the same discourse as a man recovering his manhood in his encounter with the primitive'.<sup>61</sup>

As a final instance of the term epiphany 'cropping up' I would like to discuss Umberto Eco's book, *Foucault's*

*Pendulum*.<sup>62</sup> In a novel that has been seen as representatively post-modernist, epiphany is strikingly *not* deconstructed. At the end of the first chapter, the hero, who is named Casaubon (presumably as a reference to the character in *Middlemarch* whose project is to write a metatext, or 'key' to all mythologies), is trying to find somewhere to hide in a museum: 'I tried to shake off the spell of the place and look at the nave with cold eyes. It was not an epiphany now I was seeking, but information' (p.9). The refusal to allow a potential epiphany to occur in favour of finding practical information on where to hide frustrates the reader's expectations at this stage of the novel. However, the novel's whole hermeneutic is structured around the idea of epiphany or revelation, even if the term is not used explicitly. To briefly 'summarise' the plot: the hero works for a publishing house that publishes esoteric literature. He and his colleagues are told of the existence of a Templar plot designed to tap a powerful secret energy source. As they investigate, the 'plot' ramifies and extends uncontrollably as they uncover more and more 'evidence' and play with different ideas and possibilities. Casaubon's colleague makes the mistake of telling a member of a secret society that he has the knowledge needed to utilise the power source when the 'master-plan' is merely his own creation. The initiates believe him, and because he refuses to provide them with this 'transcendental signified' he is murdered. This murder is witnessed by Casaubon, who recognises that he will be next, as the secret society will never accept that he 'made it all up'! If the novel ended here then it would be a

brilliant comment on the desire for meaning in a meaningless universe, but it offers a rival way of understanding life epiphanically which resituates that meaning in 'moments' or 'Opportunity' (p.633). The murdered man's diaries, which Casaubon reads as he waits to be caught, tell of his childhood obsession with the trumpet, and his frustrated desire to play the trumpet at a festival where the girl he is in love with, who is a predictably distant object - of a different class and unaware of his love - will be watching. He is unable to do this, but by a stroke of luck at a later date he is asked to play at a funeral. The association of sexual and personal success with the trumpet is now so strong that an epiphanic experience results!

He continued holding that virtual note, because he felt he was playing out a string that kept the sun in place. The planet had been arrested in its course, had become fixed in a noon that could last an eternity. And it all depended on Jacopo, because if he broke that contact, dropped that string, the sun would fly off like a balloon, and with it this day and the event of this day, this action without transition, this sequence without before and after, which was unfolding, motionless, only because it was in his power to will it thus.

If he stopped, stopped to attack a new note, a rent would have been heard, far louder than the volleys that had deafened him, and the clocks would all resume their tachycardial palpitation...He had entered that trance state that overwhelms the diver when he tries not to surface, wanting to prolong the inertia that allows him to glide along the ocean floor. (p.632)

Although the funny side of the adolescent boy finding an epiphany in the phallic trumpet is obvious, and the inflated 'cosmic' significance of the moment is also apparent; the narrative, and the reader's, desire for satisfactory closure encourages a serious weighting of this moment as an alternative to the failed project of 'The

Plan'. Casaubon comments: 'You spend a life seeking the Opportunity, without realizing that the decisive moment, the moment that justifies birth and death, has already passed. It will not return, but it was - full, dazzling, generous as every revelation' (p.633). The reader, and Casaubon, take note to have, and appreciate, their epiphanies before they die!

### Conclusion: A Sign Not a Symbol

This chapter has surveyed the changing use of the term epiphany in Joyce's fiction and notebooks, and in criticism of Joyce and other writers. This examination of the development of the epiphany as a literary and critical term has highlighted the way that various twentieth century critical issues have influenced interpretations of the concept. The movement away from what has been identified as a liberal-humanist approach to literature with its stress on establishing intentions and coherent wholes, to the use of more contemporary methods, can be seen in the increasing use of feminist, psychoanalytic, and narrative theory to analyse epiphany. However, it has also been accepted as a transparently comprehensible critical term which the reader will understand, although each writer actually uses it quite differently. I hope that this suggests the usefulness, in Kristeva's terms, of discussing epiphany as a sign rather than as a symbol.

I have also stressed the importance of relating epiphany to its narrative context: it functions differently

in a short story, in a collection of 'epiphanic' moments, and in the novel, and I suggested that epiphany is a gendered phenomenon, which has implications for the way masculinity and femininity are positioned within texts. To conclude, I would like to quote from an article by J. Hillis Miller, 'From Narrative Theory to Joyce; From Joyce to Narrative Theory' where he writes:

One consequence of current narrative theory, at least of the so-called deconstructive sort, has been in various ways to put in question the concept of organic unity or wholeness which has been the central assumption guiding much interpretation of fiction. In place of wholeness has been put the hypothesis of heterogeneity, indeterminacy, or open-endedness.

If these notions in current narrative theory have any validity, then it may not be an accident that critics have tended to disagree about the meaning of Joyce's works, both about the minuscule parts and about the overall patterns. The small-scale parts may have multiple incompatible meanings, and those meanings may not be controllable by references to other similar words or phrases in other parts of the same work by Joyce, or in other works by him, or in his sources. Such links are broken or may be broken.<sup>63</sup>

#### Notes

1. The complete epiphanies are available in *James Joyce: Poems and Shorter Writings*, edited by Richard Ellmann, A. Walton Litz, and John Whittier Ferguson (London: Faber and Faber, 1991), pp.157-200. Further references are to this edition.
2. The evidence for dating appears in the preface to *Archive Seven, 'A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man': A Facsimile of Epiphanies, Notes, Manuscripts, and Typescripts*, edited by Hans Walter Gabler (London: Garland, 1978), pp.xxiii-xxvii.
3. Stanislaus Joyce, *My Brother's Keeper*, edited by Richard Ellmann with a preface by T. S. Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 1958), pp.134-135.
4. *The Letters of James Joyce*, Volume II, edited by Richard Ellmann (London: Faber and Faber, 1958), p.28.
5. Morris Beja discusses which epiphanies were included, and where, in his article 'Epiphany and the Epiphanies' in *A Companion to Joyce Studies*, edited by Zack Bowen and James F. Carens (Westport: Greenwood, 1984), pp.707-725 (pp.712-713).

6. Colin MacCabe, *James Joyce and the Revolution of the Word* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1978), p.3.
7. David W. Robinson, "'What kind of a name is that?": Joyce's Critique of Names and Naming in *A Portrait*', *James Joyce Quarterly*, 27 (1990), 325-333 (p.327).
8. Suzette A. Henke, *James Joyce and the Politics of Desire* (London: Routledge, 1990), p.74.
9. Karen Lawrence, 'Gender and Narrative Voice in *Jacob's Room* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*', in *James Joyce: The Centennial Symposium*, edited by Morris Beja and others (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), pp.31-38 (p.32).
10. Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* (London: Macmillan, 1910), p.125.
11. Richard Poirier, 'Pater, Joyce, Eliot', *James Joyce Quarterly*, 26 (1988), 21-35 (p.24).
12. Harry Levin, *James Joyce: A Critical Introduction*, second edition (New York: New Directions, 1960).
13. There are forty extant epiphanies. Twenty-two of these are in Joyce's hand, and are in the Poetry Collection at the State University of New York at Buffalo. Twenty-five epiphanies are at Cornell University. Seven of these are duplicates of those at Buffalo. All but one of the collection at Cornell are in Stanislaus Joyce's hand.
14. James Joyce, *Stephen Hero: A Part of the First Draft of 'A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man'*, edited by Theodore Spencer (New York: New Directions, 1944).
15. Theodore Spencer, 'Introduction', in *Stephen Hero*, by James Joyce, edited by Theodore Spencer, second edition, revised by John J. Slocum and Herbert Cahoon (London: Jonathon Cape, 1969), pp.13-24 (p.22).
16. Irene Hendry, 'Joyce's Epiphanies', *Sewanee Review*, 54 (1946), 449-467.
17. *Joyce's Epiphanies*, edited by Oscar Silverman (Buffalo: Lockwood Memorial Library, 1956).
18. Robert Scholes and Richard M. Kain, *The Workshop of Daedalus: James Joyce and the Raw Materials for 'A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man'* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1965).
19. Dorothy van Ghent, *The English Novel: Form and Function* (New York: Rinehart, 1953), p.275.
20. Florence Walzl, 'The Liturgy of the Epiphany Season and the Epiphanies of Joyce', *PMLA*, 80 (1965), 436-450.
21. William T. Noon, *Joyce and Aquinas* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1957), p.70.



22. William York Tindall, *A Reader's Guide to James Joyce* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1959), pp.10-11.
23. Julia Kristeva, 'From Symbol to Sign', in *The Kristeva Reader*, edited by Toril Moi (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp.62-73 (p.64). It is difficult to establish why Kristeva's text reads 'pretends not to' here, as this would seem to suggest that the use of *symbols* is the more authentic semiotic practice.
24. Dolf Sorensen, *James Joyce's Aesthetic Theory: Its Development and Application* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1977).
25. Kate Harrison, 'The Portrait Epiphany', *James Joyce Quarterly*, 8 (1971), 142-150 (pp.146-147).
26. Robert Scholes, 'Joyce and the Epiphany: The Key to the Labyrinth?', *Sewanee Review*, 72 (1964), 65-77 (p.70)
27. Zack Bowen, 'Joyce and the Epiphany Concept: A New Approach', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 9 (1981-2), 103-114 (pp.104-5).
28. Robert Adams Day, 'Dante, Ibsen, Joyce, Epiphanies and the Art of Memory', *James Joyce Quarterly*, 25 (1988), 357-362 (p.358).
29. Robert Langbaum, 'The Epiphanic Mode in Wordsworth and Modern Literature', *New Literary History*, 14 (1983) 335-358.
30. Morris Beja, *Epiphany in the Modern Novel* (London: Peter Owen, 1971), p.192.
31. Patrick Parrinder, *James Joyce* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p.39.
32. Erwin R. Steinberg, *The Stream of Consciousness and Beyond in 'Ulysses'* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1958), p.264.
33. S. L. Goldberg, *The Classical Temper: A Study of James Joyce's 'Ulysses'* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1961), p.253.
34. Hélène Cixous, *The Exile of James Joyce*, translated by Sally A. J. Purcell (London: John Calder, 1976), p.603.
35. Hugh Kenner, *Dublin's Joyce* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1955), p.141.
36. Morris Beja, 'One Good Look at Themselves: Epiphanies in *Dubliners*', in *Work in Progress: Joyce Centenary Essays*, edited by Richard F. Peterson, Alan M. Cohn, and Edmund L. Epstein (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1983), pp.3-14 (p.10).
37. Robert Scholes and Florence Walzl, 'The Epiphanies of Joyce', *Notes, Documents, and Critical Comment*, *PMLA*, 82 (1967), 152-154.

38. Don Gifford, *Joyce Annotated: Notes for 'Dubliners' and 'A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man'*, second edition (London: University of California Press, 1982), pp.2-3.
39. Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, translated by Jane E.Lewin (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980).
40. Zack Bowen, 'Epiphanies, Stephen's Diary, and the Narrative Perspective of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*', *James Joyce Quarterly*, 16 (1979), 485-488.
41. Klaus Reichert, 'The European Background of Joyce's Writing', in *The Cambridge Companion to James Joyce*, edited by Derek Attridge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp.55-82 (p.60).
42. Rosemarie Battaglia, 'Stages of Desire in Joyce', in *New Alliances in Joyce Studies: When its Aped to Foul a Delfian*, edited by Bonnie Kime Scott (London: Associated University Presses, 1988), pp.37-47 (p.41).
43. John Paul Riquelme, 'Stephen Hero, *Dubliners*, and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*: Styles of Realism and Fantasy', in *The Cambridge Companion to James Joyce*, edited by Derek Attridge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp.103-130.
44. Klaus Reichert, 'Fragment and Totality', in *New Alliances in Joyce Studies: When its Aped to Foul a Delfian*, edited by Bonnie Kime Scott (London: Associated University Presses, 1988), pp.86-90 (p.86).
45. Richard Pearce, 'Voices, Stories (W)holes: The Politics of Narration', in *New Alliances in Joyce Studies: When its Aped to Foul a Delfian*, edited by Bonnie Kime Scott (London: Associated University Presses, 1988), pp.79-85 (p.79-80).
46. Annis Pratt, 'Women and Nature in Modern Fiction', *Contemporary Literature*, 13 (1972), 476-490 (p.477).
47. Vicki Mahaffey, 'Joyce's Shorter Works', in *The Cambridge Companion to James Joyce*, edited by Derek Attridge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp.185-212.
48. Thomas B. O'Grady, 'Conception, Gestation, and Reproduction: Stephen's Dream of Parnell', *James Joyce Quarterly*, 27 (1990), 293-301.
49. Karen Lawrence, 'Joyce and Feminism', in *The Cambridge Companion to James Joyce*, edited by Derek Attridge (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1990), pp.327-258 (p.244).
50. Vicki Mahaffey, *Reauthorizing Joyce* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

51. Bonnie Kime Scott, *James Joyce, Feminist readings* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1987).
52. Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, edited by Michael Holquist, translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, University of Texas Press Slavic Series, 1 (London: University of Texas Press, 1981).
53. The Russian word translated as 'epiphanies' is 'prozrenii' (the plural of 'prozrenie'). The *Russian-English Dictionary* (Moscow: State Publishing House, 1959), translates this as 'recovery of sight'. In the *New English-Russian Dictionary* (Moscow: Soviet Encyclopaedia Publishing House, 1972) there are four Russian words for 'epiphany'. Two of these refer to the date in the Christian calendar, another means 'appearance, phenomenon' but the fourth is 'prozrenie', which is described as 'elevated diction'. By extension from the literal 'recovery of sight', 'prozrenie' also means enlightenment or insight.
54. Annette Tromly, *The Cover of the Mask: The Autobiographers in Charlotte Bronte's Fiction*, English Literary Monograph Series, 26, (Victoria: University of Victoria Press, 1982), p.56.
55. Judith Williams, *Perception and Expression in the Novels of Charlotte Bronte*, Nineteenth Century Studies (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1988).
56. Baruch Hochman, *Another Ego: The Changing View of Self and Society in the Work of D. H. Lawrence* (South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1970), pp.17-18.
57. Hilary Simpson, *D. H. Lawrence and Feminism* (London: Croom Helm, 1982), p.34.
58. Mara Kalnins, 'Symbolic Seeing: Lawrence and Heraclitus', in *D. H. Lawrence: Centenary Essays*, edited by Mara Kalnins (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1986), pp.173-190 (p.179).
59. Cornelia Nixon, *Lawrence's Leadership Politics and the Turn against Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), p.78.
60. Betsy Draine, *Substance under Pressure: Artistic Coherence and Evolving Form in the Novels of Doris Lessing*, (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), p.35.
61. Anthony Chennells, 'Reading Doris Lessing's Rhodesian Stories in Zimbabwe', in *In Pursuit of Doris Lessing: Nine Nations Reading*, edited by Claire Sprague (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990), pp.17-40 (pp.25-6).
62. Umberto Eco, *Foucault's Pendulum* (London: Martin Secker and Warburg, 1989).
63. J. Hillis Miller, 'From Joyce to Narrative Theory; From Narrative Theory to Joyce', in *The Seventh of Joyce*, edited

by Bernard Benstock (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1982), pp.3-4  
(p.3).

CHAPTER TWO: EPIPHANY IN *VILLETTE*: THE DISRUPTION OF  
CONVENTIONAL NOTIONS OF THE FEMININE SUBJECT

Introduction: Gender Understood on a Binary Oppositional  
Model

In this chapter I intend to look at feminine subjectivity in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*. The novel, and critical response to it, initially construct the feminine subject as split between two opposing sets of personality traits and two opposing narrative functions or patterns. These are implicitly gendered as masculine and feminine. The first and second parts of this chapter will look at how this division or polarisation is developed, and in the third part I will establish that the novel's epiphanies are coexistent with a 'dislocation' and slippage of this binary opposition. I will also address the implications of this for the feminine fictional and reading subject.

The articulation of the internal split in Lucy in *Villette* has been commented on by the majority of Brontë critics in a variety of ways, the most frequent being to define groups of personality traits in her that are antithetically opposed. The characteristics that fall either side of the divide are variable: it seems that critics map their particular theoretical and ideological concerns onto them. To give a sample, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar see the split as occurring between the angel and the demon: Brontë's work displays 'an oscillation between overtly "angelic" dogma and covertly Satanic fury

that would mark the whole of her professional literary career'.<sup>1</sup> Terry Eagleton, however, comments:

We find embedded in Charlotte's work, for example, a constant struggle between two ambiguous, internally divided sets of values. On the one hand are ranged the values of rationality, coolness, shrewd self-seeking, energetic individualism, radical protest and rebellion; on the other hand lie the habits of piety, submission, culture, tradition, conservatism.<sup>2</sup>

He later adds: 'Charlotte's novels...embody a complex structure of convergence and antagonism between the landed and industrial sectors of the contemporary ruling class' (p.4). John Kucich discusses the 'fatal Brontëan dichotomy: the paleness of tranquility and externally satisfied desire as opposed to the vitality of disruptive inward change',<sup>3</sup> whereas Judith Newton thinks that 'It is this contradiction between her desire for autonomy and her loyalty to an ideology of love and sacrifice which Brontë encounters in *Villette*'.<sup>4</sup> Judith Plotz gives yet another reading when she writes that 'The uneasy symbiosis of constraint (associated with femininity, domesticity, reason, morality, convention, duty) and power (associated with imagination, passion, vision, rage, rebellion, art) is characteristic of Brontë's fiction'.<sup>5</sup> Rather than selecting the 'best' of these definitions of Lucy's personality I would suggest that all of them apply at different stages of the novel, and with differing critical perspectives. The split in Lucy is not fixed throughout the novel: where its parameters fall fluctuates as it progresses. This suggests that the split subject is a function of *narrative*. Penny Boumelha stresses the double narrative of *Villette* in her book, remarking that 'it is the relation between...sequential plotting and rhapsodic dilation, that interests me about Brontë's

plotting',<sup>6</sup> but this is not explicitly related to subjectivity.

Critics discussing the split subject in terms of a polarisation of personality traits frequently imply that one set of characteristics is more 'authentic' than the other. Linda Hunt comments: 'Not part of the official fabric of society, the redundant woman is likely to experience with particular sharpness the gulf between an inner self which lies outside social definitions of womanhood and the roles she must play in the external world, a world from which she is alienated'.<sup>7</sup> She suggests that the feminine 'inner self' pre-exists, and is unchanged by, socially defined and influenced conceptions of the subject. She also implies that the 'roles' Lucy plays are *patriarchally* defined, whereas her inner self somehow escapes that definition. In her article she explicitly 'explores how Brontë expresses Lucy's powerful sense of estrangement from society and demonstrates that an innovative use of symbolism allows Brontë to show Lucy Snowe's inward and outward selves coming increasingly into accord so that, while she may not find happiness, Lucy does become a more whole and complete person' (p.24). This sense that the novel moves towards integration of the two selves is another accepted critical opinion. Roberta C. Schwartz remarks that 'a more mature Lucy Snowe will seek a balance between reason and fantasy'.<sup>8</sup>

I would disagree with both of these assumptions. As Christina Crosby writes: 'Feminist readings of *Villette* have too uncritically depended on oppositions of surface and depth, illusion and reality, false and true

consciousness. These seemingly natural distinctions are part of the same cultural configurations that construct women as an auxiliary to man, and are tellingly compromised at various points in Brontë's text'.<sup>9</sup> Such a reliance on a binary oppositional model of the subject has problematic consequences. The first is the implicit gendering of each category, the second is the privileging or prioritising of the masculine category. As Hélène Cixous writes:

Wherever an ordering intervenes, a law organizes the thinkable by (dual, irreconcilable; or mitigable, dialectical) oppositions. And all the couples of oppositions are *couples*. Does this mean something? Is the fact that logocentrism subjects thought - all of the concepts, the codes, the values - to a two-term system, related to 'the' couple man/woman?...And the movement by which each opposition is set up to produce meaning is the movement by which the couple is destroyed...And we perceive that the 'victory' always amounts to the same thing: it is hierarchized. The hierarchization subjects the entire conceptual organization to man.<sup>10</sup>

In an article on gender and dichotomy Nancy Jay discusses 'some ways in which logical dichotomy and radical gender distinctions are associated, some consequences of conceiving of gender distinctions as formally dichotomous, and some reasons why it is in the interests of certain social groups to understand gender distinctions in that way'.<sup>11</sup> She identifies three 'logical rules' that function in binary categorisations: 'the Principle of Identity (if anything is A, it is A); the Principle of Contradiction (nothing can be both A and Not A); and the Principle of the Excluded Middle (anything, and everything, must be *either* A or Not-A)' (p.42). She then goes on to elaborate the way that gender is understood almost exclusively using this model. She points out that 'Continuity between terms is a logical impossibility for distinctions phrased as



contradictories, as A/Not-A...In A/Not-A dichotomies only one term has positive reality; Not-A is only the privation or absence of A...The structure of A/Not-A is such that a third term is impossible: everything and anything must be either A or Not-A...This all encompassing capacity is a consequence of a quality of Not-A called "the infinitation of the negative" (p.44). Thus feminist readings that, for example, stress a division in Lucy between reason and emotion, and prioritise emotion as a 'genuine' feminine/feminist response merely reverse the patriarchal conceptual model that privileges reason, without questioning that model's binary categorisation of masculinity and femininity. In my analysis of the dual subject in *Villette* I would prefer to discuss the inter-relation of gender and narrative in this binary oppositional model of the subject. I will then establish that epiphanies are among the crucial points in the text that deconstruct this model, suggesting different ways of reading the feminine subject.

'A Mere Looker-On at Life' (V p.211)

The prevailing construction of Lucy as a subject at the beginning of the novel, and one that remains important, is that of the autonomous, rational, unified liberal-humanist subject. Within the province of this account of Lucy's subjectivity can be located ideas about independence, self-reliance, ambition, and self-determination. The narration of this side of her self

relies on ideas of bildung, autobiography and individuation. The assumption underlying this reading of Lucy's subjectivity is that the subject is innate and consistent, pre-existing inter-relations with material and ideological practices such as language and sociality. This may appear to be a gender-neutral construction of the subject, but the text relies on ideals and narrative structures which have been associated with masculinity, such as rationality and the bildung form, for this account of the self. It is interesting to analyse how successful Bronte's use of these forms and ideals is, and to what extent they are subsequently questioned.

A number of factors are important in developing this perception of the subject. The most obvious is the elision of information about Lucy's personal circumstances preceding the beginning of the narrative at Bretton. The reader discovers little about her social position, family background, or early up-bringing. Linda Hunt comments,

While characters in a traditional novel are carefully defined in terms of family background, financial history, and class position, Lucy virtually moves in a void...The only information we have is that her social status was originally equal to that of her godmother, Mrs. Bretton, that her family was once comfortable enough to have a servant (the woman she visits after Miss Marchmont's death), and that she went to a school of some social standing. Because we have so little knowledge of Lucy's background, we can experience her profound sense of disconnection from the fabric of society, an estrangement which makes her remarkably like a modern figure. (p.24)

Hunt implies that, as an 'outsider', Lucy prefigures the alienated masculine subject in novels by twentieth century writers like Kafka and Camus. Penny Boumelha writes: 'Lucy's orphanhood and exile are, of course, in one sense the basis of her dispossession and privation, though the

curiously *given* quality of her isolation and misery suggests that *they reflect it as much as cause it*' [second italics mine] (p.119). Her important remark that in an odd way, Lucy's lack of background is a *symbol* of her 'given' subjectivity emphasises the way in which absence of background functions early in the novel to highlight notions of the subject as innate and pre-given in a way that is an *exaggeration* of prevalent realist forms, not a re-writing of them. As Catherine Belsey writes: 'Classic realism...performs...the work of ideology...in its representation of a world of consistent subjects who are the *origin* of meaning, knowledge and action' [my italics].<sup>12</sup>

The lack of background in *Villette* is not *merely* an absence in the text, because the reader is constantly *alerted* to the fact that this lack exists. The narrator teases with snippets of information, or beginnings of narratives of early life that are not continued. For example:

In the autumn of the year - I was staying at Bretton; my godmother having come in person to claim me of the kinsfolk with whom was at that time fixed my permanent residence. I believe she then plainly saw events coming, whose very shadow I scarce guessed; yet of which the faint suspicion sufficed to impart unsettled sadness, and made me glad to change scene and society. (V p.62) [see list of abbreviations]

The digression, suggesting vaguely troubling events in the future, perceived already by Lucy and Mrs Bretton, interrupts a sentence of the main narrative which is actually never resumed. This indicates the importance of the information revealed, although in actual fact nothing specific is divulged! Lucy's only major reference to her

family situation is similarly ambiguous. In intensely metaphorical language we are told of the loss or estrangement of her family, importantly symbolised through drowning:

However, it cannot be concealed that, in that case, I must somehow have fallen over-board, or that there must have been wreck at last. I too well remember a time - a long time, of cold, of danger, of contention. To this hour, when I have the nightmare, it repeats the rush and saltness of briny waves in my throat, and their icy pressure on my lungs. I even know there was a storm, and that not of one hour nor one day. For many days and nights neither sun nor stars appeared; we cast with our own hands the tackling out of the ship; a heavy tempest lay on us; all hope that we should be saved was taken away. In fine, the ship was lost, the crew perished. (V p.94)

The elaborate extended metaphor using the sea to represent life is one of the important early uses of water symbolism in the novel. The passage contains a suggestively biblical reference to the disciples throwing out their nets. This adds weight to the word 'saved', which gains connotations of religious redemption. An important construction of the subject as solitary pilgrim/protagonist is being developed in this scene. The very deliberate use of religious symbolism and metaphor to describe the loss of family highlights Lucy's solitude, and draws attention to the style in which this is narrated. It is important that the literary models for this passage, the Bible and *Pilgrim's Progress*, rely on masculine ideals such as discipleship, and a masculine narrative structure informed by the idea of journey in which the active subject of adventure and trial is a masculine position.

Lucy's remarks characterising her self, most of which occur in response to the behaviour of others, are also important in developing a sense of the subject as uniquely

rational, unimpressible and self-determining, especially at the beginning of the novel. Lucy's reactions to the intensely emotional child, Paulina, and her jealously possessive behaviour with her father and John Graham Bretton provoke a number of disclaimers such as 'I, Lucy Snowe, plead guiltless of that curse, an overheated and discursive imagination' (V p.69); and again: 'These sudden, dangerous natures - *sensitive* as they are called - offer many a curious spectacle to those whom a cooler temperament has secured from participation in their angular vagaries' (V p.70). The reliability of these statements is questionable, particularly when the rest of the novel is taken into account. In fact, this is one of the main issues highlighted in a reading of *Villette*: narrative itself affects a reading of the subject, so that it becomes impossible once the novel is completed to resurrect the initial reaction to Lucy. I would speculate that on reading the early chapters, and no more, a response to Lucy as a subject would accept her own explicit narration of her self.

This would be so because, in the early chapters, the narrative is not focussed on actions and events involving Lucy, but instead on the arrival of Polly and her relationship with her father and Graham. The fact that it is Lucy who narrates is initially less important than the *object* of her narrative, which is only indirectly herself. As a result of this, interest and attention is deflected away from Lucy, meaning that the reader spends little time on the question of Lucy's statements about her self. There is an early fragment in which *Polly* narrates a sea voyage

to England,<sup>13</sup> which may suggest that Brontë's early intention was for Polly to be the protagonist or to use mixed narrators. The abandonment of this opening chapter would suggest that she changed her mind *before* beginning *Villette* as it now stands, not during the composition of the novel, as has been speculated. Much of the impetus for this last opinion stemmed from the way that Brontë's novel is different from the realist plot which was privileged in the nineteenth century. In many ways *Villette* exaggerates the repressed issues of realist narrative, such as the attempt to construct a consistent, innate individual in narrative itself, which is inexorably changing. It becomes self-conscious about, and interested in, its own narrative methods.

Another important issue in the narration of Lucy's subjectivity in the early chapters of *Villette* is that she is a *watcher* of others, a narrator of others' stories. In this sense Lucy takes the position of observer: a 'looker-on at life', as she terms herself, which implies that while change and process take place *outside* her self, she remains static and consistent in order to describe. This is apparent in scenes like the following when Lucy observes Polly's reaction when her father leaves her:

During an ensuing space of some minutes, I perceived she endured agony. She went through, in that brief interval of her infant life, emotions such as some never feel; it was in her constitution: she would have more of such instants if she lived. Nobody spoke. Mrs Bretton, being a mother, shed a tear or two. Graham, who was writing, lifted up his eyes and gazed at her. I, Lucy Snowe, was calm. (V p.79)

Polly's emotional reaction is explained in terms of her 'constitution' or inherited predisposition towards

sensibility. The reactions of the other observers are apparently dictated by their gender and social position. Mrs Bretton weeps because she is a mother. Graham gazes at Polly as an interesting object. Lucy's reaction might be expected to be the most sympathetic - she is also a young girl separated from her family - but her response initially seems to be an effect of her position as *narrator*. After all, narrators traditionally pretend not to get involved in the object of their narration, instead fulfilling an apparently omniscient, detached role. However, Lucy's distinction between 'I', which may be seen as the narrative function, and the added 'Lucy Snowe' suggests a concern with her own identity that is superfluous to an uninvolved narrator. It implies a need to assert her own identity by linking it with her full name. This suggests both a lack of confidence in her own subjectivity and that the positions of narrator and subject are not in fact unproblematically seamless. The link between 'Snowe' and 'calm' is an attempt to reiterate the objective, rational personality, but it is too self-consciously forced, leaving the reader questioning Lucy's analysis of herself.

The emphasis on looking, watching and observing in developing our sense of Lucy's subjectivity in the novel stresses the importance of the masculine visual sexual economy that situates Woman as passive desired object and Man as active desiring subject. As Karen Lawrence comments: 'One of the striking aspects of Lucy Snowe as protagonist is the degree to which she is primarily a viewer rather than a viewed object, an interpreter rather than the erotic, mysterious "other" to obsess the male gaze and

fantasy'.<sup>14</sup> This could be seen to be a result of Lucy's position as narrator: because she is always looking and describing she is not herself described. In comparison with other female narrators in novels of the period, however, Lucy continually stresses that she is not looked at, except by Monsieur Paul, and, most importantly, that she looks instead. (See for example the scene in which she recognises that Dr John is Graham Bretton and stares at him, provoking his anger, but without revealing her identity to him so that he cannot recognise/look at *her* (V p.163).) In *Jane Eyre* Jane's function as an attractive object of the male gaze (specifically Mr Rochester's) is important. She is consistently called a 'fairy', 'elf', or 'sprite', which suggests the bewitching qualities of her appearance. The marriage proposal from Rochester provokes a magical change however:

'Jane, you look blooming, and smiling, and pretty,' said he: 'truly pretty this morning. Is this my pale little elf? Is this my mustard-seed? This little sunny-faced girl with the dimpled cheek and rosy lips; the satin-smooth hazel hair, and the radiant hazel eyes?' (I had green eyes, reader; but you must excuse the mistake; for him they were new-dyed, I suppose.) (JE p.287)

The engagement seems to normalise Jane's appearance from a fairy into a flesh and blood woman, thus reducing her uncanny effect on Rochester. As her fiancée, he believes himself to gain a domestic control over her appearance and its effect on him, although his previous powerlessness against her 'magical' attractions is of course a masculine fantasy. Jane resists this appropriation, however, as she has a strong sense of her appearance, and links this very closely with her own sense of identity. Her remark that his



eyes must have been 'new-dyed' may suggest a sort of 'rose coloured spectacles' attitude.

Rochester continues this conversation, revealing his intention to dress Jane finely and give her flowers and jewels. Jane is very disturbed by this:

'No, no, sir! Think of other subjects, and speak of other things, and in another strain. Don't address me as if I were a beauty; I am your plain, Quakerish governess.'

'You are a beauty in my eyes, and a beauty just the desire of my heart - delicate and aerial.'

'Puny and insignificant, you mean. You are dreaming, sir - or are you sneering? For God's sake, don't be ironical!'

'I will make the world acknowledge you a beauty, too,' he went on, while I really became uneasy at the strain he had adopted, because I felt he was either deluding himself or trying to delude me. 'I will attire my Jane in satin and lace, and she shall have roses in her hair; and I will cover the head I love best with a priceless veil.'

'And then you won't know me, sir; and I shall not be your Jane Eyre any longer, but an ape in a harlequin's jacket - a jay in borrowed plumes. I would as soon see you, Mr Rochester, tricked out in stage-trappings, as myself clad in a court-lady's robe; and I don't call you handsome, sir, though I love you most dearly; far too dearly to flatter you. Don't flatter me.' (JE pp.287-288)

Although the early part of this passage could be interpreted as Jane's playful encouragement of her lover's flattery, her seriousness increases as the conversation continues, and it becomes obvious that she believes her own sense of identity and integrity to be threatened by Rochester's talk. Her self-image - an unattractive one which she takes from the estimation of other men (it is clearly also connected with her social position as governess) - is an index of her self-worth, and of the depth of the love Rochester has for her. By loving her even though she is not beautiful to men's eyes, Rochester proves his integrity, and this is mirrored in her feelings about

him. Jane accepts the functioning of the masculine gaze in interpreting women, but she hopes that her own relationship surpasses that. Unfortunately, it is obvious that it doesn't. An important part of Rochester's attraction to Jane is clearly dependent on her conforming to his own preference in female beauty. It is instructive to compare this scene with the one in which Lucy asks Monsieur Paul if he finds her unattractive:

'Ah! I am not pleasant to look at - ?'

I could not help saying this; the words came unbidden: I never remember the time when I had not a haunting dread of what might be the degree of my outward deficiency; this dread pressed me at the moment with special force.

A great softness passed upon his countenance; his violet eyes grew suffused and glistening under their deep Spanish lashes: he started up; 'Let us walk on.'

'Do I displease your eyes *much*?' I took courage to urge: the point had its vital import for me.

He stopped, and gave me a short, strong answer - an answer which silenced, subdued, yet profoundly satisfied. Ever after that, I knew what I was for *him*; and what I might be for the rest of the world, I ceased painfully to care. Was it weak to lay so much stress on an opinion about appearance? I fear it might be - I fear it was; but in that case I must avow no light share of weakness. I must own a great fear of displeasing - a strong wish moderately to please M. Paul. (V p.583)

Unlike Jane, who wants her own and the masculine world's unfavourable opinion of her beauty to stand against Mr Rochester's, Lucy is prepared to disregard the 'rest of the world' and their gazes as long as Monsieur Paul finds her attractive.

In *Agnes Grey* Agnes is, because of her position as governess, invisible to those of a higher social status. Her response to this is significantly different to Lucy's:

As none of the before-mentioned ladies and gentlemen ever noticed me, it was disagreeable to walk beside them, as if listening to what they said, or wishing to be thought one of them, while they talked over me or across, and if their eyes, in speaking, chanced to

fall on me, it seemed as if they looked on vacancy - as if they either did not see me, or were very desirous to make it appear so.

It was disagreeable, too, to walk behind, and thus appear to acknowledge my own inferiority; for in truth, I considered myself pretty nearly as good as the best of them, and wished them to know that I did so.<sup>15</sup>

In contrast to Lucy, who appears to accept her invisibility and the opportunity it gives her to observe, Agnes dislikes being invisible because she has a strong opinion of her own self-worth: she thinks she *should* be visible, and she uses strategies that mimic those of her 'superiors' to show that she thinks this: 'I gave myself no little trouble in my endeavours...to appear perfectly unconscious or regardless of their presence' (p.111). Later in the novel, when discussing female beauty, she remarks that 'though liable to be over-estimated, it is a gift of God, and not to be despised' (p.146). A striking metaphor for the attractive power of female beauty follows:

As well might the humble glow-worm despise that power of giving light, without which the roving fly might pass her and repass her a thousand times, and never light beside her; she might hear her winged darling buzzing over and around her; he vainly seeking her, she longing to be found, but with no power to make her presence known, no voice to call him, no wings to follow his flight;...[sic] the fly must seek another mate, the worm must live and die alone. (p.146)

This passage suggests that Agnes accepts the influence of female beauty, even though she may see it as superficial.

For another female narrator, Esther Summerson of *Bleak House*, the importance of beauty is to be discovered by its loss. The attentions of Mr Guppy first alert us to Esther's functioning as an attractive object for men; until then she is rather eclipsed by her cousin Ada. Her own discussion of her looks only begins after she is disfigured in a severe illness. Although Esther struggles to accept the change, it

is difficult. When she first looks at herself in a mirror after the illness she comments:

I had never been a beauty, and had never thought myself one; but I had been very different from this. It was all gone now. Heaven was so good to me, that I could let it go with a few not bitter tears, and could stand there, arranging my hair for the night quite thankfully.<sup>16</sup>

However, she is reluctant to be seen by Ada, her beautiful friend, until she has convalesced, and she is grateful that Allan Woodcourt had not already become engaged to her before he left the country, sparing her the necessity of writing and releasing him from the engagement. Mr Guppy's reaction, and concerned withdrawal of any offer of marriage he ever made to Esther, are seen as ridiculous in the novel's terms, but various other consequences are not. Mr Jarndyce, Esther's guardian, who she has always thought of as a father, proposes to her. She remarks: 'But he did not hint to me, that when I had been better-looking, he had had this same proceeding in his thoughts, and had refrained from it. That when my old face was gone from me, and I had no attractions, he could love me just as well as in my fairer days' (p.538). Although this is meant to suggest Jarndyce's generosity, it also implies that once Esther has lost her looks she is more likely to accept what is, in terms of age, a very unsuitable marriage. We can see from these events, how important Esther's position as a physically desirable object of men's gazes is. Towards the end of the novel Allan Woodcourt declares his unchanged love for Esther in the following terms: 'You do not know what all around you see in Esther Summerson, how many hearts she touches and awakens, what sacred admiration and

what love she wins' (p.731). By this stage, Esther's physical appearance has been replaced by a metaphysical beauty that outweighs any defects. The man who loves her is able to see her 'beauty of spirit'. However, this does not really change the prevailing stress on women's appearance: Esther is a sort of exceptional saint who exceeds, but does not alter, the dominant modes of understanding women: she is still beautiful in a way.

The attitude to looking and being looked at in *Villette* is not, then, just a function of being a narrator. Female narrators in novels by both men and women are more willing than Lucy to accept their own functioning as objects of the masculine gaze. The question is whether the very different association of femininity in *Villette* with a masculine specular strategy is empowering or weakening for Lucy and the feminine reader. I would argue that at the beginning of the novel this 'reversal of the gaze' functions primarily to situate Lucy as a consistent, rational, self-determining subject. The implicit masculinity of this becomes important later in the novel, or on a retrospective/active reading. At that stage questions about the relation of femininity to the masculine gaze are explicitly raised, and I will discuss them later in this chapter.

Lucy's solitude in taking important decisions about her future also develops our early impression of her as independent, rational and autonomous. Her decision to go abroad is representative:

My state of mind, and all accompanying circumstances, were just now such as most to favour the adoption of a new, resolute, and daring - perhaps

desperate - line of action. I had nothing to lose. Unutterable loathing of a desolate existence past forbade return. If I failed in what I now designed to undertake, who, save myself, would suffer? If I died far away from - home, I was going to say, but I had no home - from England, then, who would weep? (V p.110)

Lucy's lack of emotional and personal ties emphasises her isolation. Her implied definition of 'home' as the place where she was loved rather than the place of her birth loads more emotional weight onto her refusal of the word. She also daringly rejects the social ties of allegiance to country by her statement that she has nothing to lose by leaving England. Victorian Imperialist ideas of 'Empire' are not explicitly part of her move abroad, although her treatment of Labassecour and its people when she gets there actually relies heavily on an internalised image of England. The decision to travel to foreign climes also suggests the ambition/adventure plot, in which the hero faces with bravura a series of trials in exotic situations, emerging finally unscathed and enriched by his experiences. A feminine protagonist does not change what is an essentially masculine structure. As Teresa de Lauretis writes:

The hero who crosses the boundary and penetrates the other space...is constructed as human being and as male; he is the active principle of culture, the establisher of distinction, the creator of differences. Female is what is not susceptible to transformation, to life or death; she (it) is an element of plot-space, a topos, a resistance, matrix and matter.<sup>17</sup>

Lucy's curious happiness in such isolated situations is directly related to both the functioning of the ambition narrative and the construction of the independent, self-reliant subject. The scenes when she goes aboard the *Vivid* are good examples. Her situation ought to be extremely

depressing. The few people around her take advantage of her and tease her. The waiter, who she thinks is her friend because of his earlier kindness to her, sniggers because she over-tips him. The driver who takes her to the wharf is warned not to 'leave her to the watermen', but instead 'he offered me up as oblation, [sic] served me as a dripping roast, making me alight in the midst of a throng of watermen' (V p.110). This image, which combines domestic preparation with sacrifice, suggests Lucy's helplessness and victimisation. The watermen are unhelpful and fight over Lucy's bags and person. But once making for the ship, however, Lucy's spirits revive. She finds herself strengthened rather than otherwise by her isolation: 'I asked myself if I was wretched or terrified. I was neither. Often in my life have I been far more so under comparatively safe circumstances. "How is this?" said I. "Methinks I am animated and alert, instead of being depressed and apprehensive?" I could not tell how it was' (V p.111). Later, on deck, she makes a final assertion of her mental and spiritual independence:

Throughout the afternoon I remained on deck alone. When I recall the tranquil, and even happy mood in which I passed those hours, and remember, at the same time, the position in which I was placed: its hazardous - some would have said its hopeless - character; I feel that, as -

Stone walls do not a prison make,

Nor iron bars - a cage.

so peril, loneliness, an uncertain future, are not oppressive evils, so long as the frame is healthy and the faculties are employed; so long, especially, as Liberty lends us her wings, and Hope guides us by her star. (V p.117)

Lucy's recourse to Liberty and Hope are important clues to her 'tranquil, and even happy mood'. When completely alone or amongst strangers she can believe in the idea that her

subjectivity is *non-relational*. She has consistently made somewhat defensive attempts to keep aloof from the veiled early childhood experiences that are pre-narrative, unnarrated or unnarratable and also from the displays of emotion resulting from relations with others shown by Polly, her father, and to a lesser extent Graham and Mrs Bretton. Maybe these are the 'comparatively safe circumstances' in which Lucy has previously felt 'wretched or terrified' (V p.111). The 'bird of freedom', Liberty, reassures her that she is free of the influences of others on her sense of her self. She can be the independent, *self-determining* subject of liberal-humanist doctrine. The star of Hope promises her that her circumstances can change to accommodate more happily that self. And that change must take place through narrative, through the bildung and ambition plots of masculine realist fiction. As yet there is only a faint sense that Lucy's femininity could be a problematic issue in her reliance on these personifications.

I have stressed the ways in which *Villette* develops its early construction of Lucy as a calm, rational, independent subject that is unified and innate, and explored how these ideas are related to narrative and also reliant on ideas and structures that are implicitly masculine. Underlying my discussion and the text itself has been an awareness that this subject is at any moment about to collapse and deconstruct itself because of its internal contradictions. These contradictions are also a function of narrative, in that knowledge of subsequent events and



changes in the way the subject is theorised affect a (re)reading of the early chapters of the novel.

'The Strong Native Bent of the Heart' (V p.252)

As the novel progresses, these conceptions of Lucy as a subject are undercut by the emergence of an opposing self, which has been straining beneath the first in the early pages, and now comes increasingly to the fore, although it works simultaneously with the first self rather than replacing it. This is the self where emotion and sexuality can be located. This construction of the subject relies on ideas about 'human nature', individuality, and a Christian view of the sinful personality. Felicia Gordon gives an excellent introduction to Victorian religious beliefs and controversies and their effect on the Brontës.<sup>18</sup> She discusses both the Evangelical Movement and the Oxford Movement and stresses the importance of debates about Predestination versus free individual will which occurred regardless of denomination (p.78). Brontë's ambiguous class position (see Terry Eagleton p.4) was echoed in the multiplicity of her direct religious influences: her Aunt Branwell, who was Calvinist, her father, who was 'Low Church', and the curates at Haworth, who were High Church. As Gordon puts it: 'The Brontës struggled to follow the religious impulse to transcendence and freedom, while undergoing the imperatives of a narrow moral/religious orthodoxy' (p.85).

It may seem odd that both diametrically opposed ideas about the subject in *Villette* are theorised using doctrines with a similar view of the self as innate and consistent, but there is an important difference that can be located on the spectrum of gender. Whereas the rational, self-determining subject uses *masculine* models and narrative structures for its articulation, this second emotional, sexual self situates sexuality and emotion as explicitly feminine, borrowing from the concept of 'original sin', brought into the world by Eve. The emergence of this self in the text is reliant on eruptions in the narrative that are not part of its progressive bildung plot, and also on recurring patterns of imagery and symbolism that function synchronically rather than diachronically.

A good example of an eruption of emotion in the text that is explicitly related to the position of femininity in religious discourse is the chapter where Lucy is left completely alone in the Rue Fossette over the vacation and suffers a nervous fever that emphasises the demands of her emotional, sexual self. The resulting nervous illness leads to her visiting a Catholic priest's confessional, desperate for emotional contact. When Lucy 'confesses' that she is Protestant, and extremely lonely, the priest is initially stuck for a response, but he then comments:

'My daughter...Were you of our faith I should know what to say - a mind so tossed can find repose but in the bosom of retreat, and the punctual practice of piety. The world, it is well known, has no satisfaction for that class of natures. Holy men have bidden penitents like you to hasten their path upward by penance, self-denial, and difficult good works. Tears are given them here for meat and drink - bread of affliction and waters of affliction - their recompense comes hereafter. It is my own conviction that these impressions under which you are smarting

are messengers from God to bring you back to the true church. You were made for our faith: depend upon it our faith alone could heal and help you - Protestantism is altogether too dry, cold, prosaic for you. (V p.234)

Père Silas attributes Lucy's loneliness in the absence of emotional warmth to her 'nature' but suggests that this is a sin she should be 'penitent' about. He also suggestively uses the association between water and life that we have already seen in the novel. He tantalises Lucy with promises of a religion that would allow her emotional personality full rein, and remove the 'burden' of her self-responsibility from her; but the image of retreat he offers, consisting of 'penance, self-denial, and difficult good works', does not bear this out, seeming to echo Lucy's life as it has recently been rather than suggesting an alternative.

The relation of femininity to Père Silas's discussion with Lucy is not explicit. His vision of the afflicted soul finding solace in retreat is almost deliberately ungendered, but Lucy herself makes the gender and power relations of his discourse obvious in her response:

That priest had arms which could influence me; he was naturally kind, with a sentimental French kindness, to whose softness I knew myself not wholly impervious. Without respecting some sorts of affection, there was hardly any sort, having a fibre of root in reality, which I could rely on my force wholly to withstand. Had I gone to him...I know not how it would all have ended...the probabilities are that had I visited Numero 10, Rue des Mages, at the hour and day appointed, I might just now, instead of writing this heretic narrative, be counting my beads in the cell of a certain Carmelite convent on the Boulevard of Crecy in Villette. (V p.235)

The word play on 'arms', suggesting both an embrace as well as a type of weapon implies that masculine wiles promising affection to a lonely woman are behind Père Silas's offer

of help. His intention is that Lucy should become another 'bride of Christ', or virgin martyr. The division in Lucy's self is clearly apparent in the passage as her 'force', or rational, independent self resists her need for kindness.

Lucy's collapse results in her reawakening in circumstances strangely redolent of Bretton, an uncanny experience (in the Freudian sense), in that it is the *familiar* that becomes strange. The reappearance of images and symbols of early life is in a sense regressive for the bildung/ambition plot. Once the specifics are explained however, Lucy would seem to have fallen on her feet, finding friends and emotional response just when she needed them most. Her reaction, though, is odd. She exhorts herself not to "think of them too often, too much, too fondly...to feel enough sustained by an occasional, amicable intercourse, rare, brief, unengrossing and tranquil: quite tranquil" (V p.251). The opening of the next chapter remarks explicitly on the necessity of keeping emotion in check:

These struggles with the natural character, the strong native bent of the heart, may seem futile and fruitless, but in the end they do good. They tend, however slightly, to give the actions, the conduct, that turn which Reason approves, and which Feeling, perhaps, too often opposes: they certainly make a difference in the general tenor of a life, and enable it to be better regulated, more equable, quieter on the surface; and it is on the surface only the common gaze will fall. As to what lies below, leave that with God. Man, your equal, weak as you, and not fit to be your judge, may be shut out thence: take it to your Maker - show Him the secrets of the spirit He gave - ask Him how you are to bear the pains He has appointed - kneel in His presence, and pray with faith for light in darkness, for strength in piteous weakness, for patience in extreme need. Certainly, at some hour, though perhaps not *your* hour, the waiting waters will stir; in *some* shape, though perhaps not the shape you dreamed, which your heart loved, and for which it bled, the healing herald will descend. The cripple and

the blind, and the dumb, and the possessed, will be led to bathe. (V p.252)

Lucy herself situates emotional response as 'natural character', or 'native bent'. She uses metaphors of depth and height, interior and exterior, to position Feeling and Reason, the suggestion being that her body image, or morphology, is of a surface that is impervious to the 'common gaze', hiding Feeling from view. This 'privatisation' of emotion is excellently discussed by John Kucich in his book *Repression in Victorian Fiction: Charlotte Brontë, Charles Dickens and George Eliot* (see note 3). The emotional self is explicitly Christian: only God can understand the 'spirit He gave', and provide relief from life's tribulations. The reference to the pool of Bethesda (John, v, 4), is complicated in the passage by heaven's whimsical response, which may provide relief in a different way to that desired by the bather! It could be said that this is what happens in the novel, in that Monsieur Paul gives Lucy the love that she initially wants from Graham. I would suggest that this passage is one of many that would confirm a reader's binary oppositional model of gender, by encouraging the implicit association of femininity with Feeling and masculinity with Reason.

The articulation of the emotional and sexual subject in a more vertical, lyric way than the progressive, teleological pattern in the novel is heavily reliant on imagery and symbolism from the natural world such as water, storm, and the moon. It also uses pervasive imagery of rooms, enclosures and containers. This language has been extensively discussed by many writers, for example Judith Plotz (see note 5) and Linda Hunt (see note 7), but has

infrequently been related to the functioning of *narrative*. Penny Boumelha is one writer who comments that 'Excess is, indeed, always threatening here, with storm and flood, to overwhelm the line of nineteenth-century realist narrative, with its appropriate drives toward sequence, causality and typicality' (p.103). She locates female desire as a feminine narrative strategy (p.20). However, I would argue that Brontë's text eventually *undermines* the binary opposition set up between its two constructions of the subject, and does not privilege one in particular as authentically female.

I would like to look at two passages that combine this emphasis on imagery from the natural world with that of rooms and enclosures. The first is a passage discussing Lucy's life with Miss Marchmont:

Two hot, close rooms thus became my world; and a crippled old woman, my mistress, my friend, my all. Her service was my duty - her pain, my suffering - her relief, my hope - her anger, my punishment - her regard, my reward. I forgot that there were fields, woods, rivers, seas, an everchanging sky outside the steam-dimmed lattice of this sick-chamber; I was almost content to forget it. All within me became narrowed to my lot. (V p.97)

The language of this passage is simultaneously persuasive and attractive and constraining and limiting. The panorama outside the sick-room: 'fields, woods, rivers, seas', reintroduces the pervasive water imagery and externalises it in order to develop the sense that Lucy's own emotional life suffers from being incarcerated with Miss Marchmont. It is also apparent in the 'steam-dimmed lattice' and two 'hot, close rooms' of the sick chamber. The contrast between the heat and intensity of Miss Marchmont's emotion, and the cold, wet world outside (associated with Lucy)

causes condensation to form on the windows. The use of the sick-chamber as a symbol of the repressed and confined life that Lucy must lead is evocative of both the female body and the emotional self. As a result it strains a more conventional split between body and mind. The powerful sentence 'all within me became narrowed to my lot' suggests that Lucy is simultaneously attracted by and chafes at the boundaries set for her by 'fate'. The comfort and stability that Miss Marchmont provides are quite persuasive in that they give Lucy security. Later she comments: 'For these things I would have crawled on with her for twenty years' (V p.97). The passage also implies a profound ambivalence about the bildung/ambition plot, and the necessity of going out into the world, which is also externalised as part of the environment outside the sick room.

Another notable passage that combines water and room imagery concerns Lucy's convalescence at the Bretton household after her fainting fit:

My calm little room seemed somehow like a cave in the sea. There was no colour about it, except that white and pale green, suggestive of foam and deep water; the blanched cornice was adorned with shell-shaped ornaments, and there were white mouldings like dolphins in the ceiling-angles. Even that one touch of colour visible in the red satin pincushion bore affinity to coral; even that dark, shining glass might have mirrored a mermaid. When I closed my eyes, I heard a gale, subsiding at last, bearing upon the house-front like a settling swell upon a rock-base. I heard it drawn and withdrawn far, far off, like a tide retiring from the shore of the upper world - a world so high above that the rush of its largest waves, the dash of its fiercest breakers could sound in this submarine home, only like murmurs and a lullaby. (V p.254-5)

This passage uses the water imagery differently by going *under* water, which may suggest a complete immersion (or baptism) in the emotional personality. The passage seems to

enact a psychic 'regression': the pastel colours suggest a nursery; the faint suggestion of adult female heterosexual sexuality (the red satin pincushion presumably stuffed with pins) is naturalised in to a harmless component of the ocean floor; the 'dark shining glass [that] might have mirrored a mermaid' implies a problem with the self image reminiscent of the baby's confused mis/recognition of its reflection in the Lacanian mirror phase. The final sentence is a womb-like fantasy of unification with the mother's body that situates the threat of life's tribulations far above, so that the bildung/ambition plot takes on the associations of water moving *on the surface*. The use of Lucy's room as the ideal interior - the maternal womb - makes explicit the antithetical movement of the emotion and bildung/ambition plots.

The recurrent use and convergence of water and room symbolism is germane to the construction of the emotional, sexual subject in *Villette*. It is clear that such imagery pervasively implies the gendered nature of this subject by its consistent suggestions of a feminine morphology and its 'regressive' narrative patterns. It is also clear that there is a profound discomfort in the narrative about the relationship between the rational, independent, self-determining subject and the emotional, sexual subject. Both selves are seen as innate and consistent, and are viewed as pre-existing language and sociality. They are gendered in different ways, using masculine and feminine theoretical and narrative models respectively. The relationship between narrative and the subject also relies on the positioning of each type of subjectivity at different stages of the



narrative: the rational self predominates at the opening of the novel and the emotional self becomes more important as it progresses. However, it has been difficult to keep both constructions of the subject apart during specific analyses, which suggests the degree to which Brontë's text is always on the verge of collapsing its distinctions.

Disruptive Epiphanies: 'Too Resistless Was the Delight of Staying with the Wild Hour' (V p.176)

This collapse and slippage is even more specific in Lucy's epiphanies, which have important implications for a new reading of the feminine subject. An early example is the scene after Miss Marchmont's death where Lucy is walking home from visiting her old servant to ask advice about her future and receives a revelation that she should go to London:

Still all inward darkness, I left her about twilight; a walk of two miles lay before me; it was a clear, frosty night. In spite of my solitude, my poverty, and my perplexity, my heart, nourished and nerved with the vigour of a youth that had yet counted twenty-three summers, beat light and not feebly. Not feebly, I am sure, or I should have trembled in that lonely walk, which lay through still fields, and passed neither village nor farm-house, nor cottage; I should have quailed in the absence of moonlight, for it was by the leading of stars only I traced the dim path; I should have quailed still more in the unwonted presence of that which to-night shone in the north, a moving mystery - the Aurora Borealis. But this solemn stranger influenced me otherwise than through my fears. Some new power it seemed to bring. I drew in energy with the keen, low breeze that blew on its path. A bold thought was sent to my mind; my mind was made strong to receive it.

'Leave this wilderness', it was said to me, 'and go out hence'.

'Where?' was the query.

I had not far to look: gazing from this country parish in the flat, rich middle of England - I mentally saw within reach what I had never yet beheld with my bodily eyes; I saw London. (V pp.103-104)

This scene is apparently part of the masculine ambition/bildung plot, in that the revelation encourages Lucy's forward movement to London, and thence to Vilette, propelling her on an adventure in foreign climes that encourages the narrative progression. It uses the motif of the solitary pilgrim and again suggests the curious happiness in being alone that establishes Lucy as a self-determining individual. But there are several problems with this reading as it stands. The revelation stems from a natural phenomenon, and I have already established the importance of nature imagery in suggesting the feminine, emotional, sexual subject. Inga-Stina Ewbank writes: 'If, as philosophers and scientists thought, woman was closer than man to nature, then Lucy's closeness is not only to her sexual nature...but also to a strange, Romantic, [sic] bond with natural forces and phenomena'.<sup>19</sup> This imagery is apparent elsewhere, in the phrase 'my heart, nourished and nerved with the vigour of a youth that had yet counted twenty-three summers', which uses the heart, the 'seat of the emotions' as a metaphor for the subject. The reader becomes doubtful about exactly where the revelation stems from, increasingly associating it with Lucy's emotional self. This awareness of the divided subject is actualised in the passage as a split between mental darkness and clear vision, between '*inward* darkness' and a walk in a '*clear, frosty* night'; and London, '*mentally* within reach', but '*never yet beheld with my bodily eyes*'. Judith Newton writes: 'The influence of the aurora

borealis...functions...to assure the reader that Lucy is not as unfeminine and daring as she seems: reader, the aurora borealis made me do it' (p.114). She situates this as part of Brontë's ambivalent relationship to contemporary models of femininity, but I would suggest that it serves to distance Lucy from the implicitly masculine ambition/bildung plot, by showing that she does not make an active, conscious choice, but an unconscious one that has more to do with a feminine narrative of emotional response. The reader is left unsure exactly what aspects of Lucy's 'nature' are being served by this epiphany, which encourages a questioning of prevailing definitions of the feminine subject so far.

One of the most important epiphanies in *Villette* occurs at the end of Chapter Twelve, where Lucy is sitting alone in the Pensionnat Beck's forbidden alley. The scene begins with Lucy pondering the contrast between the school environment and the nearby night-life of the town:

On the night in question, I was sitting on the hidden seat reclaimed from fungi and mould, listening to what seemed the far-off sounds of the city. Far-off, in truth, they were not: this school was in the city's centre; hence, it was but five minutes' walk to the park, scarce ten - to buildings of palatial splendour. Quite near were wide streets brightly lit, teeming at this moment with life: carriages were rolling through them, to balls or to the opera. The same hour which tolled curfew for our convent, which extinguished each lamp, and dropped the curtain round each couch, rung for the gay city about us the summons to festal enjoyment. (V p.175)

Lucy's musings display a sophisticated awareness of relativity: she perceives that the observer's presence changes perceptions of space and time. For her, the school might just as well be miles away from the excitements of Villette society. Her next statement: 'Of this contrast I

thought not, however' (V p.175), is somewhat contradictory given her earlier reflections. She continues:

Gay instincts my nature had few; ball or opera I had never seen; and though often I had heard them described, and even wished to see them, it was not the wish of one who hopes to partake a pleasure if she could only reach it - who feels fitted to shine in some bright distant sphere, could she but thither win her way; it was no yearning to attain, no hunger to taste; only the calm desire to look on a new thing. (V p.175)

The reader may find it difficult to take Lucy at her word here, and statements such as these are important in building up our sense that Lucy is an unreliable narrator. The narration of this passage mainly allows us to see Lucy's desire to 'shine in some bright distant sphere', so that the emotional, sexual personality is shown to lie behind the rational observer. This is also apparent in the use of words like 'yearning' and 'hunger'. This self is closely connected, as this quotation makes clear, with being an object of the male gaze, as opposed to a calm looker-on, or gazer. The two issues of narration and specularisation are closely related and will be discussed later, but are frequently highlighted in moments of epiphany.

Lucy's reflections make her strangely receptive to the sight of the crescent moon:

A moon was in the sky, not a full moon but a young crescent. I saw her through a space in the boughs over-head. She and the stars, visible beside her, were no strangers where all else was strange: my childhood knew them. I had seen that golden sign with the dark globe in its curve leaning back on azure, beside an old thorn at the top of an old field, in Old England, in long past days, just as it now leaned back beside a stately spire in this continental capital.

Oh, my childhood! I had feelings: passive as I lived, little as I spoke, cold as I looked, when I thought of past days I *could* feel. About the present, it was better to be stoical: about the future - such a

future as mine - to be dead. And in catalepsy and a dead trance I studiously held the quick of my nature. (V p.175)

Lucy's epiphany is an attempt to provide a sense of constancy and continuity in her self. She is searching here for a pre-mirror phase identity with no fissures. The 'golden sign with the dark globe in its curve' may initially function as a sign of imminent storm and be a reference to Coleridge's 'Dejection Ode'.<sup>20</sup> Coleridge's poem is headed with a quotation from the Ballad of Sir Patrick Spens:

Late, late yestreen I saw the new Moon,  
With the old Moon in her arms;  
And I fear, I fear, my Master dear!  
We shall have a deadly storm. (p.362)

Coleridge then uses the image himself:

For lo! the New-moon winter-bright!  
And overspread with phantom light,  
(With swimming phantom light o'erspread  
But rimmed and circled by a silver thread)  
I see the old Moon in her lap, foretelling  
The coming-on of rain and squally blast.  
And oh! that even now the gust were swelling,  
And the slant night-shower driving loud and fast!  
Those sounds which oft have raised me, whilst they  
awed,  
And sent my soul abroad,  
Might now perhaps their wonted impulse give,  
Might startle this dull pain, and make it move and  
live! (p.363)

Lucy's reaction to the subsequent storm in *Villette* is close to that which Coleridge is looking for. The moon is also, though, a perfectly complete image, a holistic, harmoniously complementary transcendental signified. But although it is a sign for Lucy's longed for unity of self, its split also signifies a rupture or division in the self that can never be healed, so that a recognition of the split subject pervades attempts to perceive it as whole. The memories of childhood the image provokes suggest that

Lucy's emotion can only be awakened in a self-conscious way retroactively. This is clearly an attempt to control emotion and keep it in proper boundaries, so that childhood probably takes on all the weight of the unhappy present as well. The phrase 'in catalepsy and a dead trance, I studiously held the quick of my nature', introduces the violent imagery associated with the split subject. The 'I' takes on the associations of repression, isolation and defence which we have linked with the rational, empirical subject. The 'quick of my nature' suggests a sexual metaphor as well as the innately emotional feminine self. This sense of an alter ego or double also begins to personify the split subject.

The tone of Lucy's narrative changes now to a cooler, more conversational register: 'At this time, I well remember whatever could excite - certain accidents of the weather, for instance, were almost dreaded by me, because they woke the being I was always lulling, and stirred up a craving cry I could not satisfy' (V pp.175-6). There is a degree of temporal confusion here. Is the 'this time' the present of Lucy's old age, as she sits and writes the narrative, or the present of that particular stage in Lucy's life? This confusion stresses the text's awareness of its concern with questions of narrative and subjectivity. Other epiphanies are recollected within the first, an embedding which leads to a sort of expansion or intensification of the emotions associated with them. The emotional self becomes 'a being' with 'a craving cry', a Hyde-like double with a voraciously animal hunger. The narrative division between the 'I' who is writing from a

distance, and the 'I' whose feelings are being recollected, falls across the split between rational, repressive, and emotional, sexual self.

The narrative then moves again from the general to a specific epiphany, with a corresponding blending of the two personalities: 'As for me, the tempest took hold of me with tyranny, I was roughly roused and obliged to live' (V p.176). The 'I' and the 'me' are now synonymous with the emotional, sexual subject. The cause of Lucy's strange reaction to the storm (she gets out of the window and sits on the windowsill), is said to be the weather, as if to obviate personal responsibility as in the Aurora Borealis scene. The peak of the storm provides a satisfaction that is implicitly sexual: 'I could not go in: too resistless was the delight of staying with the wild hour, black and full of thunder, pealing out such an ode as language never delivered to man - too terribly glorious, the spectacle of clouds, split and pierced by white and blinding bolts' (V p.176). There is an explicit contradiction in the storm's being 'beyond language', but described to the reader in a way that relishes words.

The concluding comment of this episode returns us to the metaphor of physical violence for emotional and sexual repression:

I did long, achingly, then and for four-and-twenty hours afterwards, for something to fetch me out of my present existence, and lead me upwards and onwards. This longing, and all of a similar kind, it was necessary to knock on the head; which I did, figuratively, after the manner of Jael to Sisera, driving a nail through their temples. Unlike Sisera, they did not die: they were but transiently stunned, and at intervals would turn on the nail with a rebellious wrench; then did the temples bleed, and the brain thrill to its core.

To night, I was not so mutinous, nor so miserable, [sic] My Sisera lay quiet in the tent, slumbering. (V p.176)

Jael, the wife of Heber, killed Sisera by tricking him into sleeping in her tent, and then driving a tent peg through his head. (See Judges, iv, 1-24.) The passage expands the implied personification of 'Feeling' and 'Reason' as doubles or alter egos by using this Old Testament story of female violence. The separation of the two selves is again rigidly enforced, but there is a suspicious suggestion of sado-masochistic pleasure in the turning of Lucy's longings on the nail, which 'thrills the brain to its core'. The emotional self, starved of outlets at every turn, is forced to find release in the very repressive measures used to subdue it. This serves to break down the division between the two halves of the split subject, showing, as this whole epiphany does, that our notions of the subject must be more fluid than previously thought. The two conceptions of Lucy Snowe as a subject are constantly overtaking each other's territory, and are always shifting and unstable.

During the long vacation, Lucy's nervous illness provokes strange dreams and imaginings that terrify and disturb her. Her distress is clearly situated as an eruption of the emotional, sexual personality by the way that the weather mirrors her worsening condition:

At last a day and night of peculiarly agonizing depression were succeeded by physical illness, I took perforce to my bed. About this time the Indian summer closed and the equinoctial storms began; and for nine dark and wet days, of which the Hours rushed on all turbulent, deaf, dishevelled - bewildered with sounding hurricane - I lay in a strange fever of the nerves and blood. (V p.231)

The fever 'of the nerves and blood' links Lucy's physical and emotional response together, refusing to adhere to a



split between mind and body, but insisting that both are closely connected. Lucy's inability to sleep is only interrupted by an epiphany in the form of a terrible dream:

By the clock of St Jean Baptiste, that dream remained scarce fifteen minutes - a brief space, but sufficing to wring my whole frame with unknown anguish; to confer a nameless experience that had the hue, the mien, the terror, the very tone of a visitation from eternity. Between twelve and one that night a cup was forced to my lips, black, strong, strange, drawn from no well, but filled up seething from a bottomless and boundless sea. Suffering, brewed in temporal or calculable measure, and mixed for mortal lips, tastes not as this suffering tasted. Having drank [sic] and woke, I thought all was over: the end come and past by...Some fearful hours went over me: indescribably was I torn, racked and oppressed in mind. Amidst the horrors of that dream I think the worst lay here. Methought the well-loved dead, who had loved *me* well in life, met me elsewhere, alienated. (V p.231)

Lucy tells us that her suffering did not occur on the level of the rational, empirical experience, or self - the 'temporal or calculable measure'. The cup forced to her lips is imaged as a witches' brew, drawn from the depths of the sea, or Lucy's emotional self. This suggests that it is Lucy's unconscious that is making her suffer, an idea supported by the *dream* of her alienated loved ones. If we see Lucy's dream as an unconscious *wish or desire*, then it would seem inexplicable. The only way to explain it in these terms would be to analyse the dream as a highly displaced and condensed wish that Lucy could be independent of the emotional ties and memories that prevent her from being a non-relational, self-determining subject. This would not seem impossible given the narrator's intention to establish Lucy in this way in the early chapters. The epiphany collapses the emotional subject into the rational one, showing that both are inextricably connected.

A second epiphany in the allee defendue occurs when Lucy decides to bury her letters from Graham, in recognition that his affections are now engaged with Polly. In doing so, she simultaneously represses and preserves, or 'buries alive', the emotions associated with her relationship with Dr John. After the letters have been safely deposited Lucy has the following strange experience:

The air of the night was very still, but dim with a peculiar mist, which changed the moonlight into a luminous haze. In this air, or this mist, there was some quality - electrical, perhaps - which acted in strange sort upon me. I felt then as I had felt a year ago in England - on a night when the aurora borealis was streaming and sweeping round heaven, when, belated in lonely fields, I had paused to watch that mustering of an army with banners - that quivering of serried lances - that swift ascent of messengers from below the north star to the dark, high keystone of heaven's arch. I felt, not happy, far otherwise, but strong with reinforced strength.

If life be a war, it seemed my destiny to conduct it single-handed. I pondered now how to break up my winter-quarters - to leave an encampment where food and forage failed. Perhaps, to effect this change, another pitched battle must be fought with fortune; if so, I had a mind to the encounter: too poor to lose, God might destine me to gain. But what road was open? - what plan available? (V p.381)

This experience, like the aurora borealis epiphany to which it refers, is overtly concerned to affirm Lucy's rational, independent self. The electrical metaphor suggests an empirically observed, scientific phenomenon, and the prevalence of imagery of battle, warfare, and travel along the 'open road' also refers the reader to the masculine bildung/ambition plot. Immediately following this epiphany, however, Lucy again sees the nun who has been persecuting her in the attics and alleys of the school. The most obvious function of the nun in the novel is as a symbol of the return of Lucy's repressed emotions, but this is only a part of 'her' role. The issue seems to be that solving the

enigma of the nun by making it into a disguise worn by de Hamal doesn't use up the surplus supernatural and psychological affect caused earlier in the novel. As Christina Crosby puts it, 'The nun is invested with symbolic significances incompatible with the mystery's solution' (p.704). Mary Jacobus comments on the uncertainty over whether the nun has a realist or symbolic function in the novel: 'The effect of this uncertainty...is to challenge the monopolistic claims of realism on "reality" - to render its representations no less fictive and arbitrary than the Gothic and Romantic modes usually viewed as parasitic'.<sup>21</sup> She adds that the nun signifies a Lacanian lack, and 'derives her significance from her place in the signifying chain' (p.51). This would mean that, rather than giving us the 'correct' reading of Lucy as emotionally and sexually repressed, as opposed to rational and independent, the nun actually functions to deconstruct this opposition, showing either position to be merely strategic or provisional. John Kucich sees this similarly when he writes that 'the nun is also, quite literally, a piece of acting - a theatrical use of repression as a disguise...the nun calls attention to the performative nature of Lucy's repressive emotional organization' (p.69). The link in this scene between an epiphany and the appearance of the nun suggests that epiphanies function similarly in the novel to question the binary division of Lucy's subjectivity by demonstrating that each self inheres inescapably in the other.

Some of the most impressive scenes of the novel are contained in the chapters set at the fête. The whole

episode is like one long epiphany, with a surreal and dreamlike quality offset by Lucy's frequent protestations that all can be rationally explained. The fête scenes cannot be said to belong to the progression of the bildung/ambition narrative as they provide Lucy with additional, confusing information that serves to disrupt the narrative's movement towards closure. The knowledge that Monsieur Paul has not yet sailed seems to give hope, but is swiftly followed by false information that he is to be married on his return from Guadeloupe to his ward, Justine Marie. This information is not necessary to provide a traditional obstacle to be overcome by the gallant hero(ine) - that has already been created by Paul's trip abroad. It seems merely designed to give Lucy yet more emotional wrenches.

The fête scenes open with Lucy's delirious reaction to the drug with which Madame Beck has tried to sedate her: 'Instead of stupor, came excitement. I became alive to new thought - to reverie peculiar in colouring. A gathering call ran among the faculties, their bugles sang, their trumpets rang an untimely summons. Imagination was roused from her rest, and she came forth impetuous and venturous' (V pp.546-547). The use of battle metaphors for the rousing of Imagination - the faculty of emotion - is odd in the novel's terms. Such imagery is more usually seen when discussing the rational, reasoning self. Imagination instructs Lucy to 'look forth and view the night' and shows her 'the park, the summer-park, with its long alleys all silent, lone and safe; among these lay a huge stone-basin - that basin I knew, and beside which I had often stood -

deep-set in the tree-shadows, brimming with cool water, clear, with a green, leafy, rushy bed' (V p.547). This basin functions as an internalised image of the whole and complete subject, and acts as the impetus for Lucy's venturing into the park. As she gets near it she enters into a strange world 'stranger than dreams' (V p.549), where she sees an almost spectral vision of Paulina and her father with Graham and Mrs Bretton in an open carriage, which serves as an emblem of their future happiness and birth under a 'lucky star'. As she enters the park she finds herself in:

A land of enchantment, a garden most gorgeous, a plain sprinkled with coloured meteors, a forest with sparks of purple and ruby and golden fire gemming the foliage; a region, not of trees and shadow, but of strangest architectural wealth - of altar and of temple, of pyramid, obelisk, and sphynx; incredible to say, the wonders and the symbols of Egypt teemed throughout the park of Villette. (V p.550)

At this stage, the reader must be completely confused as to the status of this epiphany: is it 'real', is Lucy dreaming or drugged? The next paragraph apparently clarifies the issue for us:

No matter that in five minutes the secret was mine - the key of the mystery picked up, and its illusion unveiled - no matter that I quickly recognized the material of these solemn fragments - the timber, the paint, and the pasteboard - these inevitable discoveries failed to quite destroy the charm, or undermine the marvel of that night. No matter that I now seized the explanation of the whole great fête - a fête of which the conventual Rue Fossette had not tasted, though it had opened at dawn that morning, and was still in full vigour near midnight. (V p.550)

Lucy's explanation does not undermine, as she recognises, the 'charm' and 'marvel' of the previous description. The very status of what is 'real', in what she observes and writes, and what we read, is being questioned in the

juxtaposition of these two passages, as it is in episodes involving the nun, and other epiphanies in the novel. This questioning includes definitions of the 'real' Lucy Snowe. The emphasis on metaphors of interpretation is striking: the key; the veil; the grasping hand 'seizing' the correct reading. The proliferation of these metaphors suggests an anxious need to persuade that in fact undermines our belief that Lucy can be telling the truth. After detailing the history of this fete Lucy remarks:

I lost sight of the party which, from the middle of the great square, I had followed - or, rather, they vanished like a group of apparitions. On this whole scene was impressed a dream-like character; every shape was wavering, every movement floating, every voice echo-like - half-mocking, half-uncertain. Paulina and her friends being gone, I scarce could avouch that I had really seen them. (V p.551)

The rationalising of the spectral vision of the park and its inhabitants is here reversed, with the rationalisation itself being doubted, and the visionary imagery returning. The dreamlike quality of the evening continues as Lucy's search for the stone basin is prevented at every turn: 'I knew my route, yet it seemed as if I was hindered from pursuing it direct: now a sight, and now a sound, called me aside, luring me down this alley and down that' (V pp.551-552).

Lucy disguises herself as a peasant to prevent being recognised, remarking 'I rather liked to find myself the silent, unknown, consequently unaccosted neighbour of the short petticoat and the sabot; and only the distant gazer at the silk robe, the velvet mantel, and the plumed chapeau. Amidst so much life and joy, too, it suited me to be alone - quite alone' (V p.552). This pleasure in being

alone and unrecognised is contradicted somewhat by her response to Monsieur Miret, the local bookseller, who 'knew me under my straw-hat and closely-folded shawl...and insisted on making a way for me through the crowd, and finding me a better situation' (V p.553). Lucy is flattered that he recognises her, and finds her a seat more appropriate to her true station in life. This displays the ambivalence about class identity that Bronte expresses elsewhere, in, for example, the plot of *Jane Eyre*, which returns Jane to her 'rightful station' at the end of the novel, through her inheritance as well as her marriage. Mrs Bretton and Monsieur de Bassompierre do not recognise Lucy in the same way, however. Finding herself next to them, she overhears remarks about herself that show their understanding of her to be a limited one. They perceive her to be 'steady'; 'quietly pleased'; 'little moved' (V p.554): attributes that suggest the rational, calm subject. Their misunderstanding of Lucy is equated with their inability to see her, so it is important that Graham notices her:

Possibly I might have spoken, but just then Graham turned...there was behind him a throng, a hundred ranks deep; there were thousands to meet his eye and divide its scrutiny - why then did he concentrate all on me - oppressing me with the whole force of that full, blue, steadfast orb? Why, if he *would* look, did not one glance satisfy him? why [sic] did he turn on his chair, rest his elbow on its black [sic], and study me leisurely? He could not see my face, I held it down; surely, he *could* not recognise me; I stooped, I turned, I *would* not be known. He rose, by some means he contrived to approach, in two minutes he would have had my secret; my identity would have been grasped between his, never tyrannous, but always powerful hands. There was but one way to evade or to check him. I implied, by a sort of supplicatory gesture, that it was my prayer to be let alone. (V pp.554-555)

Graham's masculine gaze silences Lucy's speech. The power, singularity, and consistency of his look is linked to an ability to perceive who she is. Lucy has to plead with him to leave her alone, which she does, not by looking at *him* but by avoiding his gaze. Graham's look is simultaneously a flattering mark of his closeness to Lucy (she remarks 'Graham's thoughts of me were not entirely those of a frozen indifference, after all' (V p.555)), and an index of his power over her, unlike her earlier look of recognition which he has the power to resent and reject.

The links in these scenes between identity, vision and disguise should be obvious. What is also important is the relationship of all three to narration. Lucy is positioned as a blank that does not attract the masculine gaze, but instead becomes the gazer. The place of watcher is closely connected to that of narrator in the novel. The main issue seems to be to what extent Lucy takes up this position deliberately, in other words does she disguise herself? And is this a positive, empowering, or negative strategy? Karen Lawrence comments: 'Lucy's plainness allows her to reverse the gaze, to observe the "mystery" of the male rather than provide the feminine mystique...The power in these possibilities helps to qualify Mary Jacobus's statement that "Lucy's invisibility is an aspect of her oppression"' (p.451). She discusses the way that writing (or narrating) provides an alternative to being viewed and interpreted in the novel. Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz discusses Lucy's narrative technique of withholding information as a 'defensive strategy'.<sup>22</sup> She also remarks that Lucy 'may gain some power or self-esteem from the self-conscious



adoption of a role that may have been enjoined on one by others' (p.248), referring in a footnote to Luce Irigaray's idea of mimesis. This would suggest that Lucy's adoption of disguises throughout the novel is a strategy of mimicry that acts out and exaggerates predominant patriarchal definitions of femininity appropriate to women of her social position in a way that leaves a resistant surplus. As Irigaray puts it:

To play with mimesis, is thus, for a woman, to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it. It means to resubmit herself...to 'ideas', in particular to ideas about herself, that are elaborated in/by a masculine logic, but so as to make 'visible', by an effect of playful repetition, what was supposed to remain invisible: the cover-up of a possible operation of the feminine in language. It also means to 'unveil' the fact that, if women are such good mimics, it is because they are not simply resorbed [sic] in this function. *They also remain elsewhere.*<sup>23</sup>

Lucy's ability to make herself into a blank, to disguise herself, merely exaggerates what is expected of a woman of her station by nearly all the characters in the novel. By doing this, she is able instead to watch and write about others in the way she wishes, the 'elsewhere' that Irigaray speaks of. However, this interpretation would accord a status to Lucy's narrative that it does not have. As Karen Lawrence goes on to argue in her article:

The 'myth' of full self-presence in writing as opposed to speech reverses the logocentrism that Derrida has traced in Western metaphysics - 'lack' for Lucy is stamped on her face, on her person, but is presumably completed in her writing. Yet the text as a whole deconstructs this opposition, showing that no medium fully reveals presence or conceals significance. Lucy's cypher-like face ultimately cannot retreat from textuality; however much Lucy sometimes strives to remain out of circulation as a sign, at the very least her person and speech are 'stamped' with deprivation, her presence bearing the mark of a lack. (p.454)

I would also add that Lucy's narrative constructs her textually in a way that develops our ideas about the consequences for the feminine subject of prevailing definitions of subjectivity, femininity, and narrative. The narrative is not an empowering alternative to Lucy's status in the 'real world', but instead highlights prevalent issues about reading and writing femininity, predominantly in its epiphanies.

As if to emphasise this, the remaining fete scenes seem almost ostentatiously concerned with interpretation, 'truth' and reliability. One mystery that Lucy narrates is the appearance of someone called Justine Marie - the same name as that of the woman who Monsieur Paul was going to marry, who ended her life in a nunnery. Lucy thinks that the nun who has been haunting her is the ghost of this dead fiancée, so that the imminent appearance has all the supernatural and psychological weight of discovering the nun's identity. Her arrival is described as follows:

It is over. The moment and the nun are come. The crisis and the revelation are passed by.

The flambeau glares still within a yard, held up in a park-keeper's hand; its long eager tongue of flame almost licks the figure of the Expected - there - where she stands full in my sight. What is she like? What does she wear? How does she look? Who is she?

There are many masks in the park to-night, and as the hour wears late, so strange a feeling of revelry and mystery begins to spread abroad, that scarce would you discredit me, reader, were I to say that she is like the nun of the attic, that she wears black skirts and white head-clothes, that she looks the resurrection of the flesh, and that she is a risen ghost.

All falsities - all figments! We will not deal in this gear. Let us be honest, and cut, as heretofore, from the homely web of truth.

*Homely*, though, is an ill-chosen word. What I see is not precisely homely. A girl of Villette stands there - a girl fresh from her pensionnat. She is very comely, with the beauty indigenous to this country;

she looks well-nourished, fair, and fat of flesh. (V pp.562-563)

Lucy titillates the reader by telling us that the long-awaited moment has come, yet not moving straight on to the description. She tells us that Justine Marie is right in front of her, lit up by the park lights, and she imitates our presumed questions, highlighting by this delay the fact that only she can give us the information we want to know. Then she suggests an alternative narrative that satisfies our presumed Gothic and Romantic fantasies. And then she berates herself and decides to tell us the homely 'truth'. But what she sees is 'not precisely homely', so if truth is homely, then she is still 'lying'. This Justine Marie is also not the nun, leaving that particular mystery unsolved. The stress on narration, interpretation and the references to other genres confuses our notions of what truth actually is.

Lucy then notices Monsieur Paul and overhears mention of his intended marriage to Justine Marie on his return. Her reaction is remarkable:

I might have paused longer upon what I saw; I might have deliberated ere I drew inferences. Some perhaps would have held the premises doubtful, the proofs insufficient; some slow sceptics would have incredulously examined...but far from me such shifts and palliatives, far from me such temporary evasion of the actual, such coward fleeing from the dread, the swift-footed, the all-overtaking Fact, such feeble suspense of submission to her the sole sovereign, such paltering and faltering resistance to the Power whose errand is to march conquering and to conquer, such traitor defection from the TRUTH.

No. I hastened to accept the whole plan. I extended my grasp and took it all in. I gathered it to me with a sort of rage of haste, and folded it round me, as the soldier struck on the field folds his colours about his breast. I invoked Conviction to nail upon me the certainty, abhorred while embraced, to fix it with the strongest spikes her strongest strokes could drive; and when the iron had entered well my

soul, I stood up, as I thought renovated. (V pp.565-566)

The passage makes truth into a goddess, or monarch, demanding immediate and total subjection from her adherents. Any refusal of this slavish adoration is seen as weak and cowardly. But this imagery divorces truth from rationality, empiricism and calm consideration, the traits with which it is traditionally identified. The second paragraph mixes battle similes with violent crucifixion scenes that, like the Jael and Sisera image, associate eruptions of pleasure with pain and repression.. This imagery implies a similar collapse of definitions of truth in its suggestion of the slippage of the rational and emotional personalities into one another.

Conclusion: Femininity as the 'Excluded Middle' or 'A and Not-A'

In this chapter I have discussed the predominant definitions of the split subject in *Villette*, showing how both the rational, independent self and the emotional, sexual self are gendered through their implicit theoretical and narrative models. It is also important that both constructions of the subject rely on the idea that subjectivity is innate, individual and unified, and pre-exists material and ideological practices such as language and sociality. My reading of the epiphanies in *Villette* emphasises that these definitions of the subject are always fluctuating, shifting, and overtaking each other's territory at such moments. This leads to a productive set

of questions about the feminine subject. If the binary opposition between the masculine and feminine models of the subject in the novel becomes unstable at certain points then the effectiveness of both these models and the binary opposition itself becomes doubtful. This implies that it is insufficient to see femininity as a complement or reflection of masculinity (in Nancy Jay's terms as Not-A). As Elizabeth Grosz writes when discussing Luce Irigaray's work: 'To reconceive of women and femininity in terms independent of men and masculinity requires a major reorganisation of sexual, linguistic and socio-symbolic systems, and indeed of desire itself'.<sup>24</sup> She later adds: 'To speak as woman...involves speaking from a position in the middle of the binaries (the so-called position of the "excluded middle"), affirming both poles while undoing their polarisation' (p.132). As Irigaray puts it:

Every dichotomizing - and at the same time redoubling - break, including the one between enunciation and utterance, has to be disrupted. Nothing is ever to be *posited* that is not also reversed and caught up again in the *supplementarity of this reversal*...we need to proceed in such a way that linear reading is no longer possible: that is, the retroactive impact of the end of each word, utterance, or sentence upon its beginning must be taken into consideration in order to undo the power of its teleological effect, including its deferred action. That would hold good also for the opposition between structures of horizontality and verticality that are at work in language. (p.80)

This is exactly what epiphanies do in the novel: suggest that femininity is simultaneously both of the definitions set up for it (A *and* Not-A), and neither of them (the "excluded middle"). The instability of the binary opposition in the text also suggests that the feminine subject is not adequately theorised as innate. A discussion of femininity and subjectivity *must* take account of

language, because it is through the slippage of language, especially in the epiphanies, that the feminine subject in *Villette* is constituted.

#### Notes

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2. Terry Eagleton, *Myths of Power: A Marxist Study of the Brontes* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1975), p.4.
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13. See Charlotte Bronte, *Villette*, edited by Herbert Rosengarten and Margaret Smith, *The Clarendon Edition of the Novels of the Brontes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), Appendix 1 pp.755-756.

14. Karen Lawrence, 'The Cypher: Disclosure and Reticence in *Villette*', *Nineteenth Century Literature*, 42 (1988), 448-466 (p.450).
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CHAPTER THREE: D. H. LAWRENCE'S *SONS AND LOVERS*, *THE RAINBOW* AND *WOMEN IN LOVE*: THE ROLE OF EPIPHANY IN POSITIONING THE FEMININE SUBJECT

Introduction: Theorising the 'Lawrentian' Subject

For the protagonists of Lawrence's fiction, subjectivity is an intensely problematic issue. The 'development' of the self is a question of central importance at the level of character and narrative. By this I mean that as well as the character's overt concern with subjectivity, the movement of the narrative is propelled from its beginning to end points by the 'quest' or desire for a secure sense of selfhood. Nearly all critics in some way notice the importance of this, for example, Daniel Allbright comments that 'his [Lawrence's] characters are engaged in a perpetual struggle of self-definition',<sup>1</sup> and Mara Kalnins remarks on the 'quest of his principal characters to create themselves into new being'.<sup>2</sup> Gavriel Ben-Ephraim suggests the structural importance of the use of subjectivity in the novels:

At the *plot's climactic moments*, the novels' protagonists undergo a *crisis of being* that endangers their very lives. The cycle of outward events culminates in the *achievement or dissolution of the character's inner self* and there is always the implicit question of whether salvation or catastrophe will claim him [sic]. [My italics]<sup>3</sup>

However, it seems insufficient, and rather mimetic, to simply accept this sense of subjectivity without further examining its implications, some of which could be elaborated as follows: the characters in Lawrence's novels



are aware of an insufficiency in their own sense of subjectivity and find it curiously unsatisfactory. This dissatisfaction is usually expressed as a feeling of disjunction between self and other, whether that 'other' is manifested as an object of sexual desire; an awareness of nature; a perception of 'society'; or a split *within* the subject. This 'self/other split' has been appropriated by various theoretical positions. Daniel Allbright sees it in physical terms: 'The hardest, most tenacious boundary line is that between the inside and the outside of the body, what is I and what is Other' (p.23), although he accepts our notions of what is internal/external to the body as constant and 'natural'. Baruch Hochman and Graham Holderness, bearing in mind the titles and perspective of their books, understandably see the split as between self and *society*: 'A sense of the tension between self and society pervades the work of D.H. Lawrence',<sup>4</sup> and: 'There is a radical split between the conscious, perceiving subject and the external, objective society'.<sup>5</sup> In his article, 'The Phallus in D.H. Lawrence and Jacques Lacan', Ed Jewinski takes a Lacanian position on the internally split subject when he writes:

The inability to be completely free of the "other" while simultaneously being incapable of wholly losing oneself in the "other", drives the individual to continually acknowledge *its* - self, its utter singleness at the moment when it hopes to find relief in the love for the other.<sup>6</sup>

In this chapter I will examine how *Sons and Lovers*, *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love* deal with the issue of subjectivity as produced in moments of epiphany in narrative. I wish to differentiate between *Sons and Lovers*

and *The Rainbow*, which I think can be approached similarly, and *Women in Love*, which is very different. The main project of the first two of these novels is the attempt to *heal* the split between self and other through its epiphanies. On a less episodic level, the novels' whole hermeneutic can be said to conclude with a resolution, or at least a coming to terms with, this split; for example, Paul's reaction to his mother's death and turn towards the city lights, and Ursula's 'vision' of the rainbow spanning the earth.

The implications for the 'subject-view' of the novels are interesting. If the subject is open to change through such epiphanic experiences, it can be seen as unfixed: the process of 'life' as narrative can change the self. Cornelia Nixon, referring specifically to *The Rainbow*, writes that '"The old stable ego of the character," or of the person, is a hurtful fiction perpetuated by the rationalist tradition',<sup>7</sup> and Ed Jewinski concludes that 'the old stable ego is gone, for both Lawrence and Lacan: individuality is seen as a fluctuating process, as a tension, as an active creation and recreation, not a static state' (p.23). Both remarks seem to be positive about the loss of the stable ego, which is seen as confining and destructive.

Interestingly, both these last comments borrow from Lawrence's famous letter to Edward Garnett where he discusses his own fictional constructions of subjectivity in *The Rainbow*. He had just read Marinetti's *Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature* and was struck by his

notion of "an intuitive physiology of matter".<sup>8</sup> The translation of Marinetti that I have used reads:

Deep intuitions of life joined one to one another, word for word according to their illogical birth, will give us the general lines of an *intuitive psychology of matter*. This was revealed to me when I was flying in an airplane. As I looked at objects from a new point of view, no longer head on or from behind, but straight down, foreshortened, that is, I was able to break apart the old shackles of logic and the plumb lines of the ancient way of thinking.<sup>9</sup>

The notes to Lawrence's letter suggest that his reading of 'physiology' rather than 'psychology' was probably correct, as the original is apparently a printer's error for the word 'fisiologia' or physiology. Most reprints of Marinetti's text in Italian use 'psicologia', which is frequently translated as 'psychology'. Lawrence comments: 'that which is physic - non-human, in humanity, is more interesting to me than the old-fashioned human element - which causes one to conceive a character in a certain moral scheme and make him consistent. The certain moral scheme is what I object to' (p.182). He then remarks that this moral scheme, as exemplified in the work of the nineteenth century Russian realists 'is...dull, old, dead' (pp.182-3). Referring back to Marinetti, he comments on his assertion that 'the warmth of a piece of iron or wood is in our opinion more impassioned than the smile or tears of a woman' (*Marinetti: Selected Writings* p.87):

What is interesting in the laugh of the woman is the same as the binding of the molecules of steel or their action in heat: it is the human will, call it physiology, or like Marinetti - physiology of matter, that fascinates me. I don't care so much about what the woman *feels* - in the ordinary usage of the word. That presumes an ego to feel with. I only care about what the woman *is* - what she *is* - inhumanly, physiologically, materially - according to the use of the word: but for me, what she *is* as a phenomenon (or as representing some greater inhuman will), instead of

what she feels according to the human conception.  
(p.183)

This comment positions femininity, and by extension, humanity, as a 'phenomenon' or essence. It may be significant that the example that interests Lawrence is feminine: it would perhaps be more difficult for him to see masculinity in this way. He continues:

There is another ego, according to whose action the individual is unrecognisable, and passes through, as it were, allotropic states which it needs a deeper sense than any we've been used to exercise, to discover are *states of the same single radically-unchanged element* (Like as diamond and coal are the same pure single element of carbon.) [My italics] (p. 183)

The suggestion that Lawrence is not interested in the literary subject as a unified individual may appear to be pervasive in these quotations: his interest lies at a deeper, more general substratum. However it is questionable to what extent he actually deconstructs predominant ideas about the individualised subject in fiction. Although he objects to the 'certain moral scheme' which situates character as 'consistent' his metaphors seem to suggest a way of looking at the subject that makes it amenable to his powerful and determining overview. Lawrence places himself in the position where he can decide 'what the woman *is...*as a phenomenon', representing some larger 'will' which does not seem so far removed from the 'moral scheme' he objects to. His allotropic simile is similarly suggestive of the fixed subject. Allotropy means the ability of chemical elements to exist in several forms. Although appearing to be different the element involved has still the same chemical composition. Applying this metaphor to the subject, as Lawrence does, would suggest the opposite of

the 'subject in process' idea underlying Nixon and Jewinski's comments,<sup>10</sup> but would rather imply the existence of a consistent subject beneath its apparent fluctuations. What Lawrence appears to be objecting to is the way that the fiction he complains about only 'scratches the surface' of a character and doesn't 'get down to the nitty gritty'! He would seem to resent the style as superficial, and privilege himself as the writer really able to explain the subjectivity of his characters. (The depth and height metaphors running through this analysis have been used deliberately!) G. M. Hyde interprets the letter as follows:

Lawrence's tortuous Nietzschean argument goes on to relegate the social and 'ethical' dimension of character to a secondary order of things, asserting that the really interesting component, the novelist's true 'theme', is *some constant element*, located deeper than mere 'personality'. [My italics]<sup>11</sup>

The 'specifically Lawrentian' subject in *Sons and Lovers* and *The Rainbow* can be read as innate, consistent, and unified; constantly present in each character, but struggling to develop and be defined in some way that is 'true to itself' through the novel's narrative process. In fact, despite the letter to Garnett, this sense of the Lawrentian subject as fundamentally consistent has widespread critical support, again from a variety of theoretical positions. Leavis was one of the first to note in Lawrence's work:

An intensity of preoccupation with the individual. No one could have been more profoundly possessed by the perception that life is a matter of individual lives, and that except in individual lives there is no life to be interested in or reverent about, and no life to be served.<sup>12</sup>

Although this may appear to be a fairly straightforward aesthetic judgement it in fact serves an implicitly

political purpose in praising liberal humanist individualism without making it explicit as such, or analysing how this actually functions in Lawrence's fiction.

Other critics have elucidated the political implications of this 'individualist' subject. As Graham Hough remarks:

A contempt for egalitarianism often implies a contempt for the individual as such, a glorification of hierarchy and the social order for their own sakes. Needless to say, this is far from Lawrence's intention. His anti-democratic sentiment consorts with an almost religious veneration for the individual human person.<sup>13</sup>

Although this analysis links Lawrence's later political beliefs with his notion of the subject it seems unlikely that all 'human persons' in all of Lawrence's fiction are seen as individuals in the same way, a point I will be returning to later. Continuing with the explicitly political implications of this view of the subject, Baruch Hochman sees this in terms of the eighteenth century liberal 'social contract':

The bourgeois emerged from the substantial propertied domain, where he was anchored in things, to the public world of politics, where he functioned as a member of the body politic, without relinquishing the sense of his substantial independence. Lawrence makes the same demand for the extra-social substance of the self. He makes it, however, not in terms of property, but in terms of the irreducible, presocial, nonmaterial essence of that self. (p.187)

The masculine pre-social subject enters into society of his own free will, for his benefit, and contributes to that society while remaining, at the deepest level, uninfluenced by it. This is in direct opposition to a view of the subject as constructed by society, and is interesting because it correctly links Lawrence with the types of

realist fiction he resented, where, although characters are social types, they are always 'more than' the sum of their socio-historical background. As Catherine Belsey writes: 'Classic realism...performs the work of ideology...in its representation of a world of consistent subjects who are the *origin* of meaning, knowledge and action' [my italics].<sup>14</sup> The realist project of representing, or 'reflecting' the world 'as it is', privileges the construction of the subject as consistent, and I would argue that *Sons and Lovers* and *The Rainbow*, although they may use different techniques, in fact do the same.

Graham Holderness's book rests on the *opposition* he posits between individualism and community:

These opposing impulses (of 'individualism' and of 'community') faced Lawrence with acute personal problems, which are reflected and embodied in his fictions in a pervasive and perpetual struggle between a 'realist' style and a series of other artistic methods which defy, deny or transcend the conventions of realism. (p.5)

I think this is misplaced, in that individualism is actually *intrinsic* to the realist style which Holderness privileges above others as part of his adherence to Lukacsian reflection theory (p.7) and the idea of a 'social totality' (p.12). It also results in his preference for *Sons and Lovers* over *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*, in which, he argues, the social totality is missing (p.12).

This type of 'Lawrentian' subjectivity is analysed in ways other than the *overtly* political. Many critics trace connections with the Romantic Movement and with Modernism. Elizabeth Brody Tenenbaum traces the Romantic 'self as given' from Rousseau to Lawrence's fiction. She writes that 'the Rousseauistic tradition that passes from Nietzsche to

Lawrence rests on the idea of realizing an intrinsic nature that cannot be modified by environment or volition'.<sup>15</sup> Marguerite Beede Howe discusses *The Rainbow's* view of subjectivity in terms of Impressionist and Expressionist theories of art:

In *The Rainbow* Lawrence wants to present not the social self so much as the essential being. Like Van Gogh, whom he admired, Lawrence has a vision of reality which is not a quality of surface but an emanation from a living center.<sup>16</sup>

In a footnote she contrasts this with the Impressionist way of creating characters (citing Chekhov as an example) which builds up surface details, *not* giving an 'essence'.

Richard Drain's article on *Women in Love* rejects Lawrentian subjectivity as in any way Modernist. I will quote this at length because in many ways it follows my analysis of *Sons and Lovers* and *The Rainbow*, although its usefulness with regard to *Women in Love* is questionable:

His rejection of conventional notions of character springs first from his awareness of the living psyche as subject to radical change...and second from the realization...that the mind may harbour contradictory impulses at the same time. This would seem to put Lawrence in accord with that advanced thinking of the time whose tendency was to dissolve away...all concept of the self as a single unified entity, to reveal its apparent character as an effect of conditioning, and to find within a series of radical dichotomies...And yet of course Lawrence is not finally in accord with this, as his critical views of Freud, Dostoevsky, Proust and Joyce clearly show. Essential to his critique of the structure and aims of contemporary mass society is his sense of the 'disquality', the individualness, of human beings. His view that we pass through allotropic states...may function as an attack upon the notion of human nature as fixed and stable, but it also confirms a consistency of nature...beneath the appearance of change, lies a single element, true to its individual nature.<sup>17</sup>

Again we find a critic returning to the controversial allotropic metaphor to emphasise his point: that Lawrence



cannot legitimately be associated with the 'postmodernist' view of the 'subject in process'.

The transcendence of the subject is also important for any notion of it as an essence, especially in connection with epiphany. My quotation from Graham Hough's book (see note 13), remarks on Lawrence's '*almost religious* veneration for the individual human person' [my italics] and Judith Ruderman writes that 'Lawrence bids his readers adopt an almost religious attitude toward the subject'.<sup>18</sup> The Christian view of subjectivity as intensely individual and innate can be seen to be at work at an implied level, particularly in *The Rainbow* with its prolific use of religious imagery, such as the rainbow itself with its connotations of a pact or covenant between the individual and God. The tailing off of such imagery three quarters of the way through the novel may be connected with the movement from a rhythmic structure to one informed by the bildungsroman, which I discuss later in this chapter.

Other critics see this insistence on a consistent fictional subject in psychoanalytic terms, in other words, as in a great measure defensive: the subject desires the stability it lacks. This type of analysis obviously has its roots in Lawrence's biography, but also relies (especially where *Sons and Lovers* is concerned), on Lawrence's own reading of his own text.<sup>19</sup> Critical analyses using psychoanalytic models usually centre around the continuation of unsatisfactorily resolved oedipal or preoedipal issues of merging and differentiation in the subject. The simultaneous fear of/desire for a return to the dyadic relationship with the mother figure hovers over

the insistence on a defined, bounded self. Earlier writers see these issues more in terms of the Oedipus Complex, for example Marguerite Beede Howe writes that 'the oedipal personality is the subject of the book' [*Sons and Lovers*] (pp.1-2). More recently, Judith Ruderman has discussed Lawrence's essays on psychoanalysis as attempts to 'define scientifically the "kind of incest" that he wrote of incessantly and obsessively in his letters, poetry, and narrative prose - a pre-oedipal, pre-genital desire to merge with the caretaker mother' (p.24). Barbara Schapiro has discussed 'the emphasis...on separation and autonomy'<sup>20</sup> in Lawrence's work as resulting from 'a lack of separation and individuation' (p.350) concluding that Lawrence's works 'display a need to construct and maintain a coherent selfhood, along with a simultaneous yearning for and terror of dissolution' (p.364).

I hope to show that ideas about the subject in *Sons and Lovers* and *The Rainbow* stress that it is innate, individual and consistent, although it is also perceived by the reader and character as a goal to be achieved through the narrative process. What I have also hoped to show, by its *absence* from my discussion so far, is the 'gender blindness' of much critical analysis of the 'Lawrentian subject'. In contrast I hope to point out the importance of this issue. Graham Hough typifies this sort of analysis by commenting on the 'almost religious veneration for the *individual human person*' in Lawrence's fiction. (See note 13.) My argument would be that the construction of subjectivity in *Sons and Lovers* and *The Rainbow* is specifically sexually differentiated, with very different

ideas about the feminine, as opposed to the masculine, subject available to the reader. I should say that there have been some analyses that specifically discuss subjectivity as a gender and/or feminist issue in Lawrence's fiction, for example Marguerite Beede Howe's book, *The Art of the Self in D. H. Lawrence* (see note 16), Gavriel Ben-Ephraim's book, *The Moon's Dominion: Narrative Dichotomy and Female Dominance in Lawrence's Earlier Novels* (see note 3), and Barbara Schapiro's article 'Maternal Bonds and the Boundaries of Self: D. H. Lawrence and Virginia Woolf' (see note 20). Other feminist work on Lawrence inevitably touches on subjectivity, and non-feminist work does notice the sexually differentiated presentation of subjectivity, but makes it incidental to, or separates it from, discussions of a subject which is generalised as masculine.

Despite my suggestion that 'the quest, or desire, for the goal of a secure sense of selfhood' (page 137), is a norm offered to both men *and* women characters, the implicit polemic of *Sons and Lovers* and *The Rainbow* is that women do not need to 'search for self' because they have an innate consistency and strength of subjectivity that is greater than, and oddly threatening to, the man's more problematic (and incidentally heroic) sense of self. I intend to show how the epiphanies in these novels suggest gender differentiated forms of subjectivity by using explicitly contrasting languages. The typically 'feminine' epiphany involves images of differentiation and contrast, of sharply defined boundaries, for example a contrast between light and dark. The typically masculine epiphany significantly

uses metaphors of lapsing and merging: of fluidity and process. These languages implicitly suggest a conception of woman as essence: powerful, strong, and defined in a static, pre-existent way, as opposed to the man as weak and ill-defined in contrast, heroically struggling to articulate his innermost consciousness of self. Such patterns are strikingly different from, and opposed to, those of Brontë and Lessing.

The 'strength' of women characters' subjectivity in contrast to that of the men in Lawrence's fiction has been extensively discussed. Many critics accept this without further analysis, merely commenting on it using language that parallels Lawrentian style in its inventiveness:

Men...tend to lose their identities, blur away into the corpus of the women, like those deep-sea fish in which the small male fastens his body to the rear of the huge female, allows his head to be absorbed into her body, his nervous system to dissipate, until he is vestigial, a mere protuberance from the female, a sexual ancilla. When Lawrence's women talk of fusion, what they really want is this sapping mastery. (Daniel Allbright, p.87)

In an attack on the feminist critic Kate Millett's reading of *Sons and Lovers*,<sup>21</sup> Peter Balbert writes: 'Kate Millett's sneering description of Paul as "the perfection of self-sustaining ego" describes a state of power and confidence in him that never exists...the three women who nourish his ego also provide emotional traps that nearly doom him to egocentric patterns of failure'.<sup>22</sup> These analyses only serve to re-capitulate and endorse the Lawrentian polemic.

In contrast Gavriel Ben-Ephraim's book involves this polemic as an explicit part of his aesthetic judgement on Lawrence's fiction. Starting from the premise that '*on the deepest level of self, women are stronger and wholer* [sic]

*than men'* (pp.19-20), he sees the leadership novels as weaker because this pattern is not present: 'Imbalance characterizes Lawrence's fundamental apprehension of males and females...a narrative describing this imbalance in action is the authentic tale he has to tell' (p.195). This view implicitly accepts Lawrence's differentiation of masculine and feminine subjectivity by privileging it as an aesthetically superior narrative device. Ben-Ephraim also has problems extending his theory to *Women in Love*.

Feminist critics have also found Lawrence's descriptions of women's strength of self positive. Cornelia Nixon writes that '*The Rainbow*' centers on *strong women*, procreative sexuality, and female fecundity in a way that finally, beyond its reservations, is extremely positive' (p.5). The link with a biological definition of femininity is stressed here, but I would argue that this view of the feminine subject is very reductive. In such a definition women are primarily seen as conforming to an image of the *magna mater*. Gavriel Ben-Ephraim talks about the '*magna mater*, indicative of Oedipalism in the... sense of the boy's identity being submerged in the mother' (p.223). Judith Ruderman discusses the way that 'characters [are]...treated as positive or negative aspects of the Magna Mater' (p.12). G.M. Hyde also remarks on the 'an ambivalent image of Woman that he [Lawrence] could never quite get out of his mind' (p.31).

Other critics point out that the fear of women's subjectivity fed into Lawrence's beliefs about society as a whole. Marguerite Beede Howe comments that 'according to Lawrence the present age is a matriarchy. The woman, he

says, destroys the male self' (p.46), and Hilary Simpson discusses the historical background to Lawrence's belief in a matriarchal society that had somehow 'got out of hand' and needed an urgent remedy (the resurgence of male power and comradeship).<sup>23</sup> Other writers explicitly link Lawrence's leadership novels and beliefs in male dominance with a fear of the powerful feminine subject. Cornelia Nixon comments that 'Lawrence's authoritarian politics...seem to be a response to the threat of powerful women and female sexuality' (p.114), and both her book and Judith Ruderman's are structured on this informing principle.

The importance of discussing Lawrence's explicitly *gender differentiated* conception of subjectivity is that it has a lot to say about the way femininity is constructed in *Sons and Lovers* and *The Rainbow*. In these novels I will identify two narrative processes that are explicitly associated with the masculine and feminine subject. One is that of individuation and *bildung*, which situates the protagonist, or hero, as desiring masculine *subject* of the narrative. The other positions femininity as powerful essence, or *object* of the narrative's desire. Teresa de Lauretis discusses the progression of narrative in terms of a masculine Oedipal desire for closure and resolution.<sup>24</sup> By looking at the Oedipus myth as both folklore's representation of the change from a matriarchal to patriarchal system and paradigm of masculine desire for integration in the symbolic order she convincingly establishes that 'pleasure and meaning [in narrative] move along the triple track he [Roland Barthes] first outlined,

and the tracking is from the point of view of Oedipus so to speak, its movement is that of a masculine desire' (p.107).

She later writes:

Femininity and masculinity...are positions occupied by the subject in relation to desire, corresponding respectively to the passive and the active aims of the libido. They are positionalities within a movement that carries both the male child and the female child toward one and the same destination: Oedipus and the Oedipal stage. That movement, I have argued, is the movement of narrative discourse, which specifies and even produces the masculine position as that of mythical subject, and the feminine position as mythical obstacle or, simply, the space in which that movement occurs. (p.143)

The feminine and masculine subject positions occupied by the characters in the text are not a result of their gender, but of their relationship to the narrative process. Women characters can occupy both positions. As de Lauretis points out: 'The effectiveness of symbols - the work of the symbolic function in the unconscious - effects a splitting of the female subject's identification into the two mythical positions of hero (mythical subject) and boundary (spatially fixed object, personified obstacle)' (p.123). Although she is discussing the feminine cinema spectator, I think her discussion holds true for the subject positions occupied by the feminine characters in a novel as well. De Lauretis goes on to discuss the positive and negative aspects for the feminine viewing subject, and I intend to examine this in relation to the feminine reading subject's position.

The epiphanies in *Sons and Lovers* and *The Rainbow* are important to a discussion of subjectivity because they elaborate the specifically different ways in which men and women characters experience 'moments of revelation' or

'transcendence'. In these moments, the sense of a sharp division between self and other is either lost in a way which paradoxically *confirms* the *masculine* subject, or *emphasised* in a way which undermines the *feminine* subject. This experience of the breakdown of barriers between self and other, and subsequent dispersal of the subject into the matrix of the other is remarked on by most critics in different ways. Many comment on the links with Romantic experiences of transcendence. Marguerite Beede Howe writes that 'the experience of dissolving out into infinity is described in conventional mystical terminology reminiscent of Wordsworth, Whitman or St. John' (p.28). John Beer compares such Lawrentian moments to those in *The Prelude*,<sup>25</sup> and Gavriel Ben-Ephraim sees the complexity of such moments as reminiscent of the Romantic poets (p.113). The title of Colin Clarke's book, *Rivers of Dissolution: D. H. Lawrence and English Romanticism* highlights his similar concerns.<sup>26</sup> Others see the sporadic, imagistic quality of these experiences as representatively Modernist.<sup>27</sup>

Such experiences of self-loss are also theorised using psychoanalytic models. David Ellis uses Freud's discussion of the 'Oceanic feeling' to point out the 'regressive' desires expressed in these moments.<sup>28</sup> Marguerite Beede Howe contrasts an oedipal incest, in which the desire is to replace the father, with what she terms (borrowing from Erich Neumann) 'uroboric' incest, which is an act of self-effacement desiring to return to the womb (p.14). She writes, of *Sons and Lovers*, that 'the core of Paul's nature mysticism, and of the related sexual mysticism that he discovers...is the uroboric outflux of the self' (p.15).



Other critics have commented on the paradoxical way in which such experiences of self-loss lead to a *confirmation* of subjectivity, although again this is not discussed in terms of gender. Peter Balbert sees this in the sexual act: 'The ideal impulse of love for Lawrence embodies a species of *existential transcendentalism*; the intrinsic power of lovers to *get beyond* their ego, will and self rests on the strength and willingness with which they assert the raw power of their 'maximum selves' in the act of heterosexual love' [my italics] (p.27). Simultaneously, then, escaping the ego involves an assertion of its force which results in some sort of positive confirmation. Colin Clarke calls this 'the process of dying into being, the lapsing of consciousness which is yet the discovery of a deeper consciousness' (p.3).

Perhaps more interesting is the way in which various critics discuss such moments' working on a structural, or narrative level, although they may not make this an explicit part of their analysis. Gavriel Ben-Ephraim sees this cumulatively: 'D. H. Lawrence's own novels have their life and power in the cumulative series of symbolic scenes they present' (p.18), but I think this is insufficient. The narrative function that epiphany has is different in each novel, although more different in *Women in Love* than either *Sons and Lovers* or *The Rainbow*, and is implicitly gendered. *Sons and Lovers* is sharply divided into the masculine and feminine narratives previously identified. The 'masculine' realist narrative relies on literary models of autobiography, bildung, and individuation. Associated with this narrative is the distinctively 'masculine' epiphany,

with its language of 'lapsing out', mingling, merging and fusing. Such moments are, however, predominantly *progressive* for the masculine protagonist. Baruch Hochman suggests this when he comments:

Communion scenes...form the structural units of the novel. The novel [*Sons and Lovers*] may be said to be organized in terms of movement towards crucial communion scenes. In these, characters move toward fuller selfhood as they come to experience the world and the independent life that is in the world. (p.30)

*The Rainbow* maintains this narrative differentiation, although in the first half of the text it is obscured, and the novel relies more heavily on myth, symbol and a notion of 'rhythmic form' as structure. As Ursula grows up, however, there is a resurgence in the use of realism, and also in the functioning of ideas about the 'masculine' protagonist. With this change the divergence between a 'feminine' and 'masculine' epiphany and narrative structure reasserts itself.

In *Women in Love*, however, this gender differentiation in the language of epiphanic experiences is lost, and with it goes the 'feminine' and 'masculine' narrative structures that informed the previous two texts. The difference between epiphanies, and subjects, occurs between the two couples, Ursula and Birkin as opposed to Gudrun and Gerald. The predominant language for epiphany becomes that of self-loss and dispersal. Both men and women characters use this language, but added to it is the idea of the *tearing* of the unified subject, that allows the sexually violent aspects of the unconscious to flood in to the conscious. Such a recognition of the *internally* split subject influences the whole narrative structure to implode ideas of progression

and bildung: there is no longer a consistent individual to be articulated through the narrative process.

G. M. Hyde writes: 'Lawrence's novel shares with Gudrun's art *a certain schematism and a "diagrammatic" quality*, as well as a use of reversed perspective that locates the source of illumination in a rabbit or a cat and then projects a diffuse beam outwards from the art object into the fictional space and beyond into the "real" world' [my italics] (p.64). He explicitly links this to the presentation of subjectivity: 'the psyche is "layered" temporally, a space-time continuum' (p.39). Later he comments on the way that the 'spatialization' of narrative time 'release[s] characters from the constraints of an "individuality" or "stable ego" constructed from a determinate narrative point of view' (p.53). Graham Holderness makes an extremely important point about *Women in Love*: 'Its refusal of linear narrative, its synchronic rather than diachronic form, seems connected with the tendency of industrial society to resolve experience into isolated moments' (p.217).

Interestingly, the critics I have quoted do not specifically refer to the term 'epiphany', at least not when discussing the issues on which I have quoted them! I have already discussed in my first chapter the way in which critics (including Lawrentian critics) use the term, so I will confine myself here to observing that it is substituted by various others which work equally well, although they have their particular implications (for example Peter Balbert's 'existential transcendentalism' [see page 17]) as do any terms of reference.

I propose to look at the moments of epiphany in D.H. Lawrence's three novels, *Sons and Lovers*, *The Rainbow*, and *Women in Love*, explicitly as sites for the construction of the *gendered* subject, which other critics have not considered. I intend to elaborate the implications for my specific feminist reading of the view of feminine and masculine subjectivity implicit in such moments in the narrative of these texts. Although each novel will be considered separately I do not propose to analyse the epiphanies sequentially in each novel because, although the epiphanies have a *cumulative* effect on a reading of these texts, retroactively they work in a much more 'synchronic' way because of the distinctive language used and the repetitive way the masculine and feminine subject is constructed in such moments.

*Sons and Lovers*: 'The Masculine as Mythical Subject and the Feminine as Mythical Obstacle'

*Sons and Lovers* establishes a narrative pattern of masculine and feminine subjectivity in a fictional form closest to that of autobiography. The narrating voice is nearest to that of the protagonist, Paul, although it is never synonymous with it. The novel also more obviously employs realist strategies than *The Rainbow* or *Women in Love*. Both these things give *Sons and Lovers* a lot of power. 'Autobiographical' fiction has a certain fascination for readers, considering the contemporary stress on biographical criticism. The Penguin Classics edition of

*Sons and Lovers* informs the reader on its back cover that 'D. H. Lawrence himself described *Sons and Lovers* as an "adaptation from life" in which he recalls his own upbringing and adolescence'. The realist autobiographical *form* means that the author can attempt to construct a textual world that 'improves' on life or interprets it favourably. Whether or not this can be extended to the reader's construction of the text is more doubtful. My own readings of *Sons and Lovers* will challenge some of the powerful ways in which feminine subjectivity is narrated in the text's epiphanies.

Paul's relationship with Miriam, the first woman after his mother to be significant in his life, dominates the middle sections of *Sons and Lovers*. The epiphanies they have are very different, embodying the attitudes to masculine and feminine subjectivity inscribed in the text. The narration of episodes involving Miriam is problematic in itself because frequently what seems to be an 'internal' description of Miriam's thoughts and feelings or an 'objective' narrator's comment is actually focused through Paul's perspective, which is deeply influenced by his mother's perception of Miriam as a threat. The issue, though, is whether or not the reader can make a space *in the text* that acknowledges that. There are moments in the text when Miriam's language seems to be less mediated by Paul's, and is consequently more 'authentic'. In many of their dialogues Miriam's response to Paul disturbs his faith in his own reading of her and their relationship:

'If only you could want *me*, and not want what I can reel off for you!'

'I!' she cried bitterly - 'I! Why, when would you let me take you?'

'Then it's my fault,' he said. (SL p.247) [see list of abbreviations]

'I'm so damned spiritual with you always!' he cried.

She remained silent, thinking. 'Then why don't you be otherwise!' But he saw her crouching, brooding figure, and it seemed to tear him in two. (SL p.241)

Clara's interpretation of their relationship also unsettles

Paul's:

'I know she wants a sort of soul union.'

'But how do you know what she wants?'

'I've been with her for seven years.'

'And you haven't found out the very first thing about her.'

'What's that?'

'That she doesn't want any of your soul communion. That's your own imagination. She wants you.'

He pondered over this. Perhaps he was wrong.

'But she seems -' he began.

'You've never tried,' she answered. (SL pp.337-338)

Although occasional episodes offer a different interpretation or voice to that of Paul's it is questionable whether such moments significantly balance the 'majority view' which is surely his. As hero and protagonist he is in a powerful interpretative position. Opinion on the issue of the reader's relationship to the voices and narration of the text seems to vary depending on sympathy with Lawrence and ideological stand-point. For example, Diane S. Bonds writes that '*Sons and Lovers*...does not invite... participation...the novel attempts in many ways - for example, by the use of an ostensibly "objective" narrator - to frustrate and discourage any such participation as well as readers' attempts to counterpoise their own interpretations to the narrator's.<sup>29</sup> A. H. Gomme comments that 'the convention of the omniscient narrator has gone through a process of being, as it were, absorbed

into the internal consciousness of several characters in turn', but adds: 'passage after passage could be quoted to confirm the way in which the very technique of the novel is enlisted in the service of one particular interpretation of the events of the story'.<sup>30</sup> (And we could easily guess whose!) In contrast, Laurence Lerner, in a spirit of calm rationality, tries to fend off feminist anger with Lawrence:

It is almost always premature to accuse Lawrence's fiction of silences and smug distortions: as we read on, we find that what is missing is, somehow, indirectly present after all. This is the situation diagnosed in the formula, Never trust the artist, trust the tale, and that is why I have used it as a critical principle in this discussion, while at the same time trying to show how difficult it is to apply, since the artist can invade his tale in such varied and damaging ways.<sup>31</sup>

This statement seems particularly ineffective in that it wants the best of both worlds. The important word for me is 'indirectly'. If some aspects of a text are 'more present than others' (although we must put a question-mark after the idea of 'presence' in texts), then that must say something about the ideological weighting of that particular text. My argument about the narration of Paul and Miriam's epiphanies is that it constructs the reader's interpretation of masculinity and femininity in *Sons and Lovers* in ways that disadvantage the feminine fictional and reading subject.

If we look at the scene where Miriam shows Paul a rosebush in the woods, we can examine why this is an epiphany for Miriam and not for Paul, and see how this begins to differentiate the feminine from the masculine subject. To begin with, Paul and Miriam are described using

two competing languages. Paragraphs centering on Miriam have short phrases that are abrupt, jerky and disjointed, with a plethora of possessives:

She wanted to show him a certain wild-rose bush she had discovered. She knew it was wonderful. And yet, till he had seen it, she felt it had not come into her soul. Only he could make it her own, immortal. She was dissatisfied. (SL p.209)

There is a consistent use of emotional adjectives, 'wonderful', 'immortal', 'dissatisfied'.

The next paragraph, describing Paul, is markedly different:

Dew was already on the paths. In the old oak-wood a mist was rising, and he hesitated, wondering whether one whiteness were a strand of fog or only campion-flowers pallid in a cloud. (SL p.209)

This description is more diffused and relaxed, with longer phrases and more uncertainties. It is implicitly suggested that Paul is in harmony with nature whereas Miriam is opposed to it. This pattern continues in the next paragraph where Miriam is described using the words 'eager', 'tense', 'passionately', 'thrilled', and 'trembled', whereas Paul is only 'vaguely anxious'. Miriam's imputed strength of mind is seen in the construction '*they were going to have a communion together*' [my italics] (SL p.209), which is oddly balanced between description and prescription.

Paul is associated with fluidity and merging, and a confusion or blending of colours. The mist confuses his perceptions, the sky is 'mother-of-pearl' and the honeysuckle is '*streaming* scent' [my italics] (SL p.209). He can't distinguish the way forward in the twilight and Miriam directs him. In contrast, the metaphors for '*her bush*' [my italics] (SL p.210), rely on the opposition



between light and dark: stars in a night sky, moonlit waves on a dark shore, candles, and ivory. The religious, sacramental feel of the experience echoes Miriam's supposed longing for a holy communion that would unite her with Paul.

The conflict between these two 'languages' is clear in the sentence: 'The dusk came like smoke around, and still did not put out the roses' (SL p.210): The consistency and strength of Miriam's light/soul/subjectivity cannot be occluded by Paul's more murky self. The description of Miriam's face that follows, 'pale and expectant with wonder' with dark eyes that 'lay open to him' (SL p.210) reinforces this implicit link. Her ultimate epiphany is experienced when she 'receives' his look, again described in language reminiscent of some sort of annunciation: 'His look seemed to travel down into her. Her soul quivered. It was the communion she wanted' (SL p.210). This makes Miriam into a blank text, or empty vessel (vestal virgin?) who is written on/impregnated by Paul. However, she does not merely accept his 'script', but seems rather to ingest it and incorporate or add it to her already powerful sense of subjectivity. She seems almost to drain Paul in a vampiric way, so that he has to break the link by turning aside. The language of self-loss, lapsing and mingling is significantly absent, and this is why Paul is unhappy with the moment and does not have an epiphany. He competes with what it is suggested is *Miriam's* 'reading' of the bush by comparing the roses to butterflies that 'shake themselves' (SL p.210), trying to set up a simile with more movement and fluidity. But when Miriam turns back to the roses her

distinctive language, 'white', 'holy', 'ecstasy', 'worship', 'ivory' and 'virgin' (SL p.210) returns, making him feel imprisoned.

The implications for our reading of Paul and Miriam are significant. If we accept that the narrator of *Sons and Lovers* is most often in sympathy with, and thus closer to Paul, then we can accept the idea that we read Miriam through Paul's reading of her. Miriam's language in the passage is therefore the narrator's language for Paul's language for Miriam's language. Thus Miriam is seen as 'virgin soil', and also as a threateningly stable, fixed and solid subject, something that is closely associated with her femininity. Many critics accept this reading of the passage without further comment:

Miriam *manoeuvres* Paul into an intimacy which is not only irreproachable and would have her mother's sanction but also *feeds and satisfies* her own religious longings. At the same time, however...the *double entendre* of Paul's look in response to Miriam's eyes and his compulsive breaking into a run when he leaves her are expressive of the frustration *to which she subjects him. She turns the wood into a church for herself but into a prison for him.* [My italics]<sup>32</sup>

H. M. Daleski's comment merely repeats the textual construction of Miriam without analysing how it is created or discussing the implications. Graham Holderness writes that 'Miriam is constantly leading Paul towards experiences of a quasi-sexual, religious intensity', and adds that 'living things [are] translated by Miriam's emotional intensity into transcendent objects' (p.154). The implication of both critics' views is that Miriam deliberately directs Paul away from sexual experience into repressive substitutions when in fact she should be doing the exact opposite: she is the archetypal 'prick-tease'.

Marguerite Beede Howe is closer to my interpretation when she writes that 'the lovers' communion at the white rose-bush makes Paul feel "anxious and imprisoned" not because Miriam denies his sex (as Lawrence intimates), but because she threatens his being' (pp.16-17). This threat is intrinsic to the feminine epiphany in Lawrence's fiction.

If we look at another similar experience a few pages further on we can see the same language surrounding another of Miriam's epiphanies. She has fallen behind Paul on an outing, hurries to catch up with him, and on turning the bend in the road sees him mending something:

He remained concentrated in the middle of the road. Beyond, one rift of rich gold in that colourless grey evening seemed to make him stand out in dark relief. She saw him, slender and firm, as if the setting sun had given him to her. A deep pain took hold of her, and she knew she must love him. And she had discovered him, discovered in him a rare potentiality, discovered his loneliness. Quivering as at some 'annunciation', she went slowly forward. (SL p.216)

The same opposition between light and dark isolates Paul from his surroundings. He is 'concentrated', and 'stand[s] out in dark relief' becoming an object that is easier (the text implies) for Miriam to assimilate. The link between possession by the woman and this language is emphasised by the phrase 'as if the setting sun had given him to her'. The inverted commas around the word 'annunciation' highlight the effects of the narrator's/Paul's mediation of Miriam's voice.

In an interesting article 'Jessie Chambers and Miriam Leivers' (see note 30), A. H. Gomme discusses the 'real life' Miriam and her own record of this experience, written in *D. H. Lawrence: A Personal Record*:

It was on one of these walks...that I had a sudden flash of insight which made me see Lawrence in a totally new light. We were walking along anyhow, singly, or in twos and threes. I happened to be alone, admiring the bronze tips of the maple in the hedge. Suddenly I turned and saw Lawrence in the middle of the road, bending over an umbrella. There was something in his attitude that arrested me. His stooping figure had a look of intensity, almost of anguish. For a moment I saw him as a symbolic figure. I was deeply moved and walked back to him.

'What is the matter?' I asked.

'It was Ern's umbrella, and mother will be wild if I take it home broken,' he replied.

We walked on together, but I did not tell him what I had seen. This was perhaps the beginning of our awareness of sympathy for one another.<sup>33</sup>

Jessie's assertion that she did not tell Lawrence how she felt at the time is apparently contradicted by his use of the scene and treatment of Miriam's feelings in *Sons and Lovers*. Gomme discusses how when Lawrence was writing *Sons and Lovers* he asked Jessie to write down details of episodes in their early relationship which he used in the novel. Thus *Sons and Lovers* responds to Jessie's notes, and *A Personal Record* responds to both these notes and Lawrence's treatment of them in *Sons and Lovers*.

Another obvious difference in this account is the question of who has broken the dead brother's umbrella. In Jessie's story Lawrence has, in *Sons and Lovers* Miriam's brother Geoffrey is responsible. When Miriam realises this, and the extent to which Paul is concerned on his mother's behalf, she seems to find it a 'confirmation of her vision of him' (SL p.217), maybe of his 'rare potentiality...his loneliness' (SL p.216). A. H. Gomme continues: 'The episode becomes the occasion of division rather than of unspoken sympathy, or at least a sign to Miriam of the divisive force of his mother standing between them' (p.35). This seems to suggest that Miriam cannot possess Paul because of

his emotional tie with his mother, but to me the scene over the umbrella seems to be extrinsic to Miriam's epiphany: she cannot even tell what Paul is mending at the time she experiences it. The umbrella scene is 'tacked on' to the end of Miriam's epiphany as a way for the narrator to defend Paul *against* her possessiveness. In this epiphany, the language of the feminine subject maintains the implications of strength, security and possessiveness that occur elsewhere in the text. Interestingly, this language is absent from Jessie Chambers's own account of this episode: none of the light/dark oppositions are used at all and the moment has much more to do with the realist narrative plot, as it is explicitly linked to the significance of the umbrella, and Lawrence's embodying the guilty, grieving son of an overbearing mother.

In contrast to Miriam's epiphanies, Paul's involve the language of self-loss and dispersal into the other that is suggestive of Gertrude's experience at the beginning of the novel when she is locked outside (which I will analyse later). Whereas Miriam is equated, symbolically, with the clarity of vision that light provides in contrast with darkness, Paul is identified with twilight confusion and darkness that is unrelieved by light. In Chapter XI, 'The Test on Miriam', Paul and Miriam struggle to define a sexuality that satisfies them both. After watching the sun set they walk in among the trees and Paul says: "'I like the darkness,...I wish it were thicker - good, thick darkness"' (SL p.348). This darkness is associated with both his sexuality and his subjectivity, but Miriam is not defined in the same way, and so their sexual experience is

unsuccessful in Paul's terms: 'Now he realized that she had not been with him all the time, that her soul had stood apart, in a sort of horror' (SL p.348). His epiphany results from his apprehension of this division (although of course in many ways it is he who creates it):

He did not mind if the raindrops came on him: he would have lain and got wet through: he felt as if nothing mattered, as if his living were smeared away into the beyond, near and quite lovable. This strange, gentle reaching-out to death was new to him. (SL p.348)

Being 'wet through' is not just a cliché here, especially when read with the phrase 'smeared away'. It is as if the water leaches Paul's soul out of his body. His 'living' remains 'near and quite lovable' which is important in suggesting the way in which such an epiphany paradoxically *confirms* Paul's fragile sense of subjectivity, and is to a large extent a *substitution* for a sense of security which is absent and has to be created by such experiences. The idea of 'reaching out to death' then, though evoking the death drive, seems to be a fanciful *play* with the idea of non-being as a solution. The illusory nature of this experience is emphasised in the phrase: 'The highest of all was to melt out into the darkness and sway there, identified with the great Being' (SL p.348), which suggests delusions of grandeur! Paul's final comment on his desire for self-loss is representative: '"To be rid of our individuality, which is our will, which is our effort - to live effortless, a kind of conscious sleep - that is very beautiful, I think; that is our after-life - our immortality"' (SL p.349). His desire to lose his *individuality* or subjectivity is balanced by a desire for a

soul that would be almost religiously purified and become omnipotent.

Gavriel Ben-Ephraim sees this epiphany as almost wholly negative: 'Paul's self-cancellation is more closely related to lack of ego than transcendence of the ego', and 'Paul seeks to escape from his white mother-bound reality into the darkness of nonbeing, his only alternative' (p.109). Marguerite Beede Howe similarly writes of this scene that 'a weak ego also has the capacity...to experience...excruciating feelings of non-existence' (p.15). I find this stress on the negative aspect of this epiphany insufficient. It is Paul's apparent lack of consistent subjectivity that provokes his desire for it and allows him to be a hero, pursuing through the text the elusive goal of 'self in harmony with self and other'. The 'masculine' epiphanies provide a language with which we can understand Paul's search. It is because Woman is seen as essence or desired object of this quest that she lacks access to it.

Paul's movement from Miriam to Clara is, initially at least, regressive in terms of the treatment of feminine subjectivity in the text. Miriam's oppositional function in defining Paul's sexuality and subjectivity is a negative archetype suggesting a definition of Woman as repressive, devouring vampire - Mrs Morel comments that she is '"one of those who will want to suck a man's soul out till he has none of his own left"' (SL p.211). However, this is more constructive than Clara's acquiescence by mere virtue of its *opposition*. Although Clara initially fulfils the role of Woman as sexual object, she later comes to echo the

Miriam role in her growing possessiveness and dissatisfaction with Paul's desire for impersonal sex. This cannot be said to be a significant progression because of its return to a previous stereotype.

The epiphany Paul and Clara experience in the peewit field is the most important for Lawrence's polemic in *Sons and Lovers*. It is the first to be successful for both a man and a woman during sex, and it repeats the language we have associated with the masculine epiphany, as it is largely narrated from a perspective sympathetic and closer to, Paul. We can see this clearly in the description of Clara's feelings about Paul just before the epiphany: 'She wanted him to be soothed upon her - soothed. She stood clasping him and caressing him, and he was something unknown to her - something almost uncanny. She wanted to soothe him into forgetfulness' (SL p.420), and later: 'she felt it was great that he came to her; and she took him simply because his need was bigger either than her or him, and her soul was still within her. She did this for him in his need, even if he left her, for she loved him' (SL pp.420-421). Kate Millett remarks that 'This is a dazzling example of how men think women ought to think' (p.255). The passage echoes the language of romantic fiction, like the episodes concerning Gerty MacDowell in *Ulysses* (U pp.344-365). Again the question is to what extent the reader finds the text *acknowledges* this. Whereas the changing narrative styles and focus of *Ulysses* draw attention to the question of who is speaking, and the combination of voices highlights the issue of the (un)reliability of narration, I would suggest that occasional 'self-conscious' narrative in *Sons and*



*Lovers* gets totalised, or subsumed, in the persuasive polemic of the whole narrative progress.

The construction of Clara as a desired object in this epiphany can stand for the way feminine subjectivity is narrated in the epiphanies in the text. The innate strength and consistency of Woman is celebrated. The power of femininity is closely related to both generalisation and submission: 'But then Clara was not there for him, *only a woman, warm, something he loved and almost worshipped, there in the dark. But it was not Clara, and she submitted to him*' [my italics] (SL p.420). Making Clara impersonal is important for Paul's successful sex, especially in contrast to his failures with Miriam, but both women are seen (in different proportions), as, on the one hand, providers of passionate sexual release, and on the other, suffocatingly personal. Paul *is* able to make love to Miriam if he doesn't take her into account, and Clara begins to echo Miriam's concerns as the affair progresses. Both women are placed on the same 'sliding scale', which seems to be the only possible one for Paul's lovers in the novel.

After their lovemaking Paul experiences a misrecognition of himself, Clara, and the surrounding world suggestive of Gertrude's epiphany:

When he came to, he wondered what was near his eyes, curving and strong with life in the dark, and what voice it was speaking. Then he realized it was the grass, and the peewit was calling. The warmth was Clara's breathing heaving. He lifted his head, and looked into her eyes. They were dark and shining and strange, life wild at the source staring into his life, stranger to him, yet meeting him; and he put his face down on her throat, afraid. What was she? A strong, strange, wild life, that breathed with his in the darkness through this hour. It was all so much bigger than themselves that he was hushed. They had met, and included in their meeting the thrust of the

manifold grass-stems, the cry of the peewit, the wheel of the stars. (SL p.421)

The simultaneous (in)ability to define Clara and himself and their relationship is characteristic of misrecognition in the mirror-stage. As Elizabeth Grosz puts it:

The child's identification with its specular image impels it nostalgically to seek out a past symbiotic completeness, even if such a state never existed and is retrospectively imposed on the pre-mirror phase; and to seek an anticipatory or desired (ideal or future) identity in the coherence of the totalized specular image. Lacan claims that the child is now enmeshed in the system of confused recognition /misrecognition: it sees an image of itself that is both accurate...as well as delusory (since the image prefigures a unity and mastery that the child still lacks). It is the dual, ambivalent relation to its own image that is central to Lacan's account of subjectivity.<sup>34</sup>

The search for a coherent identity (which Clara provides for a time) can be seen as an extension of early concerns with self and self image. Both the masculine and feminine subject is generalised in Paul's epiphany as 'life', and united with nature as if to add authority to the experience and Paul's self image. Paul recognises the grass and the peewit cry before he recognises Clara, who he initially experiences as merely a 'heaving breath'. He again reads her eyes, as he once read Miriam's. The word 'strange' is repeated three times in connection with her. This misrecognition of Clara associates her explicitly with a sexual 'other', with a potency stemming from an essential 'source' which can affirm his sense of himself as a subject. In his reading of Clara in this experience Paul behaves as an anaclitic lover. Elizabeth Grosz discusses this term (used by both Freud and Lacan) as follows:

While claiming to love the woman desperately, the anaclitic lover strives for a recognition of his own active position...The lover repeats the structure of his infantile narcissistic relations with the mother,

where he is affirmed as the object of her desire, the phallus for her. He is positioned here, and in adult relations, as the subject who has what the (m)other lacks. His position as phallic is conditioned on women's valorized, 'superior' position coupled with their real social powerlessness. (p.127)

The confirmation that this moment offers to Paul is obvious in the following quotation:

To know their own nothingness, to know the tremendous living flood which carried them always, *gave them rest within themselves*. If so great a magnificent power could overwhelm them, identify them altogether with itself, so that they knew they were only grains in the tremendous heave that lifted every grass-blade its little height, and every tree, and living thing, then *why fret about themselves? They could let themselves be carried by life*, and they felt a sort of peace each in the other. There was a *verification* which they had had together. Nothing could nullify it, nothing could take it away, *it was almost their belief in life*. [My italics] (SL p.421)

This justifies Paul's subjectivity: 'the answer' that he looks for in *Sons and Lovers* is to be found in moments like these, and it also justifies Clara's function in the text as the provider of such experiences. The fact that she is not permanently satisfied by this is marked by the return of the language we previously identified in connection with Miriam:

But Clara was not satisfied. Something great was there, she knew; something great enveloped her. But it did not keep her. In the morning it was not the same. They had *known*, but she could not keep the moment. She wanted it again; she wanted something permanent. She had not realized fully. She thought it was he whom she wanted. He was not safe to her. This that had been between them might never be again; he might leave her. She had not got him; she was not satisfied. She had been there, but she had not gripped the - the something - she knew not what - which she was mad to have. (SL pp.421-422)

The short, single clause sentences swiftly following on from one another without connection seem to be distinctive to the text's construction of women's thought processes. Our reading of Clara, then, is deeply influenced by our

perception of Miriam. Marguerite Beede Howe, using Freud's 'The Theme of the Three Caskets', points out that the two women significant in Paul's life apart from his mother are actually extensions of her, represented in a characteristically Freudian triple image (p.10). Although this is interesting, I think the representation of women's subjectivity in epiphanies is actually more fluid. We read the three major women characters in the light of each other.

Of this epiphany, Gavriel Ben-Ephraim writes: 'Apprehending the life around us does not enlarge the self, but rather diminishes it; going beyond taking pleasure in peaceful self indifference, Paul finds satisfaction in self-cancellation' (p.114). I would argue that Paul does not ultimately 'cancel' his self in this experience, but confirms himself as a subject. Graham Holderness comments that 'even after such a triumphant epiphany Paul remains isolated - the irreducible, separate individual, unable to relate or connect. The connection with another individual is no substitute for the relation to the community - a community of the kind dramatised in the art of the novel itself' (p.157). His implication is also that the novel finds Paul a failure at the level of subjectivity, here because he rejects his 'community'.

Having established the predominant languages that position the masculine and feminine subject in *Sons and Lovers* I will turn to a scene earlier in the novel that is more complex: the moment that follows Walter pushing Gertrude out of the house just after an argument over his drinking. Gertrude's epiphany is important in that it uses

*both* languages, which will afterwards be associated with the feminine epiphany (and subject) *and also the masculine epiphany and subject*. The scene uses images of contrast *and also* of merging and fusion, thus being almost hermaphrodite according to the gender differentiated language I have elaborated in Lawrence's fiction. The 'feminine' sense of sharply defined boundaries is very clear as Gertrude finds herself outside: 'Then she got the air into her breast. She walked down the garden path, trembling in every limb, while the child boiled within her' (SL p.59). The separation between the unborn child, her own body, and the surrounding environment is striking. The contrast between light and dark is also present, in the difference between the dark side-garden and the 'front, where she could stand as if in an immense gulf of white light' (SL p.59). Perhaps the most interesting simile, though, is that used to describe the way Gertrude's mind keeps revisualising the argument she has just had: 'certain phrases, certain moments coming each time *like a brand red-hot down on her soul*; and each time she enacted again the past hour, each time the brand came down at the same points, *till the mark was burnt in*' [my italics] (SL p.59). The language of contrast culminates in the sense of flesh being seared and separated from itself by intense heat.

Also present is the language of merging and fusion which is usually more representatively 'masculine':

Mrs Morel leaned on the garden gate, looking out, and she lost herself awhile. She did not know what she thought. Except for a slight feeling of sickness, and her consciousness in the child, herself melted out like scent into the shiny, pale air. After a time the child, too, melted with her in the mixing-pot of moonlight, and she rested with the hills and lilies

and houses, all swum together in a kind of swoon. (SL p.60)

This experience of 'self-loss' and the movement outwards of the self in to the matrix of the other involves fluidity, process, and mingling. The child is the last part of her 'self awareness' to be lost, which is very significant, as I will discuss later.

Gertrude's epiphany embodies what is identified within the terms of the text as masculine *and* feminine languages, which makes her into the split subject identified by Teresa de Lauretis (p.123): before the birth of Paul Gertrude fulfils the narrative role of protagonist of the novel. In *Sons and Lovers*, the position of protagonist necessarily means being masculine, in the sense that notions of the protagonist/hero rely on his own masculine autobiographical investment as well as the masculine narrative of Oedipal desire. As 'hero' (until the birth of Paul), Gertrude will be associated with this 'masculine' language of mingling, lapsing and merging. Secondly, the consciousness of Paul's future existence seems to work on the way Gertrude can be read here. This is obvious in one sense in the fact that she is pregnant with Paul, but it is also apparent in that until the coming of our 'hero', Gertrude must stand in for him and mark and lead the way in which he will be subsequently written.

As a woman, however, Gertrude also figures the way in which other *women* characters' epiphanies will be positioned: the symbols of moon and lily are associated with femininity here, and will be throughout this, and other Lawrentian texts. The moonlight highlights an undulating landscape which stands almost stereotypically

for the feminine body: 'she could stand as if in an *immense gulf* of white light...the moonlight standing up from the hills in front, and *filling the valley* where the Bottoms crouched, almost blindingly' [my italics] (SL p.59). The lily is also a distinctive metaphor for the 'virgin' feminine body, although here the flowers are full of pollen, which implies reproduction and an equation with motherhood. Gertrude seems both frightened of, and attracted by, the flowers, which may suggest the experience of misrecognition, in that she sees her own role as mother simultaneously as part of/not part of her self in the way that the baby placed in front of the mirror relates to its mirror image in Lacan's mirror stage. Pregnancy is seen as a productively destabilising time for the feminine subject by Julia Kristeva: 'Pregnancy seems to be experienced as the radical ordeal of the splitting of the subject: redoubling up of the body, separation and coexistence of the self and of an other, of nature and consciousness, of physiology and speech'.<sup>35</sup> Later in *Sons and Lovers* in the scene where Paul tells her he is breaking off with Miriam Gertrude is clearly associated with '*madonna lilies*' [my italics] (SL p.355). The *combination* of 'masculine' and 'feminine' narrative positions allows a *disjunction* between Gertrude as 'masculine' protagonist misrecognising herself as Mother/Woman. This may be a rare, productive instance for the feminine reading subject, where a certain amount of ideological 'slippage' occurs in the construction of the feminine textual subject through a moment of epiphany. Gertrude certainly does not occupy such an ambiguous

position in the rest of the novel once Paul is born and becomes the focus for the narrative voice.

To return to the 'melting' of the child at the end of this epiphany: the state of complete disregard of the unborn child is, I think, equated with Gertrude's ignorance of *Paul*, a state that is half desired and half feared by him later in the text. Suffering, as he perceives it, from maternal suffocation as an adult, we can read in to this scene the wish by the narrating voice that Paul/the unborn foetus would disappear '*with her*' [my italics] (SL p.60) into a state of non-being that is also union. The link between such desires and the masculine epiphany is made here, and is also significant in Paul's sexual experiences with both Miriam and Clara.

The importance of latent imagery of fertilisation in the scene is apparent in phrases such as 'the presence of the night came again to her' (SL p.59), and 'she roused herself to see what it was that penetrated her consciousness' (SL pp.59-60). In these lines the environment seems to be implicitly masculine, fertilising Gertrude and conceiving Paul. His metaphorical conception is thus implicitly associated with imagery of self-loss. The multiplicity of imagery here, and the confusing narration of gender, is unusual in Lawrence's fiction, but explicable in terms of Gertrude's position at this stage of the narrative, as embodying both the 'masculine' qualities of the desiring hero/protagonist and the 'feminine' qualities of the desired Mother/Woman.

Most critics see this moment rather more simply. Gavriel Ben-Ephraim discusses it as the first of a series



of moments of 'inviolable femaleness', and as a pact between Gertrude and the unborn Paul: 'The scene shows us a merger of mother, nature, and infant. And the infant is a subsidiary element, entirely enfolded into a great maternal being. This binding in white between mother and foetus is the beginning of their Oedipal tie' (p.92). F. B. Pinion also comments on this: 'Metaphorically the passage expresses a fertilisation, the prenatal establishment of the psychic bond between Paul and his mother which outlasts her life'.<sup>36</sup> Graham Holderness fits this scene into his oppositional pattern of individual versus community when he writes: 'Pushed beyond...the normal common experiences of the community, the individual has to enter into communion with some alienated 'reality' beyond the common, the ordinary, the collective life of the community' (p.148). Most of these critics look too selectively at this passage, whereas my analysis establishes the contradictory language and implications for the masculine and feminine subject in this passage, and examines the way it influences, and is influenced by, our reading of the rest of *Sons and Lovers*.

A reading of epiphany and subjectivity in *Sons and Lovers* is, I think, aided by the use of psychoanalytic models to a certain extent. There is no doubt that the epiphanies in the text are 'regressive', and deeply connected to Paul's problems with a mother figure that are frequently transposed on to other women. The problem is that such an analysis may make women powerful, threatening objects and men weakly insecure, but heroic, subjects without discussing this in terms of the material conditions in which this occurs, or as part of the narrative process

and structure of the novel itself. As Hilary Simpson writes: 'The real blow to feminism in *Sons and Lovers* lies in Lawrence's failure to connect the personal world of individual development to the larger material forces which have a part in shaping it' (p.37). The early chapters of *Sons and Lovers* do set Gertrude and Walter within such a 'context', and try to 'explain' the failure of the marriage and Gertrude's turn towards Paul in terms of the social/class situation. The rest of the novel also continues with this approach in some analyses of Miriam and Clara: see for example the sections where Clara and Paul talk about her work jennying (SL p.320) or where Paul analyses his sexual difficulties with Miriam in terms of his relationship with his mother, as representative of 'a good many of the nicest men he knew' (SL p.340)) However, the treatment of masculine and feminine subjectivity does not involve such analyses, particularly not in the moments of epiphany, which are extremely significant in constructing our almost unconscious assumptions about the narration of masculinity and femininity in *Sons and Lovers*. A solely psychoanalytic reading of such moments supports the text's construction of an essential, unified feminine object and a dispersed, problematised masculine subject, but it does not explicate the way in which such gender differentiated epiphanies imply that Paul Morel as hero can progressively struggle to confirm his sense of himself as a subject through such experiences in the narrative, eventually turning 'towards the light' at the end of the novel because of the strength he has gained. The women characters, Miriam, Clara and, to a lesser extent,

Gertrude, are excluded from this project because they are the defined, powerful objects of such a search. *Sons and Lovers* privileges the questing narrative subject of the realist bildungsroman, and identifies such a subject as intrinsically masculine. Kate Millett's frequently quoted remark (often out of context) that 'at this [the vitalist] level Paul is the perfection of self-sustaining ego' (p.247), is more comprehensible when seen in terms of my analysis.

The Rainbow: The Splitting of the Feminine Subject/Narrative Position

In contrast to *Sons and Lovers*, *The Rainbow* offers distinctly less realist forms, relying much more heavily on myth and symbol to structure the narrative. Because of this, the epiphanies in the text are highlighted. As Marguerite Beede Howe writes: 'In *The Rainbow*...the passional, or mystical experience is not the infrequent occurrence it was in *Sons and Lovers*, it becomes the general rule rather than the exception. In fact this desirable state becomes the basis of the morality and the religion of *The Rainbow*' (p.29). Many critics have discussed *The Rainbow*'s 'rhythmic' form which in many ways plays around with chronological time: 'Rhythmic form enables Lawrence in *The Rainbow* to vary the timespan of the narrative from generalised states of long duration to experiences of the intensely lived moment. The Victorian sense of chronological time is displaced by waves of

movement which are subtly responsive to periodicity in human and natural life, a periodicity whose final effect is to undermine "objective" time schemes'.<sup>37</sup> I would disagree with the idea that a disrupted time scheme necessarily means a disrupted subjectivity. G. M. Hyde writes that 'Such devices [in *The Rainbow*] spatialise narrative time by releasing it from the sequentiality of chronometric cause and effect; they also release characters from the constraints of an "individuality" or "stable ego" constructed from a determinate narrative point of view' (p.53). I intend to show how the repetitive symbols and images in the epiphanies of *The Rainbow* construct a notion of the masculine and feminine subject that, although sharply differentiated from each other, establishes specific consistent definitions of femininity and masculinity.

The move towards a centering on Ursula as protagonist in the second half of the novel brings about certain changes, however, that I do not think have been adequately theorised by using the idea of 'rhythmic' form. There is a definite change in the tone, narrative focus, and approach of the novel as Ursula grows up. This half of *The Rainbow* has either been seen as inferior,<sup>38</sup> or the change has not been discussed. The identification of the narrating voice with Ursula brings about a resurgence of realist material and approach, (see for example Chapter XIII, 'The Man's World'), which changes the reader's response to her, fitting her in to an understanding of the questing hero(ine) of the bildungsroman. This reading of Ursula is influenced by Lawrence's personal, autobiographical

investment in the telling (reminiscent of his treatment of Paul Morel, and perhaps taking up where that left off). This means that the construction of Ursula in this part of the novel again relies on ideas about 'the protagonist' that use *masculine* notions of Oedipal desire and closure. This narrative of Ursula as a masculine desiring subject goes hand in hand with the construction of her that relies on image patterns and symbols that reiterate those used to describe other women in *The Rainbow*, (most importantly, her mother Anna), which suggests that this notion of the *feminine* subject as desired object is inherited and inherent. The feminine subject is again theorised as essential, unitary, and threateningly powerful, using language that relies on the light and dark, contrast and definition oppositions we have seen in *Sons and Lovers* but adding to them repeated patterns of gestation and harvest. The epiphanies where such language is used are frequently focused through a threatened male observer/partner (for example Will or Anton), so that this parallel construction of the feminine subject is seen through the eyes of a masculine character. I intend to address the question of whether the split between masculine and feminine narratives of the subject provokes a positive clash for the feminine reading subject or merely positions femininity more effectively.

My analysis of the epiphanies in this text starts with the scene where Will and Anna visit Lincoln cathedral because it sets up such divergent masculine and feminine responses to an 'epiphanic' situation. We again read the combination of images of self loss and self containment

leading to a paradoxical self-affirmation in Will's reaction to the cathedral:

His soul shuddered and rose from her nest. His soul leapt, soared up into the great church. His body stood still, absorbed by the height. His soul leapt up into the gloom, into possession, it reeled, it swooned with a great escape, it quivered in the womb, in the hush and the gloom of fecundity, like seed of procreation in ecstasy. (R p.243) [see list of abbreviations]

But here the simultaneous self-loss and self-containment are implicitly described using metaphors of orgasm and gestation. The cathedral is explicitly feminine, (Will calls it 'she', which Anna resents) (R p.243) and is both a sexual partner *and* a pregnant woman. It also has power over the life and death of its male acolytes. All these images become superimposed on to the cathedral, and on to Woman.

The church lay like a seed in silence, dark before germination, silenced after death. Containing birth and death, potential with all the noise and transitation [sic] of life, the cathedral remained hushed, a great, involved seed, whereof the flower would be radiant life inconceivable, but whose beginning and whose end were the circle of silence. Spanned round with the rainbow, the jewelled gloom folded music upon silence, light upon darkness, fecundity upon death, as a seed folds leaf upon leaf and silence upon the root and the flower, hushing up the secret of all between its parts, the death out of which it fell, the life into which it has dropped, the immortality it involves, and the death it will embrace again. (R pp.243-244)

The 'hypnotic' parallel syntax creates an image heavily suggestive of 'feminine mystique'! The power that this has had over Will's life is obvious in the following: 'Through daylight and day-after-day he had come, knowledge after knowledge, and experience after experience, remembering the darkness of the womb, having prescience of the darkness after death' (R p.244).

In contrast, Anna's response is to resent and ridicule Will's epiphany and its attendant language: 'But yet - yet

she remembered that the open sky was no blue vault, no dark dome hung with many twinkling lamps, but a space where stars were wheeling in freedom, with freedom above them always higher' (R p.245). She mistrusts the way the cathedral architecture encourages adoration and subjection: 'She was not to be flung forward on the lift and lift of passionate flights, to be cast at last upon the altar steps' (R p.245). The 'nursery rhyme' effect of this phrase mimics the language Will uses for the cathedral. To resist being appropriated by his discourse she picks on the little faces or gargoyles, and insists that they are feminine, and that Will acknowledge them (and in so doing acknowledge her alternative reading):

'Oh this is good!' she cried again. 'Here is the same woman - look! - only he's made her cross! Isn't it lovely! Hasn't he made her hideous to a degree?' She laughed with pleasure. 'Didn't he hate her? He must have been a nice man! Look at her - isn't it awfully good - just like a shrewish woman. He must have enjoyed putting her in like that. He got his own back on her, didn't he?' (R p.247)

Anna's opposition to Will's epiphany is effective *in this scene* because she is remarking on the way men deliberately read women to exercise power over them, in both 'positive' images like the cathedral and negative ones like the 'shrewish' 'hideous' gargoyle. However, this opposition does not really work effectively at the deeper levels of the text and the reader's response to it, because Anna is described elsewhere in the text using the same language as that Will associates with the cathedral, which must have an effect on the reader's response in this scene.

If the corn stacking scene where Will and Anna declare their love for each other, and the scene where she dances

in her bedroom when pregnant are read in the light of each other it can be seen that Anna is closely identified with images of sexual union, gestation and fruitful harvest. The moon is important as a symbol of a sequentially defined feminine sexual cycle which begins with the crescent, or virgin, and moves towards the full moon, or fertile, sexually and reproductively active woman. Charlotte Bronte uses the same metaphor, making it more explicit when her protagonist in *Villette*, Lucy Snowe, regrets what she perceives as a sterile life with no chance of love, marriage, or children by using the following metaphorical equivalent: 'I suppose Lucy Snowe, the orb of your life is not to be so rounded; for you the crescent-phase must suffice' (V p.451).

The corn-stacking scene in the novel takes place beneath 'a large gold moon [which] hung heavily' (R p.159), suggesting a full moon at the end of its cycle, or a pregnant woman, heavy with child, like Anna in her bedroom, dancing 'in the pride of her bigness' (R p.224). The link between Anna's reproductive and mothering function and the full moon is stressed by the description of her turning twice to the moon, which highlights her breasts, and by implication, their suckling function, seeming 'glowingly to uncover her bosom every time she faced it', and 'which laid bare her bosom, so she felt as if her bosom were heaving and panting with moonlight' (R p.160). The sheaves Will and Anna are stacking, which are 'like bodies prostrate in shadowy bulk' (R p.159), full, or pregnant, with grain, also form part of the same pattern of imagery. They lift 'the heavy corn' and bring the sheaves together in an



almost sexual union: 'He set his shaves with a keen, faint clash, next to her sheaves. They rode unsteadily. He tangled the tresses of corn' (R p.160). Thus the episode, although suggestive of their incompatible sexual rhythms, also implies that Anna's feminine subjectivity is intimately bound up with her capacity for childbearing. This culminates in Will's description of their kiss: 'She was sweet and fresh with the night air, and sweet with the scent of grain' (R p.162), which imagery is repeated when Will watches her dance when pregnant: 'And with slow, heavy movements she swayed backwards and forwards, like a full ear of corn' (R p.225). It would be possible to argue that the imagery surrounding Anna is only specific to her, and that her retreat to childbearing and rearing is seen as a response to her unsatisfactory relationship with Will, and is criticised by Ursula, and of course that is also true. But the way that Ursula's epiphanies reiterate this language demonstrates that feminine subjectivity is explicitly associated with consummation, gestation and childbirth in *The Rainbow's* epiphanies.

Critical reading of the cathedral epiphany mainly stresses Will's need for self-loss. Marguerite Beede Howe writes that 'Will's life becomes a quest for the ultimate interior...likewise the transcendent experience Will seeks in religion is uroboric merging' (p.47). Gavriel Ben-Ephraim writes that 'giving external form to Will's loss of self urge, the huge church is a Lawrencian objective correlative' (p.150). I would argue that the cathedral represents not Will's urge but the thing to which he can associate that urge: Woman. Ben-Ephraim makes this

connection when he remarks that 'both the church and Anna's body allow Will to lose his identity into something exterior', but this seems, for him, to be more of a link in the plot: 'Anna opposes Will's religious adoration because of its relation to the merging need that plagues their marriage' (p.147), rather than a consistent language associated with femininity.

In contrast, Ursula's epiphanies are of two types: the 'masculine' epiphany associated with her function as a 'masculine' protagonist, which involves the recognisable language of lapsing and merging that I have already identified in Paul and Gertrude Morel, and the distinctively 'feminine' epiphany which draws on imagery of black/white, definition/contrast and also echoes the imagery associated with Anna. This can lead to an apparently confusing presentation of Ursula's subjectivity, which on the one hand differentiates her from her feminine forebears and on the other identifies her closely with them, but if these are understood as specifically gendered narratives working in different ways in the text it becomes more comprehensible.

Ursula's epiphany as she looks through the microscope at the unicellular creature is recognisably reminiscent of Paul and Gertrude's similar experiences. After a discussion with a lecturer about whether life is 'a complexity of physical and chemical activities, of the same order as the activities we already know in science' (R p.491) (which definition Ursula rejects), she has the following experience as she looks under the microscope:

Suddenly in her mind the world gleamed strangely, with an intense light, like the nucleus of the creature under the microscope. Suddenly she had passed away into an intensely-gleaming light of knowledge. She could not understand what it all was. She only knew that it was not limited mechanical energy, nor mere purpose of self-preservation, and self-assertion. It was a consummation, a being infinite. Self was a oneness with the infinite. To be oneself was a supreme, gleaming triumph of infinity. (R pp.491-492)

This experience is intimately connected with the fact that Ursula is meeting Skrebensky for the first time for six years as soon as the afternoon's work is over: her experience is important for the masculine/active plot. The representatively masculine language of self-loss affirms Ursula's sense that subjectivity is much more than Dr Frankstone thinks. The 'oneness with the infinite' suggests that the subject is a 'triumph of infinity': a transcendent self that achieves its clearest expression in such moments.

Gavriel Ben-Ephraim seems unable to see the direct relationship between self-loss and self-confirmation: he writes that 'the greatest fulfilment is not of the separate self (this Ursula has achieved), but of the self *in oneness with the universe*' (p.167). John Beer sees the achievement of individuality to be of great importance in this scene:

For Ursula, to see that a cell exists in its own infinity was to find a key to the significance of all life, including human life; as she did so, she was delivered into a pluralistic universe, where existence in a common infinity paradoxically allowed each self to flourish in its own individuality - and in the process guaranteed the full quality of that individuality. (p.51)

However, I cannot see that Ursula is delivered in to a pluralistic universe. To be '*a triumph of infinity*' [my italics] suggests rather to take your place in a world created and ordered by a divine being, whether this be God

or 'infinity'. The problem seems to centre on this word, which Cornelia Nixon stresses in her reading of the scene:

The opposition between 'personal salvation' and 'fulfilled individuality' seems to underlie Ursula's second vision. The self that the cell possesses is not personal but infinite, an individual embodiment of infinity rather than an ego. An ego is a closed, fixed entity that needs to be consistent, rational, and conventional, whereas an individual embodying infinity is open to impulses, unfixed, in flux. (p.67)

I don't think that 'personal salvation' and 'fulfilled individuality' are actually very different. The second term is merely a secularisation of the first, reliant on the same belief in the unitary, transcendent subject. The way the word 'infinity' is used in the passage does not support her stress on the 'subject in process' (see note 10).

In contrast to the imagery, tone, and narrative function of this epiphany, Ursula's other 'epiphanic' moments more distinctively echo the language we have already associated with Miriam, in *Sons and Lovers*, and Anna. In the epiphany where they dance together after a wedding she and Skrebensky struggle to define each other in the way that Paul and Miriam did. The narrative focus switches from Ursula to Skrebensky as she becomes more powerful and threatening. Ursula is clearly metaphorically linked with the moon, and a specific reference to Anna's experience is made in the way it lights up her breasts, again described twice: 'her breast opened to it, she was cleaved like a transparent jewel to its light', and 'Her two breasts opened to make way for it, her body opened wide like a quivering anemone, a soft, dilated invitation touched by the moon' (R p.365).

Skrebensky and Ursula's competing languages are consistent with those I have identified when discussing Paul and Miriam. He is synonymous with darkness, heaviness, softness, magnetic weight, and impure metal. She is cold, light, white, bright and pure metal. Where he is wheedling, she is angry: 'A strange rage filled her, a rage to tear things asunder. Her hands felt destructive, like metal blades of destruction' (R p.366). The change in the narrative focus occurs as she becomes more threatening: '*His will was set and straining with all its tension to encompass him and compel her. If he could only compel her...if he could only set a bond round her and compel her*' [my italics] (R p.366). His response is to wish that he could trap her: 'he must weave himself round her, enclose her, enclose her in a net of shadows, of darkness, so she would be like a bright creature gleaming in a net of shadows, caught. Then he would have her, he would enjoy her. How he would enjoy her, when she was caught' (R pp.366-367). It would seem that the flip side of feminine power in *The Rainbow* is the masculine desire to subdue it. The woman trapped in the net is a 'bright creature', like a mermaid, that beguiles men and must be caught. Interestingly, Ursula is next compared to a steel blade which would be able to cut a net, or the hand that clasped the blade. The defeat of Skrebensky begins to be introduced in such similes. As they move towards the stackyard the previous corn-sheaving scene underlies our reading of what follows. Here the corn is already stacked, and the identification, already made, between stack and Woman seems to culminate in the following:

They went towards the stackyard. There he saw, with something like terror, the great new stacks of corn glistening and gleaming transfigured, silvery and present under the night-blue sky, throwing dark, substantial shadows, but themselves majestic and dimly present. She, like glimmering gossamer, seemed to burn among them, as they rose like cold fires to the silvery-bluish air. All was intangible, a burning of cold, glimmering, whitish-steely fires. He was afraid of the great moon-conflagration of the cornstacks rising above him. His heart grew smaller, it began to fuse like a bead. He knew he would die. (R p.367)

Although the stacks are 'dimly present' and 'intangible', this only seems to give them more power. They throw 'dark, substantial shadows' and rise upwards gigantically above Skrebensky. The white/black contrast is apparent in the dark shadow against the white stack. The simile used to describe Skrebensky's heart: 'it began to fuse like a bead', is very important, particularly later on, suggesting that whereas Ursula's 'burning' is perpetual and not consuming, Skrebensky's is self-destructive. This again defines femininity as an unchanging essence, and masculinity as changeable process. The pervasive metaphors that conclude the episode identify Ursula with burning salt that poisons, and Skrebensky with 'soft iron' that is overtaken by her. This comparison is interesting, because salt can also mean 'a chemical compound derived from an acid by replacing hydrogen with a metal' (*The Collins Pocket Dictionary*), which would fit with Lawrence's pervasive allotropic metaphors. Although Ursula's destruction of Skrebensky is complete it is undermined by a return to a narrative focus on Ursula, and a stress on her guilt:

She was filled with overpowering fear of herself, overpowering desire that it should not be, that other burning, corrosive self. She was seized with a frenzied desire that what had been should never be

remembered, never be thought of, never be for one moment allowed possible. She denied it with all her might. With all her might she turned away from it. She was good, she was loving. Her heart was warm, her blood was dark and warm and soft. She laid her hand caressively on Anton's shoulder. (R pp.368-369)

This passage returns the reader to the masculine realist narrative, showing that such a narrative positions the feminine subject's identification with power, threat and destruction predominantly through such moments of epiphany.

Most critics seem to see Ursula's role as destructive, and not extend their analysis much beyond that: 'the dance becomes a destructive context [sic] for dominance in which Ursula, like her mother, is *Victrix*, in self assertion'.<sup>39</sup> The link between Ursula and her mother seems to be a merely incidental comparison in Kinkead-Weekes's comment. Gavriel Ben-Ephraim writes of the scene that 'we have a figurative evocation of an archetypal encounter between the destructive *magna mater* and her victim'. He later adds: 'It would be incorrect to read the scene only as a condemnation of her' ! His final comment is that 'her magnitude of self and his nullity are uncovered' (p.161), but he does not discuss why the feminine subject is consistently constructed as essential, inherent, and threateningly powerful.

Ursula and Skrebensky's next epiphany as they walk along the seashore, towards the end of the novel, reiterates the tone and imagery of their first fight; if anything it is more extreme, and is conclusive in ending their relationship. Ursula is again identified with salt, and the moon, and these images are combined by the sea, which is indifferent to the earth/Skrebensky: the suggestive comparison between Ursula and a sea-creature (or

mermaid) caught in a net is here elaborated. When the moonlight shines on Ursula she is again deeply affected (there is an on-going suggestion that the moonlight has a mystical power over women, 'metamorphosing' them into creatures such as the mermaid or harpy). The narrative focus again switches to Skrebensky, as if once Ursula takes this feminine position of threat and power it is no longer possible to narrate from her perspective because she is no longer the 'masculine' protagonist I identified earlier: 'He felt his chest laid bare, where the secret was heavily hidden. He felt himself fusing down to nothingness, like a bead that rapidly disappears in an incandescent flame' (R p.531). The repetition of the bead simile is significant, especially as it has progressed from 'fusing like a bead' (R p.367) in the previous scene, to melting completely in this one, expressing the deterioration of Skrebensky's powers of resistance to Ursula.

As Ursula runs into the water, it solidifies, which is mentioned twice, and again she 'gave her breast to the moon, her belly to the flashing, heaving water' (R p.531), repeating her own and Anna's previous actions. The destructiveness implicit in the solid consistency of her subjectivity is apparent as she is compared to a 'harpy' and a 'possessed creature', reminiscent of the suggestive description of Miriam as a vampiric woman in *Sons and Lovers*. Her 'fierce, beaked harpy's kiss' and 'beaked mouth' (R p.532) combine the feminine and birdlike characteristics of the Greek legend. Ursula takes Skrebensky to a slope under the moonshine, but he is unable to satisfy her and wants to be 'buried in the goodly



darkness' (R p.532), with which he has been identified throughout, and where he later curls up to sleep. Ursula's reaction is one of grief:

Her face lay like an image in the moonlight, the eyes wide open, rigid. But out of the eyes, slowly, there rolled a tear, that glittered in the moonlight as it ran down her cheek.

He felt as if the knife were being pushed into his already dead body. With head strained back, he watched, drawn tense, for some minutes, watching the unaltering, rigid face like metal in the moonlight, the fixed, unseeing eyes, in which slowly the water gathered, shook with glittering moonlight, then surcharged, brimmed over and ran trickling, a tear with its burden of moonlight, into the darkness, to fall in the sand. (R p.532)

This description positions Ursula simultaneously as a consistent, powerful, and destructive woman, or object of desire, and a woman capable of feeling and expressing grief at her actions in a way that returns her to the masculine narrative as actively desiring subject. The contradiction between these two constructions of Ursula as a subject is apparent in the way her tears are unconnected to any emotion, and seem to form of their own accord. This scene could be said to encourage an awareness of the 'ill-fitting' double narration of Ursula in the reader that would work to deconstruct both the masculine and feminine narratives, but I think that the two subject and narrative positions that Ursula occupies in the epiphanies leave no real surplus, as they so effectively determine how both she and femininity can be read.

Critical response to this scene, like the previous one, seems concerned to impute blame. Mark Kinkead-Weekes writes that 'Under an incandescent moon, beside brilliant water, she tries to force the polar opposite of the dark consummation [which is presumably positive in his terms], a

coming-together in intense awareness, and succeeds only in destroying, like a harpy' (p.36). It is obvious who is to blame in his reading of this scene! In contrast, Gavriel Ben-Ephraim, although commenting on Ursula's 'genuinely ugly overassertiveness' (p.169) in the passage, decides that 'neither character should be blamed for the essential truths of being revealed under the moon. The scene does not so much impute the source of the failure as ascertain that the combination of a defined female and a null male leads to carnage' (p.170). Ascertaining blame seems less important than examining why Ursula is consistently described in the way she is in these epiphanies and discussing what that implies about feminine subjectivity in *The Rainbow*.

The end of the novel (frequently found disappointing) suggests, in its changing approach to Ursula, the way in which she will be read in *Women in Love*. The significance of the horse scene rests in the return to a 'masculine' narrative and epiphany as a sort of reaction against, and punishment for, Ursula's 'feminine' subjectivity and epiphany. This should be immediately obvious in the following:

Her heart was gone, she had no more heart. She knew she dare not draw near. That concentrated, knitted flank of the horse-group had conquered. It stirred uneasily, awaiting her, knowing its triumph. It stirred uneasily, with the uneasiness of awaited triumph. Her heart was gone, her limbs were dissolved, she was dissolved like water. All the hardness and looming power was in the massive body of the horse-group. (R pp.541-542)

The transference of imagery of hardness and definition from Ursula to the threatening horse group leaves her with the representatively masculine language of dissolution and

dispersal. It seems impossible to see this experience as a 'transfiguration' (Ben-Ephraim p.171), or as a 'rebirth' that relies on imagery of physical parturition (Cornelia Nixon p.98): it is far too negative.

*The Rainbow*, in the myths and symbols surrounding the feminine epiphany, suggests an inevitable continuity between its women characters and their subjectivity. Feminine subjectivity is theorised as inherent, essentially linked, imagistically, to reproduction and child-rearing, and powerfully threatening to men. The resurgence of a more realist autobiographical form as Ursula becomes the focus for the narrating voice marks a return to the more divided construction of the feminine subject seen previously (if only briefly) in Gertrude Morel's epiphany in *Sons and Lovers*. However, the split between a feminine subject position and a masculine one limits and curtails both the feminine fictional and reading subject's position and access to the narrative by providing two mutually exclusive narratives that work to 'use up' and define notions of femininity in the text.

Women in Love: Mutuality in Destruction; Equal Access to Desire?

*Women in Love* is more distinct from *Sons and Lovers* and *The Rainbow* than either of those novels are from each other. In many ways a transitional text, it marks Lawrence's disenchantment with his old beliefs and struggle to develop new ones that could take account of the changes

in his society provoked by war. Perhaps the most pervasive change is the *loss* of belief in the existence of 'the same single radically-unchanged element' (*The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, Volume II, p.183) in each individual. It was women who embodied that element most clearly in *Sons and Lovers* and *The Rainbow*, and a striking absence in *Women in Love* is that of the distinctively feminine epiphany, with its language of contrast and definition. This would suggest that certainty about the feminine subject is also absent.

In the epiphanies in *Women in Love* the language of dissolution and merging predominates for both men and women characters. This language was previously closely associated with the inscription of masculinity in the text, and the 'masculine' protagonist's desiring function within a realist narrative. However, the absence of the specifically 'feminine' epiphany and its positioning of femininity as essence or object of the narrative's desire means that this language is more difficult to read. Can it be explicitly masculine when there is no feminine object for it to desire? The differentiation in epiphanies in *Women in Love* seems to occur across gender, contrasting the two couples, Birkin and Ursula as opposed to Gerald and Gudrun. This change is accompanied by the loss of a clear realist narrative. The whole narrative is structured around a series of disjointed epiphanies. As David Lodge writes: 'The most memorable events of this story are, precisely, contingent...These events do not seem to belong to any pattern of cause and effect - they seem simply to happen, arbitrarily, randomly or spontaneously, and are invested with meaning by the reactions of those who are involved as

actors or as spectators'.<sup>40</sup> The implications of these changes for the construction of the feminine fictional and reading subject in *Women in Love* are considerable.

I will begin my analysis of *Women in Love* by looking at the large group of epiphanies in the novel in which male characters experience a sense of self-loss and dispersal into an other. In Gerald's case that other is explicitly feminine. This type of epiphany develops from moments like Paul's experience with Clara in the peewit field, or the scene where Anna and Will visit the cathedral. In such epiphanies, the woman, Gudrun, is asked to receive, contain, and affirm the man's subjectivity. As Marguerite Beede Howe writes 'Gerald's letting go in the presence of Gudrun signifies...a lapsing out of his sense of himself, which she provokes' (p.76). This is the main attraction that Gudrun provides for Gerald, and is first suggested in the scene in 'Water Party' where she rows him across the lake:

His mind was almost submerged, he was almost transfused, lapsed out for the first time in his life, into the things about him. For he always kept such a keen attentiveness, concentrated and unyielding in himself. Now he had let go, imperceptibly he was melting into oneness with the whole. It was like pure, perfect sleep, his first great sleep of life. He had been so insistent, so guarded, all his life. But here was sleep, and peace, and perfect lapsing out. (WL p.245) [see list of abbreviations]

This language is instantly recognisable, but its implications are more explicit, more self-conscious. Gerald's experience is no longer an unquestionably 'good thing', and is seen rather as a *product* of his 'keen attentiveness' than as a solution to it. The scene where

Gerald creeps in to Gudrun's house secretly at night after his father's death elaborates this:

As he drew nearer to her, he plunged deeper into her enveloping soft warmth, a wonderful creative heat that penetrated his veins and gave him life again. He felt himself dissolving and sinking to rest in the bath of her living strength. It seemed as if her heart in her breast were a second unconquerable sun, into the glow and creative strength of which he plunged further and further. All his veins, that were murdered and lacerated, healed softly as life came pulsing in, stealing invisibly in to him as if it were the all-powerful effluence of the sun. His blood, which seemed to have been drawn back into death, came ebbing on the return, surely, beautifully, powerfully. (WL p.430)

The difference in this scene is that Gudrun gets an effective response to this language, which is no longer monological. While Gerald sleeps, he is watched and re-written:

But he was far off, in another world. Ah, she could shriek with torment, he was so far off, and perfected, in another world. She seemed to look at him as at a pebble far away under clear dark water. And here was she, left with all the anguish of consciousness, whilst he was sunk deep into the other element of mindless, remote, living shadow-gleam. He was beautiful, far-off, and perfected. They would never be together. Ah, this awful, inhuman distance which would always be interposed between her and the other being! (WL p.432)

It is this distance between subjects that *Women in Love* suggests so strikingly. Masculine experiences of epiphany may try and ascribe the power to women that they had in *The Rainbow*, but women characters are no longer the essential, unitary subjects they once were. This can be seen in the fact that women characters also have such experiences of self-loss and dispersal, in a way that allows them to occupy the position of desiring subject, eliding the role of desired object. Gudrun herself has experienced the same feelings as Gerald does earlier in the same chapter, 'Death and Love':

So she relaxed, and seemed to melt, to flow into him, as if she were some infinitely warm and precious suffusion filling into his veins, like an intoxicant. Her arms were round his neck, he kissed her and held her perfectly suspended, she was all slack and flowing into him, and he was the firm, strong cup that receives the wine of her life. So she lay cast upon him, stranded, lifted up against him, melting and melting under his kisses, melting into his limbs and bones, as if he were soft iron becoming surcharged with her electric life.

Till she seemed to swoon, gradually her mind went, and she passed away, everything in her was melted down and fluid, and she lay still, become contained by him, sleeping in him as lightning sleeps in a pure, soft stone. So she was passed away and gone in him, and he was perfected. (WL p.415)

Here it is Gerald who provides the solid consistency that reaffirms Gudrun's subjectivity. Gavriel Ben-Ephraim writes of this moment: 'As for Gudrun, her ability to "swoon" and "pass away", exquisite while it briefly lasts, soon yields to her assertive, circumscribing ego. Coming back to consciousness Gudrun turns self-forgetting physical intimacy into an aggressive mind-intimacy' (pp.192-193). This may be true of this scene, but it is significant that woman characters have such experiences frequently in the novel. Gudrun experiences such self-loss again in the snow at the end of *Women in Love*, as she and Gerald toboggan down the mountain-side.

Ursula also has similar moments. In the 'Moony' episode she watches as Birkin tries to break apart the reflection in the water of the full moon - a representation of feminine inviolability that has been created in the previous two texts we have examined, and is made explicit here in Birkin's curse on Cybele, a goddess whose male devotees castrated themselves in worship. As she watches she was 'dazed, her mind was all gone. She felt she had fallen to the ground and was spilled out, like water on the

earth. Motionless and spent she remained in the gloom' (WL p.324). Birkin's stoning must be seen in the context of his unsuccessful relationship with the 'possessive' Hermione, and his concern to establish a 'stellar equilibrium' with Ursula when she wants love. So his mental perception of the powerful, threatening woman, here transferred to the image of the moon in water, suggests not that such a notion of the feminine subject exists in the text, as it does in *Sons and Lovers* and *The Rainbow*, but that Birkin's internal perception of such a feminine subject is a neurotic phantasy not exactly matched by any of the women characters in the text. (Even Hermione is shown to be rooted not in strength but in insecurity.) The fact that Birkin looks at the moon as an image *reflected in water* makes this relation clear. G. M. Hyde reads this as follows: 'the moon goddess codes both the destructive and the creative parts of the 'anima', or female emanation from the male self...the split moon is also the split psyche and the fissured surface of Lawrence's novel' (p.74). John Beer makes a significant point when he argues that the revelation would result from the *re-establishment* of the moon's image if the passage were written by Wordsworth. (p.65)

The second of Ursula's epiphanies comes in the chapter 'Excuse' when she and Birkin reach an understanding of a source 'deeper, further in mystery than the phallic source' (WL p.397), which perfects their love. As Ursula kneels at Birkin's feet clasping his loins she experiences a perfect epiphany:

It was a perfect passing away for both of them, and at the same time the most intolerable accession into being, the marvellous fulness of immediate



gratification, overwhelming, outflooding from the source of the deepest life-force, the darkest, deepest, strangest life-source of the human body, at the back and base of the loins.

After a lapse of stillness, after the rivers of strange dark fluid richness had passed over her, flooding, carrying away her mind and flooding down her spine and down her knees, past her feet, a strange flood, sweeping away everything and leaving her an essential new being, she was left quite free, she was free in complete ease, her complete self. (WL p.396)

This suggestion of affirmation and completion of the feminine subject *through* the masculine is heavily ironic when one considers that whereas Gerald does seek his own confirmation through a perception of woman as 'bath of birth', Birkin experiences such moments, not primarily through Ursula or other women, but through *men*, or through something identified as masculine. Each of the characters in *Women in Love*, regardless of gender, seems to look to heal the split between self and other by joining with/lapsing in to an other that is also looking to do the same with someone/thing else in a 'La Ronde' type of hopelessness. None of the subjects in this novel can provide the ontological stability that others look for in them, least of all its women characters or an idea of femininity.

Birkin's epiphanies are distinctly masculine directed, which is extremely significant in that it removes women from their pedestal as objects of desire, without, however, effectively replacing them. The first important experience of this sort for Birkin occurs after Hermione has smashed his head with a heavy paperweight. As he leaves the house, in severe shock, his reaction against femininity is heightened and he searches for something different. The language is reminiscent of Paul's experience when he and

Miriam go to look at the rosebush. The valley is 'gloomy', and he moves 'in a sort of darkness' (WL p.164). The hillside is 'overgrown and obscure' (WL p.165). Birkin seems to need something different from Paul in this scene though: instead of 'lapsing out' he wants to 'saturate himself' (WL p.165) with the touch of the vegetation. This directional change is much more desperate and nihilistic than the other language, suggesting an actual replacement of part of the structure of the self with another substance. The *Collins Pocket Dictionary* defines saturation as 'to cause (a substance) to combine to its full capacity with another', which suggests the possibility of change and fluidity.

The images of nature in this scene are not feminine. Birkin rejects the flowers because they are too soft, and moves towards some fir trees 'that were no higher than a man'. The boughs almost ejaculate as he touches them throwing 'little cold showers of drops on his belly'. The grass is described as 'soft and more delicate and more beautiful than the touch of any woman' (WL p.165), and the following description is distinctly auto/homoerotic:

To sting one's thigh against the living dark bristles of the fir-boughs; and then to feel the light whip of the hazel on one's shoulders, stinging, and then to clasp the silvery birch trunk against one's breast, its smoothness, its hardness, its vital knots and ridges - this was good, this was all very good, very satisfying. Nothing else would do, nothing else would satisfy, except this coolness and subtlety of vegetation travelling into one's blood. How fortunate he was, that there was this lovely, subtle, responsive vegetation, waiting for him, as he waited for it; how fulfilled he was, how happy! (WL p.165)

The suggestion of the substance of the vegetation being 'transfused' in to his blood reinforces the 'saturation' image used earlier. Birkin almost seeks a new,

metamorphosed subjectivity, not a confirmation of his old self, and this is directed away from femininity. The later phrase, 'Really, what a mistake he had made, thinking he wanted people, thinking he wanted a woman' (WL p.165), suggests under the guise of misanthrope Birkin's real needs.

This becomes more apparent in the wrestling scene with Gerald, where Birkin seeks a similar fusional experience:

Birkin was much more exhausted. He caught little, short breaths, he could scarcely breathe any more. The earth seemed to tilt and sway, and a complete darkness was coming over his mind. He did not know what happened. He slid forward quite unconscious, over Gerald, and Gerald did not notice. Then he was half-conscious again, aware only of the strange tilting and sliding of the world. The world was sliding, everything was sliding off into the darkness. And he was sliding endlessly, endlessly away. (WL p.349)

The sense of the world, and himself, sliding out of focus is very disturbing, and much more negative than any of Paul's epiphanies. These experiences, like those of the other characters in the novel, are permeated by the knowledge that there is no mutuality or reciprocity, no final security in any one.

The only sense of mutuality in *Women in Love* is of mutuality in destruction, and it is the epiphanies in these scenes that offer a distinctly different version of feminine (and masculine) subjectivity. In these experiences it is the *internally split subject* that is fully realised in a way that is different from all of Lawrence's earlier novels. The release of the destructive impulses of the unconscious has, to a certain extent, liberatory effects on the treatment of feminine subjectivity in the novel. It is Gudrun and Gerald who really show us such moments, so that

the axis of differentiation between different types of subjectivity no longer falls across gender but across the 'silver river of life' (Birkin and Ursula) as opposed to the 'dark river of destruction' (Gudrun and Gerald).

In the 'Rabbit' chapter, for example, the language of 'lapsing out' remains, but instead of identifying the self's movement into the other, it describes the release of the unconscious part of the subject, with all its desires for sexual violence, into the conscious part. This destabilises the unified subject's consistency, and can be seen in the addition of language of *tearing* and *rupture* to that of leakage or seepage. After their fight to subdue the rabbit, Gudrun and Gerald realise a pact of 'mutual hellish recognition' (WL p.317). Gudrun feels that 'The scream of the rabbit, after the violent tussle, seemed to have torn the veil of her consciousness' (WL p.316), and Gerald's language, as he sees her scratches, echoes hers instead of opposing it, as we have seen Paul's and Skrebensky's do in *Sons and Lovers* and *The Rainbow*: 'The long, shallow red rip seemed torn across his own brain, tearing the surface of his ultimate consciousness, letting through the forever unconscious, unthinkable red ether of the beyond, the obscene beyond' (WL p.317). This sense of Gudrun and Gerald's narrative equality is apparent in the use of words like 'recognition', 'league' and 'equal'. G. M. Hyde comments that 'The insistent process of projection and over-determination affects the language, turbid and veering out of control, characteristically situated somewhere in between the narrator and the character, a language which is

specific to the emotional tensions in the situation as well as redolent of war' (p.61).

This implied sexual violence is sometimes inflicted on women in the novel, in, for example, the scene where Gudrun watches Gerald force his Arab mare to face the line of trucks passing through the railway crossing, or the passage where he strangles her. The 'Coal-Dust' episode prepares for the rabbit scene, and for Gudrun and Gerald's relationship. The language again uses the combination of tearing and bleeding with lapsing and dispersing: 'Gudrun looked and saw the trickles of blood on the sides of the mare, and she turned white. And then on the very wound the bright spurs came down, pressing relentlessly. The world reeled and passed into nothingness for Gudrun, she could not know any more' (WL p.170). It is significant that although the perpetrator of violence is masculine, the 'focaliser' is feminine. The scene is one of many that triggers *feminine* violence in response. As Marguerite Beede Howe writes: 'She is...ultimately excited by it to destroy him' (p.77). Gerald's strangling Gudrun is another similar episode. As he tries to tear 'the slippery chords of her life' (WL p.572) in her throat he feels an ultimate gratification, but his knowledge of the pointlessness of his attempt makes him give up. The reappearance of the language of self loss here is extremely nihilistic. Whereas I was not convinced by Paul's play with the idea of death in the woods in *Sons and Lovers*, Gerald's drifting ultimately *does* lead to his death:

A weakness ran over his body, a terrible relaxing, a thaw, a decay of strength. Without

knowing, he had let go his grip, and Gudrun had fallen to her knees. Must he see, must he know?

A fearful weakness possessed him, his joints were turned to water. He drifted, as on a wind, veered, and went drifting away.

'I didn't want it really,' was the last confession of disgust in his soul, as he drifted up the slope, weak, finished, only sheering off unconsciously from any further contact. 'I've had enough - I want to go to sleep. I've had enough.' He was sunk under a sense of nausea. (WL p.573)

The weakness associated with masculine violence is not as important for the construction of the feminine subject as the fact that women are just as violent towards men in the novel: violence is not seen to be a specifically masculine preserve at the level of particular characters. Compare for example the language describing Hermione's attack on Birkin:

A terrible voluptuous thrill ran down her arms - she was going to know her voluptuous consummation. Her arms quivered and were strong, immeasurably and irresistibly strong. What delight, what delight in strength, what delirium of pleasure! She was going to have her consummation of voluptuous ecstasy at last! (WL p.163)

with Gerald's on Gudrun:

What a fulfilment, what a satisfaction! How good this was, oh how good it was, what a God-given gratification, at last! He was unconscious of her fighting and struggling. The struggling was her reciprocal lustful passion in this embrace, the more violent it became, the greater the frenzy of delight, till the zenith was reached, the crisis, the struggle was overborne, her movements became softer, appeased. (WL p.572)

Within the terms of the text, the feminine and masculine subject is seen as seeking security from an other who, regardless of gender, cannot provide it. Whereas the narrative progression of *Sons and Lovers* and *The Rainbow* is towards men finding such security from women, *Women in Love* does not progress at all in this way but moves haphazardly towards failure of this hermeneutic.

Both sexes experience themselves as subjects split by unconscious sado-masochistic desires (one couple manages to repress these better than the other). Such desires are not confined to men or women characters, and in a sense the articulation of the unconscious, with its accompanying revelation of the failure of the unitary, individual subject, allows women characters, like Gudrun, access to the masculine desiring narrative in a way that liberates the role that the feminine subject plays in the text. The absence of a stable feminine other which can be sought, and provides stability when found, means that it would be difficult to define this narrative as 'masculine and desiring' any longer. The binary opposition falls apart when one of its terms is absent.

The place of epiphany in this is important, in that it is through the non-linear working of such moments in the narrative, and the unconscious echoes that the repetition of their representative language provides, that we can gain a sense of change in the construction of the feminine subject in *Women in Love*. My use of the term epiphany has progressed significantly from its starting point in this chapter, to incorporate moments of revelation confined *within* the subject. Julia Kristeva's understanding of the term 'abject' in her book *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* seems relevant here:

But not until the advent of twentieth century 'abject' literature...did one realize that the narrative web is a thin film constantly threatened with bursting. For, when narrated identity is unbearable, when the boundary between subject and object is shaken, and when even the limit between inside and outside becomes uncertain, the narrative is what is challenged first. If it continues nevertheless, its makeup changes; its linearity is shattered, it proceeds by flashes,

enigmas, short cuts, incompleteness, tangles and cuts. At a later stage, the unbearable identity of the narrator and of the surroundings that are supposed to sustain him can no longer be *narrated* but *cries out* or is *descried* with maximal stylistic intensity (language of violence, of obscenity, or of a rhetoric that relates the text to poetry). The narrative yields to a *crying-out theme* that, when it tends to coincide with the incandescent states of a boundary-subjectivity that I have called abjection, is the crying-out theme of suffering-horror. In other words, the theme of suffering-horror is the ultimate evidence of such states of abjection within a narrative representation.<sup>41</sup>

### Conclusion: Abject Epiphanies: Equality or Marginality?

As the 'masculine' realist narrative with its 'masculine' desiring protagonist implodes, such epiphanies of 'suffering-horror' restructure the text. However, to what extent is this an improvement on the strategies of *Sons and Lovers* and *The Rainbow*? The informing powerful narrative of these novels made femininity incommensurate with their privileged masculine signifying processes of individuation and *bildung*. Instead, femininity was positioned as the desired object of a masculine quest. The feminine reading subject was left little space. The key narrative has changed in *Women in Love* into the type of gender-neutral 'abject' structure that Kristeva describes, and femininity is defined similarly to masculinity in terms of its position in relation to unconscious sado-masochistic desire as expressed in epiphanies in the narrative.

The novel does not recognise, however, that its privileged signifying process of unconscious desire is not a gender neutral but a patriarchal choice, and that femininity has a marginal, not equal, position in relation



to it. As Kristeva puts it: 'Sexual difference...is translated by and translates a difference in the relationship of subjects to the symbolic contract which is the social contract: a difference, then, in the relationship to power, language and meaning' ('Women's Time' p.196). And if power, language and meaning focus on the disruptive outbreak of desire then femininity and masculinity must have a differential relationship to that desire. As Toril Moi puts it: 'Kristeva's emphasis on marginality allows us to view this repression of the feminine in terms of *positionality*...What is perceived as marginal at any given time depends on the position one occupies'.<sup>42</sup> The feminine reading subject may find *Women in Love* to offer a convincing account of narratively equal, actively desiring feminine and masculine fictional subjects, but will not find space for a questioning of the inter-relationship between desire, gender and power at the level of the epiphanic construction of subjectivity in the narrative.

#### Notes

1. Daniel Allbright, *Personality and Impersonality: Lawrence, Woolf and Mann* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1976), p.22.
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3. Gavriel Ben-Ephraim, *The Moon's Dominion: Narrative Dichotomy and Female Dominance in Lawrence's Earlier Novels* (London: Associated University Presses, 1981), p.19.
4. Baruch Hochman, *Another Ego: The Changing View of Self and Society in the Work of D. H. Lawrence* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1970), p.ix.

5. Graham Holderness, *D. H. Lawrence: History, Ideology and Fiction* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Humanities Press, 1982), p.179.
6. Ed Jewinski, 'The Phallus in D. H. Lawrence and Jacques Lacan', *D. H. Lawrence Review*, 21 (1989), 7-24 (p.22).
7. Cornelia Nixon, *Lawrence's Leadership Politics and the Turn Against Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), p.67.
8. *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, Volume II, 1913-1916, edited by George J. Zytaruk and James T. Boulton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p.182.
9. 'Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature', in *Marinetti: Selected Writings*, edited by R. W. Flint, translated by R. W. Flint and Arthur A. Coppotelli (London: Secker and Warburg, 1971), pp.84-89 (p.88).
10. The term 'subject in process' is a translation of Julia Kristeva's term 'sujet en proces' (subject in process/on trial). (See her book *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, edited by Leon S. Roudiez, translated by Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981), pp.135-136.) I am using the term to cover poststructuralist and postmodernist ideas about the subject.
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12. F. R. Leavis, *D. H. Lawrence: Novelist* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981), p.120.
13. Graham Hough, *The Dark Sun: A Study of D. H. Lawrence* (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1956), pp.238-239.
14. Catherine Belsey, 'Constructing the Subject: Deconstructing the Text', in *Feminist Criticism and Social Change: Sex, Class and Race in Literature and Culture*, edited by Judith Newton and Deborah Rosenfelt (London: Methuen, 1985), pp.45-64 (pp.51-52).
15. Elizabeth Brody Tenenbaum, *The Problematic Self: Approaches to Identity in Stendhal, D. H. Lawrence, and Malraux* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1977), p.21.
16. Marguerite Beede Howe, *The Art of the Self in D. H. Lawrence* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1977), p.25.
17. Richard Drain, 'Women in Love', in *D. H. Lawrence: A Critical Study of the Major Novels and Other Writings*, edited by A. H. Gomme (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1978), pp.70-93 (p.89).
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27. See for example G. M. Hyde p.64.
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30. A. H. Gomme, 'Jessie Chambers and Miriam Leivers', in *D. H. Lawrence: A Critical Study of the Major Novels and Other Writings*, edited by A. H. Gomme (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1978), pp.30-52 (pp.37,39).
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41. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, translated by Leon S. Roudiez, European Perspectives (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), pp.140-141.
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CHAPTER FOUR: EPIPHANY IN DORIS LESSING'S *CHILDREN OF VIOLENCE*: SITE FOR CONFLICTING THEORIES OF THE FEMININE SUBJECT

Introduction: Ways of Understanding the Feminine Subject in *Children of Violence*

In this final chapter I intend to discuss the changing way that the feminine subject is articulated in the epiphanies in Doris Lessing's *Children of Violence* series. I will identify the prevailing patterns in the series that situate the feminine subject in very different ways. Lessing can suggest in the early novels in the series that the feminine subject is *constructed* by what she considers to be ideological and social practices such as patriarchy, and the colonialism and racism of the white 'Zambesian' bourgeoisie. Her remark that the series is about 'the individual's relations with the collective'<sup>1</sup> is consonant with this idea of the subject and may suggest broadly socialist or materialist influences. The place of gender in this conception of the subject is sharply observed and is clearly determined by the differential relationships of women and men to power - women having a marginal position in relation to men. The inter-connections between gender, class and race are also made clear.

Simultaneously, however, the novels develop a belief in the unitary, individual subject that suggests more humanist models. The 'gendering' of this subject fluctuates. In the early novels this 'individual' self can

sometimes be associated with female anatomy and reproduction, which implies that it is *essentially* female. At other points it reiterates a masculine belief in rationality, autonomy, and self-determination. Later novels take a different position, insisting that the individual self is *not* gendered. I will discuss the implications of these definitions of the feminine subject in the series, and question to what extent any position embraces the role of language in feminine subjectivity.

Martha Quest: Initial Conflicts in Martha as Subject

In the first novel of the series, *Martha Quest*, the tension between the different models of the feminine subject is clear. From the first page we are made aware of the extent to which Martha is a *product* of her family situation and wider social environment. Martha plays an opposing role to that of her mother and her mother's friend: 'She was merely expected to play the part "young girl" against their own familiar roles' (MQ p.8) [see list of abbreviations]. The novel goes on to detail lucidly the various influences that have contributed to Martha's personality: her relationship with her mother, and, to a lesser degree, her father; her awareness of the differences of race and class encouraged by her white 'Zambesian' upbringing, and her sex-role conditioning. Her attitude to these 'building blocks' of her personality is one of repudiation, but, inevitably, remains within their confines: Martha has few *role-models*. Other important

influences are poetic literature and the surrounding veld, and the relation between them: 'She read poetry, not for the sense of the words, but for the melodies which confirmed the rhythm of the moving grasses and the swaying of the leaves over her head' (MQ p.35). But literature and nature do not provide Martha with objective 'eternal verities', instead they have an important function in constructing but also limiting her perceptions: 'she was seeing herself, and in the only way she was equipped to do this - through literature' (MQ p.13). Later we are told that 'her mind [was] formed by poetic literature (and little else)' (MQ p.61).

It is important that the text constructs Martha as a *feminine* subject, specifically situated within a patriarchal system, by emphasising the appropriate roles and experiences for each sex. In the scene where Marnie tells Martha of her older sister's marriage, the difference between the two girls' reactions to the news, their dress, and the type of language they use strongly suggests Martha's simultaneous rejection of, and attraction to, contemporary models of adult femininity (MQ p.18). Martha's mother also functions as an extremely effective agent of sex role conditioning.

The model of the feminine subject as intensely individual and innate is thematically linked to a stress on the female body and reproductive process that suggests an essential definition of femininity. The importance of a close relationship with the body in defining an authentic feminine subjectivity is important in the work of the French writer, Hélène Cixous. She writes:

By writing her self, woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display...Write your self. Your body must be heard. Only then will the immense resources of the unconscious spring forth...To write. An act which will not only 'realize' the decensored relation of woman to her sexuality, to her womanly being, giving her access to her native strength; it will also give her back her goods, her pleasures, her organs, her immense bodily territories which have been kept under seal.<sup>2</sup>

Cixous links the woman's body with a positive source, or voice, that produces an authentic writing and subjectivity. Cixous also discusses the importance of the woman's close pre-oedipal link with the mother:

In woman there is always more or less of the mother who makes everything all right, who nourishes, and who stands up against separation; a force that will not be cut off but will knock the wind out of the codes. (p.252)

Similar concerns will become apparent in Lessing's epiphanies, which frequently suggest the closeness of the female body to nature and may be interpreted as displaying a need for the return to an idealised pre-oedipal stage.

The style of narration in *Martha Quest* suggests a double definition of the feminine subject. Margaret Scanlan characterises the style as 'indirecte libre' which 'allows the narrative to move into the character's mind',<sup>3</sup> but critics and reviewers have disagreed considerably over the narrator's attitude to Martha. Jenny Taylor quotes two widely divergent readings. The first is C. P. Snow on *Martha Quest*: "'Miss [sic] Lessing often plays down any glimmer of charity or tenderness...the reader has to supply much for himself [sic] in order to find out what [Martha] is really like"'. The second is J. W. Lambert reviewing *A Proper Marriage*: "'the episodic story is presented from Martha's point of view, so much so that it could be told in



the first person".<sup>4</sup> However, the narrator's tone in *Martha Quest* can be ironic, superior, and pitying - for example:

In the meantime, Martha, in an agony of adolescent misery, was lying among the long grass under a tree, repeating to herself that her mother was hateful, all these old women hateful, every one of these relationships, with their lies, evasions, compromises, wholly disgusting. For she was suffering that misery peculiar to the young, that they are going to be cheated by circumstances out of the full life every nerve and instinct is clamouring for. (MQ p.13)

In this passage, 'adolescent' used as an adjective trivialises Martha's emotion, and removes the narrator from involvement with it, as does the long sentence with its list of grievances broken by commas. The use of the word 'for' at the beginning of the next sentence creates a sense of ordered explanation, almost like a patient's case history, and 'peculiar to the young' again emphasises the narrator's emotional and age distance from Martha's experience. Martha's misery is described as a typical symptom of the 'dis/ease' of adolescence.

This distance and 'objectivity' in detailing the experiences that make up Martha's self is also apparent in the depiction of her environment, for example in Part Three, Chapter One of *Martha Quest*, which concerns the inception, building, clientele, and social mores of the Sports Club, which the narrator mercilessly dissects:

The girls were, it was assumed, responsible for the men. Even the child of seventeen who had left school the week before, and was at her first dance, taking her first alcohol, would instantly assume an air of madonna-like, all-experienced compassion; she did not giggle when this wolf or that moaned and rolled his eyes and said, 'Beautiful, why haven't I seen you before, I can't take it, I'm dying,' as he clutched his forehead and reeled back from the vision of her unbearable attractions. (MQ p.152)

This 'bird's eye view' serves to emphasise the notion of self as *construct* that is established in the novel - Martha is a product of her society.

However, the presence of an innate, individual humanist subject is implied by the narrative at a structural and linguistic level. The surname 'Quest', as numerous critics have pointed out, has its own mythical associations, and encourages the reader to place Martha within a nineteenth century tradition of fictional heroines/heroes. This suggests an innate, consistent self coming to terms with the world, rather than being formed by it - the self retains the same personality, though it learns to accept and deal with the inevitable conflicts with the surrounding environment. The novel's position as part of the genres of 'series-novel' and bildungsroman also suggests this. As Lorna Sage writes: 'The sequence or series format allows for a good deal of wandering, while still holding out the prospect of arrival'.<sup>5</sup> This is also true of the structure of four parts per novel and four chapters per part, as Jean Pickering points out,<sup>6</sup> although there is some irregularity.

The use of social and linguistic realism throughout the novel is also important in developing a sense of the humanist subject. As Gayle Greene says: 'Lessing is initially drawn to realism because she believes that realism, as epitomized in the nineteenth-century novel, is the mode best suited to express "the individual conscience in its relations with the collective"'.<sup>7</sup> However, the realist mode can be ideologically complicit in its presentation of the world, and, therefore, the subject.

Greene discusses the problematic nature of realism in relation to the *Children of Violence* series in her article:

Since realism produces meaning by evoking and combining cultural codes that are the received ideas of the culture, appearing 'realistic' because it draws on familiar systems that reaffirm our sense of the familiar, it 'does the work of ideology' in masking contradictions and containing tendencies toward change. (p.85)

Lorna Sage compares the realist novel to an imperialist world view: 'The habitual repressions of the colony and "realist" habits of representation may have something nastily in common...the novel...is a colonising genre...that crowds out other possible world-pictures' (p.47). On the linguistic level, also, the 'common sense' feel of the writing - that everything is perfectly explicable - encourages our awareness of a rational, unitary individual self. As Nicole Ward Jouve writes: 'You are never given to understand that there is more to Martha than the text gives you'.<sup>8</sup> Most of the structural, narrative and linguistic models discussed here are masculine ones, which suggests an implicit gendering of the individual, humanist subject at the narrative level, which is at odds with the thematics which situate this self as essentially female.

The narrative, then, can simultaneously suggest that the subject is a function of social, material and ideological influences, and that it is an individual, unitary, humanist self. The ironic style of the narrator is vital to the idea of the self as construct, but the reader's sympathy is also engaged by the familiar structural and linguistic patterns apparent in the narrative: Martha is a heroine - more than merely the sum

of the parts of her environment's effect on her. This can be seen in her mother's reaction to the episode where Martha rebels against her insistence on seeing her as a child by cutting up her childish dress:

She [Mrs Quest] glanced at her husband, than came quickly across the room, and laid her hands on either side of the girl's waist, as if trying to press her back into girlhood. Suddenly Martha moved backwards, and involuntarily raised her hand; she was shuddering with disgust at the touch of her own mother, and had been going to slap her across the face. (MQ p.24)

The realist narrative here has various implications that exceed the idea of the self as ideological and social construct. The passage is a 'set-piece' very reminiscent of George Eliot or D. H. Lawrence, in which the heroic central character is misunderstood by an unfeeling and inferior person. The simile 'as if trying to press her back into girlhood' suggests the repression of Martha's developing potential as a heroine as well as her body.

The presence of these double narratives of subjectivity creates a tension which is never resolved. Many critics have remarked on this. Jenny Taylor writes:

The *Children of Violence* sequence involves a range of fictional and ideological contradictions. The narrative clearly refers back to the conventions of nineteenth-century realism...Yet within those terms, the resources of those conventions cannot 'transcend' the experience of dissolution, exile and displacement which they represent, despite the implied totalising sweep of the narrative. (p.5)

She sees this as a 'Modernist' content breaking through a Victorian form, which is insufficient to describe it. Her implication is that this is a positive aspect of the novel. However, I think it is inappropriate to see the split as occurring between form and content when both thematics and narrative are much more radically fissured. I would also

suggest that the realist narrative has much more negative implications for the novel, which I intend to examine. Ingrid Holmquist's book, *From Society to Nature: A Study of Doris Lessing's 'Children of Violence'*,<sup>9</sup> traces two conflicting attitudes which she identifies as social, and nature versus culture through the series, but comes to a completely opposing conclusion to mine as to their significance.

It is frequently around areas of tension between different ideas of the subject that the novel's epiphanies are situated. The first, and perhaps most climactic, epiphany in *Martha Quest* occurs as Martha is walking home along the veld one night. There is an initial awareness that the idea of epiphany is itself a literary construct. It is referred to as a state of mind which has been described using 'words like *ecstasy*, *illumination*, and so on' (MQ p.61). The italics on these words in the text seem to suggest that they are quotations from well-known texts. Martha has read 'descriptions of other people's "moments"'. We read: 'Her mind having been formed by poetic literature (and little else), she of course knew that such experiences were common among the religious' (MQ p.61). This self-awareness makes us feel that the text is trying to undermine the traditional notion of epiphany as a moment of transcendence that goes on to affirm the subject, and discuss on an almost metafictional level how these moments are constructed, by offering us a very different experience: the epiphany is 'a pain, not a happiness'; 'a difficult birth'; 'different' and 'terrible'. The writers who called it an illumination are 'liars'. It only happens

to Martha when she has undermined the idea to herself as a cliché '"incidental to the condition of adolescence"' (MQ p.61).

The description of the experience itself tries to break down Martha as a unified subject. This is a two stage process, beginning with an integration, where Martha and the natural environment become the same:

She felt the rivers under the ground forcing themselves painfully along her veins, swelling them out in an unbearable pressure; her flesh was the earth, and suffered growth like a ferment; and her eyes stared, fixed like the eye of the sun. (MQ p.62)

The female body metaphorically becomes the earth, experiencing the flux and growth of nature's life processes. This is a striking passage, in which there is a clear sense of the close relationship between the female body and the transcendent, epiphanic subject. Martha becomes an almost mythical 'earth-mother' with potent and fructifying female powers, but this vision of the self strongly implies a definition of the individual, constant self as essentially linked to the female body.

The second stage of the experience is one of dissolution, and a sense of breakdown:

With a sudden movement forwards and out, the whole process stopped; and *that* was the 'moment' which it was impossible to remember afterwards. For during that space of time (which was timeless) she understood quite finally her smallness, the unimportance of humanity. (MQ p.62)

The experience is meant to alienate Martha from her everyday conception of her self. It is 'inhuman, like the blundering rocking movement of a bullock cart' (MQ p.62). Words are meant to be insufficient and inapplicable, and also self-contradictory:

For during that space of time (which was timeless)...no part of that sound was Martha's voice. Yet she was part of it...For that moment, while space and time (but these are words, and if she understood anything it was that words, here, were like the sound of a baby crying in a whirlwind). (MQ p.62)

A radical new notion of subjectivity is apparently offered:

What was futile was her own idea of herself and her place in the chaos of matter. What was demanded of her was that she should accept something quite different; it was as if something new was demanding conception, with her flesh as host; as if it were a necessity, which she must bring herself to accept, that she should allow herself to dissolve and be formed by that necessity. (MQ p.62)

However, to what extent can this new vision of the subject be said to be different from the subject confirmed by transcendent epiphanies in other literature? The whole episode contains echoes of the 'doubting Thomas' who mocks the idea of epiphany at first but is finally convinced. The unification and dissolution motif is common in other epiphanies in other novels, for example Paul and Clara in the peewit field in *Sons and Lovers* (SL p.421). (See my discussion on pages 169-173 ). The theme of breakdown of the subject is offered as an alternative to Martha's everyday self with a moral tone and force that is inconsistent with ideas of fragmentation and break-up. The idea of the 'insufficiency of words', common elsewhere in Lessing's work<sup>10</sup> and a pervasive humanist belief, is not supported by the text itself, which shows very little linguistic confusion - parentheses and dashes are added in an attempt to find the *right* words, it would seem.

This initial epiphany embodies some of the contradictions in the text, and in the series as a whole, in the arena of subjectivity. Another interesting episode

in *Martha Quest* that illuminates a subtext of the essentially female individual subject in an epiphany is the moment when Donovan takes Martha up onto the kopje above the town after their first date, when she has only just arrived from the country. Martha is looking out over the town, which is shrunk in perspective, and she is aware of its smallness. She tries to resist this feeling, but Donovan keeps 'shrinking' all her experiences and responses into the correct ones:

At her feet rustled the veld grass, and the scent of the violet tree swept across her face. But Donovan said, 'And so here we are, we must admire the lights and feel romantic'... What a small town it was, seen thus from above! And its smallness defined in Martha's mind what had till then mazed and confused in streets, parks, suburbs, without limit or direction. They were all here, her experiences of the last few days, shrunk to a neat pattern of light. They were dismayingly shrunk and at once her mind tugged to soar away from Donovan and from the town itself; but he kept pulling her down, pointing out this building and that. (MQ p.119)

Here we can see what 'might have been' an epiphany. What prevents it from becoming one by inference suggests what is important to such an experience. Donovan keeps particularising, pointing out details, and emphasising appropriate social mores and responses, with a wry self-awareness. He acts as masculine interpreter, telling Martha what to think. What the text shows Martha needs is a vagueness and generalisation, a feeling of being dwarfed by her surroundings, by something larger and more marvellous than herself. She also needs the security of feeling encompassed, yet protected. This can be considered as a desire for a return to the pre-oedipal stage, where the child has a close relationship with the mother and has not yet experienced the divisions, oppositions, and gendering



of the patriarchal symbolic order. Martha seems to fantasise pre-oedipal experience as united, harmonious, and completely satisfying. The tone of the passage blames Donovan for restricting Martha's imagination, yet may also suggest that Martha must acknowledge her position within the symbolic order in order effectively to understand it.

Experiences of epiphany are used by Martha as 'moral' guidelines that prove the truth of whatever she compares them favourably with, for example her reading:

And as she read she asked herself, What has this got to do with me? Mostly, she rejected; what she accepted she took instinctively, for it rang true with some tuning fork or guide within her; and the measure was that experience (she thought of it as one, though it was the fusion of many, varying in intensity) which was the gift of her solitary childhood on the veld: that knowledge of something painful and ecstatic, something central and fixed, but flowing. It was a sense of movement, of separate things interacting and finally becoming one, but greater - it was this which was her lodestone, even her conscience; and so, when she put down this book, that author, it was with the simplicity of perfect certainty, like the certainties of ignorance: it isn't true. (MQ p.220)

Martha's use of this 'tuning fork' or 'touchstone' in her reading means that it will be directed by personal response, and familiar comparison. There are similarities here with Doris Lessing's preface to *The Golden Notebook* in which she writes the following:

I say to these students who have to spend a year, two years, writing theses about one book: 'There is only one way to read, which is to browse in libraries and bookshops, picking up books that attract you, reading only those, dropping them when they bore you, skipping the parts that drag - and never, never reading anything because you feel you ought, or because it is part of a trend or a movement...Above all, you should know that the fact that you have to spend one year, or two years, on one book, or one author means that you are badly taught - you should have been taught to read your way from one sympathy to another, you should be learning to follow your own intuitive feeling about what you need: that is what

you should have been developing, not the way to quote from other people'.<sup>11</sup>

The 'intuitive feeling' guiding a reader is very similar to the 'tuning fork' Martha has internalised. The passage from *Martha Quest* presents Martha's use of these experiences ambiguously. The positive aspects of her approach are emphasised by the images of forces becoming greater and uniting - 'fusion', 'flowing', 'interacting', 'becoming one' - and also by the positive adjectives - 'ecstatic', 'central', 'greater'. The ambiguity arises in the last sentence of the passage, with the simile 'like the certainties of ignorance' which acts retrospectively on the whole passage, casting doubt on such words as 'perfect'. It is important to stress the significant moral emphasis that is placed on epiphany in this passage - it provides an innate guide to right and wrong, which emphasises the connection between epiphany and the idea of the individual, self-determining subject. This guide is also non-rational, instinctive and intuitive. The narrative's ambiguous attitude to judgements made under its influence also extends to these qualities, attributes of this self. The use of epiphany as 'touchstone' develops considerably in the rest of the series.

Apparently in opposition to the epiphany as 'touchstone' in *Martha Quest* is the idea of the 'clear-lit space' in Martha's head, which is associated with objective observation and judgement. We first encounter it very early in the novel:

She was not only miserable, she could focus a dispassionate eye on that misery. This detached observer, felt perhaps as a clear-lit space situated just behind the forehead, was the gift of the Cohen

boys at the station, who had been lending her books for the last two years. (MQ p.14)

This capacity includes what seem to be exactly opposed qualities to those involved in the touchstone theory, but the attitude to subjectivity involved is very complex. The 'gift' is not innate, but has been developed through reading. This suggests that the subject can be changed by reading, which does not merely reinforce an innate sense of personal taste, as with the 'tuning fork' theory. It also implies a degree of dislocation between two aspects of the self, and a corresponding objectification of one element.

In *Martha Quest* epiphany is a major constituent of the debate about subjectivity, developing the alternative notions of the subject that are present in the novel. It is clear that gender, whether in the form of patriarchal ideology or the female body, has an important influence on epiphany and subjectivity in the text. However, unlike Charlotte Bronte's *Villette*, the stress is not so much on how language as a material practice constructs and then destabilises these rival ways of understanding subjectivity. Their genesis through language is not a part of the text's elaboration of them, which may seem odd given the stress on the way that literature and reading affect (or don't affect) the self.

A Proper Marriage: Epiphany as Essentially Female Experience

The second novel in the sequence, *A Proper Marriage*, continues the tension of *Martha Quest*. Martha is now firmly

engaged in one role: that of wife and mother, with a consequent narrowing of options. The feminine subject is again seen as both socially and ideologically constructed and autonomously individual. Throughout the main body of the text Martha is consistently aware of the way her self has been constructed. She sees this negatively as a trap. The vision of an individual, autonomous, self-determining subject is offered as an alternative, 'true' or 'real' self which lies behind and transcends the self constructed by society. It is seen as an escape. Martha's pregnancy, however, makes her aware of a distinctly different, intuitive, essentially female self, closely linked to her biological and reproductive processes. I will be examining to what extent this sense of an authentic female self is actually linked to Martha's belief in an autonomous, humanist subject.

The metaphors for the subject used throughout the novel are very important in creating this conflict. Martha variously images herself as a shell-less creature hiding behind a variety of edifices or buildings; as being trapped in a net; as a fish on a line; and as a ferris wheel. These symbols create a double awareness, firstly of the material and social conditions that have made Martha what she is, and secondly, of there being some sort of 'real', constant self that lies beneath or beyond these important, though 'surface', personas. The implied images of depth and height are also important, as is apparent in the following passage:

Martha scarcely listened. She was engaged in examining and repairing those intellectual bastions of defence behind which she sheltered, that building

whose shape had first been sketched so far back in her childhood she could no longer remember how it then looked. With every year it had become more complicated, more ramified; it was as if she, Martha, were a variety of soft, shell-less creature whose survival lay in the strength of those walls. Reaching out in all directions from behind it, she clutched at the bricks of arguments, the stones of words, discarding any that might not fit into the building. (PM pp.125-6) [see list of abbreviations]

In this passage, the constructed self is Martha's belief that she is intellectual, which is seen earlier as a defensive splitting response to her bad relationship with her mother. The 'real' self is vulnerable, weak, and over-reliant on the 'ramified' intellect. At this stage it seems to have very little potential, although it does exist as a separate entity. The images of leaning and support suggest Martha's hope that one day the 'real' self could stand on its own two feet, unaided.

The same matrix of associations surrounds the symbol of the net. Martha experiences herself as caught in a net predominantly on social occasions in the colony: the first a sundowner party at the beginning of the novel and the second a meeting of a left-wing group towards its end. She is aware of how colonial society has powerfully determined her as a white, bourgeois woman of English origin, and the same hopes of escape from a trap surround the symbol:

She could feel the nets tightening around her. She thought that she might spend the rest of her life on this veranda, or others like it, populated by faces she knew only too well. (PM p.69)

Martha found herself succumbing to something rather like fear: the old fear as if nets were closing around her, that particular terror of the very young...She was instinctively shaking herself free of this mesh of bonds before she had entered them; she thought that at the end of ten years these people would still be here, self-satisfied in their unconformity, talking, talking endlessly. (PM p.253)

In the second quotation the left-wing group is seen as an endless, futile conversation which Martha must avoid. The fear of not being able to escape from the constructed self is very powerful in these quotations.

The 'fish on a line' symbol is more closely connected with marriage and pregnancy. When discussing with Mr Maynard why she married so young, the text describes Martha as 'feeling the last three months as a bewildering chaos of emotion, through which she had been pulled, will-less, like a fish at the end of a string, with a sense of being used by something impersonal and irresistible' (PM pp.79-80). The 'something' can be read as a masculine libidinal economy which offers entry onto the marriage market as a norm for women of a certain age. It also offers pregnancy at regular intervals as another norm once married, and when Martha begins to infringe this rule, delaying over her second baby, she is sent to see Dr Stern by her husband. He tries to tell her that 'all' women feel dissatisfied with marriage and motherhood, but most get over it when they have another baby:

Martha noted the recurrence of the word 'all'; Dr Stern was feeding that need in her to be absolved by being like everybody else; it was the need that sent her off to women's tea parties. There was a part of her brain which remained satirical and watchful, even amused, while it tried to analyse the process by which Dr Stern handled her. But the watchful other person did not prevent him from playing her like a fish on a line, she thought. (PM p.354)

This may seem to be one of the clearest elaborations of a materialist notion of the feminine subject's construction by a patriarchal ideology of marriage and motherhood, with the self as constant elided, but in fact there is in both passages an individual subject which is able to analyse

these experiences. In the first it is the 'she' who experiences the feeling of 'being used' and in the second it is the 'watchful other person' who can comment on the situation. Martha sees a materialist view of subjectivity negatively. It expresses itself, for her, in her inability to make positive decisions to change her life, coupled with confused fantasies of doing so. She sees the *unselfconscious* subject as totally determined, and relies on her own *self-awareness*, or rationality, as a crucial constituent of potential freedom and her individuality. The narrator has a confused response to this attitude. Sometimes it is admired, but elsewhere this obsessive self-reflection is itself situated as a product of certain material conditions, (remember the 'clear-lit space' brought into being by the Cohen boys in *Martha Quest* (MQ p.14)). At one stage Martha's fear of the 'net' is referred to as 'that particular terror of the very young' (PM p.253), which distances the narrator from the experience. At other times the individual self is found in a totally different arena. As Ingrid Holmquist writes:

Although the common attitude of the narrator appears to be on the side of reason and self-awareness this is not unequivocal. Occasionally such heavy emphasis is put upon Martha's intuitive and self-confirming approach to the world that it tends to negate the value accorded to emotional distance and reflection. (p.52)

These ambiguities are typical of the novel sequence. Also interesting is the way one part of the personality becomes 'other' to another part, which would be helpfully understood as the *split* subject of the symbolic order (although the novel does not see the issue in these terms).

The ferris-wheel is perhaps the most ambiguous of the many symbols used to describe Martha's self. It is first used when Martha feels that her 'real' self has nothing to do with her marriage to Douglas, and plans to tell him so:

The great wheel was revolving slowly, a chain of lights that mingled with the lamps of Orion and the Cross. Martha laid her wet and uncomfortable head against the wall, and looked at the wheel steadily, finding in its turning the beginnings of peace. Slowly she quietened, and it seemed possible that she might recover a sense of herself as a person she might, if only potentially, respect. (PM p.37)

The wheel has a positive image here of serenity and of *continuity*. Its revolutions around the same point echo Martha's emergent sense of her own obscured, but still present, individual self. Elsewhere, however, the wheel begins to gather more negative associations. Because of a rift in their relationship, Douglas and Martha end up at the fair, where Martha 'revolved on the great wheel as if her whole future depended on her power to stick it out' (PM p.123). The suggestion of forced, self-induced compliance is more disturbing in its avoidance and transference of marital problems.

Mary Ann Singleton discusses the ferris wheel as an 'uroboros' (the snake with its tail in its mouth),<sup>12</sup> which represents the devouring mother, which may connect with Martha's fear of repeating her mother's life and with her reproductive cycle. When she first begins to experience the symptoms of pregnancy, although she has not consciously admitted them as such yet (partly because she has been deliberately misled by Dr Stern) she finds the wheel threatening:

She drew the curtains so that she might not see the great wheel; and then lay watching the circling of



light through their thin stuff. She accused herself of every kind of weak-mindedness and stupidity; nevertheless, the persistent monotony of that flickering cycle seemed a revelation of an appalling and intimate truth; it was like being hypnotized. (PM p.130)

Here she finds unwanted pregnancy a frighteningly narrow construct, forced upon her by the collusions of patriarchal society, which will swallow up her individual self. The wheel's cycle is also used to suggest Martha's fear of 'the nightmare *repetition*' (PM p.104): of herself turning out like her mother, and the whole process continuing ad nauseam. At one point she says, ironically since we suspect she is already pregnant: 'she had decided not to have a baby; and it was in her power to cut the cycle' (PM p.126). This view of the way that each generation shapes and constructs the next is seen as something fundamentally negative and to be resisted:

She could see a sequence of events, unalterable, behind her, and stretching unalterably into the future. She saw her mother, a prim-faced Edwardian schoolgirl, confronting, in this case, the Victorian father, the patriarchal father, with rebellion. She saw herself sitting where her mother now sat, a woman horribly metamorphosed, entirely dependent on her children for any interest in life, resented by them, and resenting them; opposite her, a young woman of whom she could distinguish nothing clearly but a set, obstinate face; and beside these women, a series of shadowy dependent men, broken-willed and sick with compelled diseases. (PM p.126)

It is the inevitability of this that terrifies Martha, and importantly, of it happening 'against her will'. Martha relies on an internalised belief in her 'strength of character' that will be able to resist. She does not realise that this belief is itself part of the same ideology and society that she is attempting to escape.

There is little doubt that the society that reproduces itself so efficiently from generation to generation is seen

as explicitly male dominated, controlled and ordered. Martha is quite clear on the way that patriarchy has constructed both her views of men and the way she reacts to them. She has internalised an 'ideal man' who attaches to particular individual men in the early stages of infatuation and then 'floats away' from them unharmed once they have failed to live up to the standard. If there is no one appropriate around then the image lies dormant: 'What she actually wanted, of course, was for some man to arrive in her life, simply take her by the hand, and lead her off into this new world. But it seemed he did not exist' (PM p.94). She also recognises that the men she is involved with see her as some sort of ideal: 'The condition of being a woman in wartime, she thought angrily, was that one should love not a man, but a man in relation to other men...You loved not a man, but that man's idea of you in relation to his friends' (PM pp.310-311). Her behaviour with men is a response to how they wish her to behave, but again, what she perceives to be her 'real' self remains apart from this:

She thought confusedly that there was always a point when men seemed to press a button, as it were, and one was expected to turn into something else for their amusement. This 'turning into something else' had landed her where she was now: married, signed and sealed away from what she was convinced she was. (PM p.17)

This passage images Martha's 'real' self as a letter sealed away in an envelope, which represents the confines of marriage.

Much of Martha's awareness of how her subjectivity has been constructed centres around the issue of compliance: both sexual and personal (to a man's opinions for example):

'The instinct to comply, to please, seemed to her more and more unpleasant and false. Yet she had to reassure Douglas and kiss him before he left if she was not to feel guilty and lacking as a woman' (PM p.345). Towards the end of the novel, when Martha has become involved with the left-wing group and has told Douglas that she wants to leave him, she rejects the old compliant self:

I don't see how he can complain that I am what I always said I was. For at this moment she forgot the years of feminine compliance, of charm, of conformity to what he wanted. They had all been a lie against her real nature and therefore they had not existed. (PM p.399)

The compliant, charming self has increasingly become a merely 'surface' persona, and has little to do with the 'real' Martha. The narrator seems to be rebuking Martha, not for her belief in a real constant self, but for the inability to realise that Douglas never saw that part of her and will be surprised when it is suddenly sprung on him.

The most important area where we can clearly see the tension between ideas of the subject as materially constructed and an emerging sense of an essentially female individual self concerns Martha's pregnancy and her attitudes to it. Particularly where Dr Stern's role in the early stages of the pregnancy is concerned, Martha is trapped by a male dominated medical profession into having a baby. There is little doubt that the experience of pregnancy is seen as a fitting construct for a newly married woman, and Martha has little or no choice in the matter: 'When she had left [the consulting room after being told she is not pregnant], he remarked to his new nurse

that it was just as well for the medical profession that laymen had such touching faith in them' (PM p.108). At this stage, then, the reader knows that Martha is pregnant, but she does not, which increases the feeling of collusion against her: the way femininity is forced to encompass maternity is seen as coercive. Later on in the novel when Martha realises that Dr Stern lied to her, she suspects a 'conspiracy', forcing women into having children: 'For the first time she suspected that perhaps he *had* known she was pregnant, and understood her well enough to let her become too advanced to do anything about it. Perhaps all the women who came here were handled in the same way' (PM p.355). Motherhood is seen as a threat to Martha's internalised belief in an autonomous, individual selfhood: 'Martha reacted with a cold, loathing determination that she must keep brightly burning that lamp above the dark blind sea which was motherhood. She would *not* allow herself to be submerged' (PM p.168). Again metaphors of light and dark, and depth and height above water, link childbearing with drowning. The sea is 'blind', emphasising that self-awareness and the critical faculty are associated with a purely scopic economy.

The sea is also a frequently used symbol of the unconscious, which is important when discussing the fact that at other times water similes are used much more positively:

Smoothing down the cotton stuff of her tunic over the swelling mound she watched the wall of flesh pulse, or how the weight of flesh distributed differently - as if a sleeper turned in his sleep. It was as if on the floor of a dark sea a half-recognised being crouched, moving sometimes against the change of the tides. Or she looked at the blue vein on her wrist and thought

it swollen, and was glad because its larger weight of impurities guaranteed the fresh strength of the new red current that fed the infant. She had succumbed entirely to that other time. (PM p.162)

Here, the metaphor of a flowing river and the simile of subterranean activity are seen as fascinating and encompassing. The passage's stress on Martha's body and the physical experience of pregnancy seems to stem right from the heart of her most individual, unconscious, essentially female self. Later on in the novel when Martha is tempted to have another child the text refers to her 'female self [which] was sharply demanding that she should start the cycle of birth again' (PM p.329). The text here seems to be placing Martha's 'real', constant self within the realms of an unconscious awareness of a biologically determined female 'nature'.

This is also sharply apparent in the sole epiphany in the novel: the episode where Martha and Alice, both heavily pregnant, run naked into the vlei, and Martha jumps into a pot-hole. Most critics have pointed out that the epiphany represents some sort of release from a constricting environment, and the emergence of a more 'genuine', 'liberating' sense of self. Ingrid Holmquist calls the episode a 'creative rite' (p.80); Paul Schlueter emphasises the 'potential life' in the 'fruitful scene';<sup>13</sup> and Mary Ann Singleton discusses the 'contrast implicit between the unified and unifying life of the veld as opposed to the sterile, fragmented life the women have been living' (p.74). Ruth Whittaker writes that 'the episode stands out as an instinctive healing impulse...which allows Martha temporary freedom through an irrational but naturally spontaneous action';<sup>14</sup> and Carol P. Christ suggests that

'If she had been able to listen to these experiences, the course of her life might have been different'.<sup>15</sup> A consensus seems to emerge that the epiphany is 'a good thing' but little further analysis is offered apart from emphasising the reproductively fertile element (Ingrid Holmquist, p.80 and Paul Schlueter, in *The Novels of Doris Lessing*, p.59), and remarking on the Lawrentian echoes of the passage (Paul Schlueter compares it to *Women In Love*, where Ursula and Gudrun swim naked, and then Gudrun scares away the cattle (*The Novels of Doris Lessing*, p. 59)).

I think the whole episode is much more significant than other critics suggest, and needs a much more detailed analysis. It is firstly important to note that the episode stems from both women's dissatisfaction with their husbands, marriage, and motherhood: 'The two women looked at each other, acknowledging frankly in this moment that they wished they had never married, wished they were not pregnant, even hated their husbands' (PM p.176). The epiphany is situated as explicitly anti-patriarchal and starts out as a revenge act. (There is a suggestion that Alice is trying to have a miscarriage when she fiercely tries to fit her heavily pregnant body behind the steering wheel.) It is also importantly a gesture of female friendship and closeness, if only brief (Alice is not a major character after the babies are born).

As Alice and Martha run into the grass the text simply revels in physical sensation for its own sake, which gives both women back the *jouissance* or pleasure in their bodies that they have lost in the discomforts of late pregnancy:

She heard a shout of exultation. Then she too ran straight onwards, stumbling through the wet, dragging waist-high grass that cut and stung, through the deep drench of the rain which came hard on her shoulders and breasts in a myriad hard, stinging needles. She heard that same shout of triumph come from her own lips, and she ran on blindly. (PM p.177)

At this point Martha nearly falls into a muddy pot-hole, pauses, and then deliberately jumps in: 'Martha hesitated, then jumped straight in. A moment of repugnance, then she loosened deliciously in the warm rocking of the water' (PM p.177). In the pot-hole images of fertility, as other critics have pointed out, abound. She is close enough to the frog-spawn to see 'tiny dark dots of life' (PM p.178); the frog's large palpitating throat resembles her pregnant stomach, and the spasms of its swimming legs mirror her contractions. However there are further implications: the pot-hole is described as 'a gulf...gaping like a mouth, its red crumbling sides swimming with red water. Above it the long heavy grass almost met' (PM p.177). The pot-hole would seem to symbolise not only the mouth, but the female genitals and womb. This is highly significant bearing in mind what has already been said about the desire expressed in epiphanies to return to the close relationship with the mother of the pre-oedipal stage. Particularly significant is the following:

Martha allowed herself to be held upright by the mud, and lowered her hands through the resisting water to the hard dome of her stomach. There she felt the crouching infant, still moving tentatively around in its prison, protected from the warm red water by half an inch of flesh. (PM p.178)

This again has specifically Laurentian echoes, but this time from *Sons and Lovers* where Mrs Morel is shut outside after an argument with Mr Morel (SL p.60). In this passage Martha is aware of her skin as the narrow boundary between

her child and the environment. There are negative associations here: the water is 'resisting' and her womb is a 'prison'; which suggests that images of entrapment are being overlaid on pregnancy and motherhood, for both child and mother. This is understandable in the context of the beginning of the episode, where the women resist pregnancy as a patriarchal construct. It is also understandable for Martha to see motherhood negatively, after her experience with her own mother.

However, there are also more positive connotations to the passage, specifically in the sense of *relatedness* it offers. The sense of closeness and relationship between Martha, the child in her womb, and the pot-hole, separated by only a half inch of flesh, suggests the close, undifferentiated pre-oedipal mother-daughter relationship that Martha longs for, and searches for in her epiphanies. The rest of the passage bears this out. Throughout there is a stress on things in relationship: the throat of the frog (which Martha puts out her hand to) and her stomach; the contractions and its legs; and the frog-spawn and her unborn child.

Some of the contradictions surrounding this episode are elaborated by women's writing about motherhood, for example Julia Kristeva's 'Motherhood According to Giovanni Bellini'.<sup>16</sup> Kristeva's article initially discusses the question of subjectivity in pregnancy, and the curious fact that pregnancy happens in the maternal body but is not controlled by the mother: "It happens, but I'm not there." "I cannot realize it, but it goes on." Motherhood's impossible syllogism' (p.237). She remarks on the pregnant



woman's position as simultaneously inside and outside the symbolic order:

We recognize on the one hand that biology jolts us by means of unsymbolized instinctual drives and that this phenomenon eludes social intercourse, the representation of preexisting objects, and the contract of desire. On the other hand, we immediately deny it; we say there can be no escape, for *mamma* is there, she embodies this phenomenon; she warrants that *everything is*, and that it is representable. In a double-barreled move, psychotic tendencies are acknowledged, but at the same time they are settled, quieted, and bestowed upon the mother in order to maintain the ultimate guarantee: symbolic coherence. (p.238)

Kristeva points out the place of pregnancy and motherhood in the patriarchal symbolic order: as the ensurer of the male line, and the satisfaction of the woman's desire (in Freudian terms) to bear her father's child. However, she also suggests that pregnancy and maternity function on another axis, expressing a deeply innate 'material compulsion, spasm of a memory belonging to the species', and a desire in the pregnant woman to reunite with the body of her own mother:

By giving birth, the woman enters into contact with her mother; she becomes, she is her own mother; they are the same continuity differentiating itself. She thus actualizes the homosexual facet of motherhood, through which a woman is simultaneously closer to her instinctual memory, more open to her own psychosis, and consequently, more negatory of the social, symbolic bond. (p.239).

This illuminates considerably the oscillation in the epiphany in *A Proper Marriage* between a recognition of maternity's place in the symbolic order and the sense that pregnancy provides access to some sort of authentic, *jouissant* pre-oedipal, or semiotic, relation with the mother.

Martha's initial revulsion followed by pleasure as she jumps into the mud also connects with Kristeva's discussion of the *abject* in her book *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*.<sup>17</sup> The subject experiences the abject as a momentary lapse in the symbolic order's organisation of divisions centering on the body between subject and object, internal and external. The dangerous persistence of the semiotic in the symbolic is revealed. These experiences usually centre on food, waste, and physical evidence of sexual difference. Martha's revulsion and pleasure in the mud can be seen as an initial resistance to, and subsequent acceptance of, the feel of mud against her skin; which suggests that decay and corruption are actually closer than she thinks to the process of life-creation she is undergoing.

However, there are disturbing implications for an analysis of the feminine subject in both the *Proper Marriage* epiphany and the Kristeva article. Later in her article Kristeva writes:

This ciphering of the species, however, this pre- and transsymbolic memory...make[s] of the maternal body the stakes of a natural and 'objective' control, independent of any individual consciousness; it inscribes both biological operations and their instinctual echoes into this necessary and hazardous *program* constituting every species. The maternal body is the module of a biosocial program. Its jouissance, which is mute, is nothing more than a recording, on the screen of the preconscious, of both the messages that consciousness, in its analytical course, picks up from this ciphering process...each of the sexes - a division so much more archaic and fundamental than the one into [national] languages - would have its own unconscious wherein the biological and social program of the species would be ciphered in confrontation with language, exposed to its influence, but independent from it. The symbolic destiny of the speaking animal, which is essential although it comes second, being superimposed upon the biological - this destiny seals off ( and in women, in order to preserve the homology

of the group, it censures) that archaic basis and the special jouissance it procures on being transferred to the symbolic. (p.241)

The difficulty and elusiveness of Kristeva's writing emphasises the slippage of language, but there are a number of points to take issue with here. Kristeva writes of an instinctual biological reproductive programme, or sexually specific collective unconscious, in the female body. She suggests that this is natural, independent of subjectivity or individuality as such, and, most importantly, is independent of, or sealed off by, language. I would argue that such a 'reproductive programme' would best be understood in terms of its place and function *in* the symbolic order. Kristeva's point is that the symbolic censures the maternal/feminine in order to operate effectively. This is true in one sense, in that society does not acknowledge the debt it owes to the maternal function. But her comment that this function is exposed to the influence of the symbolic order but remains 'independent from it' accords an essential status to the mother's personal experience of maternity which is just as much a product of the symbolic order's theorising of motherhood. The implied division between feminine /maternal/semiotic and masculine/paternal/symbolic does not really explain how motherhood works *within* the symbolic.

There are also a number of points of contact between a humanist, rational, self-determining individual subject and an essentially female self associated with maternity and the female body. Both are understood as 'innate' or inborn. Both are seen as essential: as an essence; and both are pre-social/linguistic: already present in the subject prior

to the encounter with language and sociality. The continuity between these two versions of the self can be seen in *Martha Quest* and *A Proper Marriage*, although they are both offered by the novel as authentic selves which will replace what Martha and the narrator perceive as the arid material analysis that she subjects herself to. In fact both of these theories of the subject suggest the traditional polarised definitions of masculinity and femininity. It would be interesting to see the subject discussed in connection with language, but neither the material/social nor the essential, innate analyses of the subject in this novel really embrace this.

*A Ripple from the Storm: A Masculine Epiphanic Subject*

*A Ripple from the Storm*, the third novel in the *Children of Violence* sequence, is primarily concerned with Martha's involvement in the emerging Communist group in the colony. For most of this novel, Martha is seen as rigidly in the grip of crude-Marxist ideology. She sees a Marxist analysis of her situation to be the 'true' one, and links it with the moments of epiphany experienced in her childhood: 'Also, the calm voice was linking her with those parts of her childhood she still owned, the moments of experience which seemed to her enduring and true; the moments of illumination and belief' (RFS p.62) [see list of abbreviations]. She uses the epiphany as a 'touchstone' to validate the group's beliefs and dogmas. Martha's

attachment to the group is thus in many ways non-rational, intuitive and emotional, and also explicitly moral.

There is more polarisation in this novel of ideas of the subject as social and ideological construct and as autonomous individual: the narrative develops the view that Martha's adherence to the group and its ideology does not in any way involve her individual self (despite what she may think), but is in fact a rebellious reaction to her dissatisfaction with female white middle-class life in the colony. This idea is achieved partly through criticism of the left-wing group: the characters involved are unpleasant or deficient in the novel's terms, and their reasons for becoming involved are frequently shown to be flawed; there are many contradictions between ideology and behaviour (for example the attitude to the position of women); and the analyses offered as group policy are seen as simplistic and naive:

'Comrades, this is the dawn of human history. We have the supreme good fortune and the responsibility to be living at a time when mankind takes the first great step forward from the barbarity and chaos of unplanned production to the sunlight of socialism - from the babyhood of our species to its manhood'. (RFS p.62)

The group is shown not to cater for people of working class background, and to patronise those of other races: Jasmine advises Tommy to read *War and Peace*, saying that it would explain about Russia before the revolution, but Tommy can't understand half the words, and finds himself identifying with the 'reactionary' characters. He is unable to explain his attitude to books (based on unfamiliarity) to the well-read, middle-class Martha.

The other major way in which Martha's 'communist' self is seen in the novel's terms as an unsatisfying construct is that she is so enthusiastically involved with the group that her 'real', individual self, although shut away for most of the novel, emerges in dreams and sickness, for example when she has a fever and dreams of a 'pale, misted, flat' country, and then a petrified lizard, imprisoned in layers of rock (RFS pp.95-6). Both images suggest the surplus part of her self, that has been so efficiently repressed. She also represses her longing for her daughter Caroline:

The image of Caroline rose to confront Martha, who said to herself tormentedly: I can't think of her now, I really can't. She sternly pushed Caroline into a region of her mind marked No Admittance. Yet as soon as she slept, Caroline emerged from this forbidden place, and confronted Martha. (RFS p.101)

This repression of the feminine, individual self has another major effect: the novel's epiphanies are few and far between. As Lorna Sage writes: 'narratively it [*A Ripple from the Storm*] has exhausted the stores of "illumination" that lent a parodic upbeat to the unhappy ending of *Martha Quest*' (p.37). What epiphanies there are are 'taken away' from Martha and given to another character, Jimmy. Nicole Ward Jouve writes that 'the sensations, the body-anchorage are all given to Jimmy' (p.107). It is as if the 'truth' that Martha found in her epiphanies is totally encompassed in the group, and the surplus in the narrative has to go somewhere. Jimmy is an appropriate 'beneficiary' of the text's epiphanies in many ways. He is a young, working class airman who is seen as idealistic, unused to the environment of the colony, and

verging on madness. (The importance of the connection between madness and epiphany will become apparent as the series progresses.) In a similar way to Tommy's attitude to books, he is unable to accept the glib way in which the group treats revolutionary ideas as foregone conclusions. His experience is enough to tell him that passing a resolution at a meeting is not enough. He interrupts one such meeting by urging that all members accept the following: that racial prejudice is created by capitalism in order to divide and rule; that anti-Semitism 'is just capitalist propaganda'; that national difference is non-existent; and that 'there's no such thing as talent...It's all just a trick to scare the workers out of trying. Talent is education' (pp.128-9). The members have no trouble accepting all but the last dictum, which has to be re-cast as 'unequal education has so far prevented the workers from making use of their talents' (RFS p.130), which still allows for innately differential ability. This subtle distinction is largely missed by Jimmy, who lays what seems to the other middle-class members to be an inappropriate stress on the resolutions being accepted: 'Jimmy sat loosely on the bench inside the thick grey shell of uniform, like a heap of big bones roughly packaged up. His big face was scarlet, his eyes sombrely unhappy' (RFS p.130). When the resolutions are accepted as if they are such basic tenets that they are unnecessary Jimmy is very distressed: 'Jimmy was clearly almost in tears. He said: "But it hasn't been done right. I don't feel right about it all"' (RFS p.131). He finds it difficult to accept that prejudices that he has experienced, or feels strongly

about, can be so simply and easily negated by people of the class that is responsible for many of them. His 'inappropriate' fervour and resulting unhappiness and incomprehension are read by the others as incipient mental illness:

Jimmy smiled back at him [Bill], but his eyes rejected him and everyone. They were turned inward, on some sore miserable place which - they all felt - had been cruelly touched. They knew he was badly hurt. It was the first time it had occurred to any of them that perhaps he was not in his right mind, or that he was so ill he had become unbalanced. (RFS p.131)

Jimmy thus becomes an appropriate vehicle for the text's epiphanies, mainly because he is an 'outsider', experiencing himself as separate from the group in the way Martha once felt separate from colonial society. While she feels integrated in her surroundings and social role her epiphanic experiences stop, and re-emerge once she begins to feel the slippage between her self and the group. The switch from Martha to Jimmy as the main character who has epiphanies is obviously significant. Jimmy is a white working-class airman from an urban background, and his experiences of epiphany are very different from Martha's for these reasons.

Jimmy's epiphanies are all centred around one event: his breaking out of his camp at night and visiting the Location and the Coloured Quarter. This episode stems from the distress he feels after the above-mentioned meeting of the group, which he leaves after a row about the group's attitude to its male members mixing with women from the Coloured Quarter. As he says: "I've got myself a real working girl, a girl like myself, and I've got myself comrades in the Coloured Quarter and in the Location I can



talk to as man to man. But I can't be a member any more of this talking shop" (RFS p.141). The following episode reveals to Jimmy how frightened people in the Location and the Coloured Quarter are of being compromised by interacting with white people outside the accepted relations (master and servant, prostitute and client). Jimmy has turned away from the Communist group feeling that he does not fit in because of his class, but when he turns to the 'working' class of the colony he finds he is separated from them by race and his role in the airforce:

Jimmy loitered along the pavements, watching them [the people of the Coloured Quarter going to work], and thinking: At home I'd join in, I'd be one of them, but just because I've got a white skin...He remembered his uniform - he was doubly separated from them. (RFS p.163)

The epiphanies are partly instrumental in this realisation. They are double edged in that they simultaneously show the spuriousness of a desire for unity with the other (a sort of anti-epiphany) but also hold out the possibility of its achievement. The implications for the attitude to the subject in these experiences are complex.

Jimmy's first epiphany occurs when he and Murdoch come back into the camp after the disastrous meeting. Murdoch feels that the camp is so regimented that it reminds him of the maintenance bench where he and Jimmy both work, fitting new parts into machines: 'Jimmy staring, his mouth half-open, saw the sheds and huts of the camp diminished to the scale of their work-bench, an arrangement of precisely-made machine parts' (RFS p.145). Murdoch intends to emphasise the futility of their existence, but Jimmy is unable to see it that way, firstly because his own physical awareness of

his body denies that life is pointless: 'the warm substance of his body insisted against the vision' (RFS p.145). He also experiences his own power to animate machines as a life-giving force comparable to Creation:

He felt, in the flesh of his finger-tips, the engine parts he handled all day. His big bony fingers moved unconsciously, in mastery of metal. In the tips of his fingers he felt inert, lazy steel, uncommunicative until he touched it and it took on life....He had slid into its proper place a tiny smooth glob of metal, and the dead part of the machine sang into life. (RFS pp.145-6)

He experiences a sense of oneness between himself and the other: man and machine. His senses are woken by the sound of an aeroplane getting ready for take-off, and he thinks of his own part in making that sound possible. The epiphany is thus a celebration of oneness, of unity with the other, but the way this is presented in the text is complex. The narrator seems on the one hand to imply Jimmy's naivete; that Murdoch's vision (which would surely be the Group one) is correct: the men are merely pawns used by the Capitalist war machine. Jimmy cannot see that while he creates a complete machine, someone/thing is creating him. Jimmy is seen as taking over Martha's old 'naive' belief in a unitary, transcendental self, which she has since 'sacrificed' to a new Communist approach. However the narrative also suggests that there is some truth in Jimmy's attitude: he has something that Martha has lost.

The next epiphany is rather less ambiguously narrated. Jimmy is helped to escape from the camp by one of the black guards, who holds up the perimeter fence while he rolls under it. He intends to stay out all night and then arrive back in the morning and present his all-night pass as if he

had never been back. He feels that escape from the boundary fence is sufficient to free him from the oppressive feel of the camp: 'It was the wire fence he had wished to escape, the eternal pressure of the wire fence, as if steel cobwebs confined him, pressing on his flesh every time he moved out of line' (RFS p.150). He decides to sleep out in the grass just outside the camp. As he settles himself, he experiences the sensory awakening and sense of oneness with nature that characterise epiphanies:

City boy from blackened, cold streets, he breathed the fresh tart air of the high-veld in and out of tainted lungs, fingered grains of heavy soil that clung to his fingers, frowned at the moonlight about him and thought: This is something like it. Never see a sky like this at home. The grass behind him was a solid wall, grown to its July strength, the sap no longer running, each stem taut and slippery as fine steel, massed together in a resilient antagonist to his back. (RFS p.150)

All his senses except that of sound are aroused. The moment appears to be one of rejuvenation. He feels so much pleasure in it that he laughs aloud, and this is where the experience begins radically to diverge from the norm:

But the laugh frightened him. He heard it raucous and sudden, not his. Now his ears were opened to sound, and above the whine and distant roaring of engines on the strip in the camp, he heard the soft noises of the night all around him. Grasses, leaves, earth kept up a perpetual soft movement of sound. There was a steady clicking and singing from the grasses. (RFS pp.150-151)

As his laugh sounds out, it sounds 'other' and foreign to him, becoming 'uncanny' in the Freudian sense of finding the familiar frightening. The sound of the camp, which he had felt to be diminished merely by crossing the wire fence, suddenly reasserts itself. He becomes aware of the insufficiency of a purely scopic economy, and is invaded by an awareness, not of comforting unity with the other, but

of unfamiliarity and alienation. It is then that he realises that the grass he lies in is full of insects:

His eyes, wide on the black-defined fronds above him, blinked, then again - there was something in his eye. No, he had stared too long at the fine black outline, because it had clotted, on the delicate feather was a black knot. He blinked, hard and sharp, hearing, just above him, a sudden outburst of noise, as loud as machine-gun fire. And from behind his back, in the grass-stems, another. He shifted uneasily, his blood pounding, his nerves tight. He looked and waited. All of a sudden he realised that the black knot was an insect, it was making that noise. (RFS p.151)

His own laugh has opened up the horror of the seemingly harmonious scene, and revealed that his sense of sight is not infallible: his eyes only slowly become accustomed to the contrasts of light and shade that enable him to differentiate the insects from their background, and his ears are 'opened' to the sounds they make. What is apparent is precisely the fallibility of his senses, and the sharp distinction between his idea of the scene and that of 'reality' becomes important. The self/other opposition is reinforced rather than broken down. The most terrible thing for Jimmy is the realisation that the insects are completely unaware of him, which disturbs his self-centred view of the world: 'Five, six, ten - while he lay there, on the soil, they had been crawling onto him, and had even started to make their noise, as *if he had not been there at all*' [my italics] (RFS p.151). Jimmy's sense of his own continuous subjectivity does a disappearing act in his own mind, and he runs off, feeling 'soiled and contaminated' (RFS p.152).

In this 'anti-epiphany', nature is seen as repellant instead of attractive. Jimmy's belief in a unitary, transcendent self is undermined by the reinforcement of the

difference between them, rather than merging, of self and other, and the independence of nature from his self-awareness. Nowhere are Martha's epiphanies presented this negatively: Jimmy is seen as naive and vulnerable. Jimmy's gender and urban background have an important influence on the way this epiphany develops. Because of this, he is seen as less able to experience merging and continuity and is forced instead to an awareness of opposition and difference. He also becomes aware of the way that the 'abject' insects, associated with decay and destruction, are a part of his idealised, inexperienced conception of nature.

The final epiphany occurs after he has visited Elias, (the black interpreter who is attending the Group meetings as a spy for Mr. Maynard, a powerful white magistrate), and has been turned away for fear of being discovered. Jimmy is deeply disturbed. He walks past the white cemetery, and becomes aware of the white tomb-stones against the shadows and foliage. This metaphorical and literal black/white difference continues as the moonlight picks out railway lines, the power station against the smoke, and finally a tree: 'Across the lines, arising out of a mess of soiled grass, railway sleepers, old tin cans, was a small tree, white-stemmed, a cloud of fine leaves rising into the moonlight like the spray of a fountain' (RFS p.159). This tree is reminiscent of the rose-bush that Miriam takes Paul to see in D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* (SL p.210), (see my discussion on pages 160-162) although here the stress on contrast and definition is a masculine rather than feminine response. The black/white difference is obviously important

in the context of Jimmy's growing awareness of the significance of race in distinguishing him from what he had at first thought was his 'fellow working class'. It also echoes the imagery of the previous epiphany where Jimmy only gradually picks out the black insects in the moonlight. Most importantly, though, it again emphasises Jimmy's 'oppositional' way of seeing things.

Looking at the tree provokes the feelings of calm, peacefulness, and 'lapsing out' that are often a typically masculine reaction to epiphany in the fiction of D. H. Lawrence (think for example of Paul as he is rained on in the wood in *Sons and Lovers* (SL p. 348); or of Birkin as he walks naked through the vegetation at Breadalby (WL p.165)), although, as I have said, the black and white tree is a more feminine epiphanic object in Lawrentian terms:

The swollen sore place inside Jimmy slowly cooled and soothed. *He was conscious of a feeling of emptiness.* He stared at the proud young tree, the squat shapes of the cooling towers, the great masses of dark smoke carved like thunder clouds by star-light and moonlight, and understood that ever since that afternoon he had been driven from action to crazy action, not knowing what he was doing, not responsible for himself. [My italics] (RFS pp.159-160)

This calm realisation is by no means unironic, though, since Jimmy's night spree is far from over. Immediately after this he walks to the Coloured Quarter and tries to stay with a friend, who he discovers has been taken to hospital to die; then he tries to stay with a prostitute, but can't because he doesn't want sex. His 'crazy actions' don't stop, and his realisation that he has been acting strangely is temporary, if not spurious. Some of this irony also attaches to the epiphany itself: Jimmy's pleasure at the beauty of the tree in the moonlight is undercut by his

later actions, which suggest the facility of his metaphoric equation and unification of black and white in the tree symbol. The project of uniting and merging racial differences is seen to be impossible.

In Jimmy's epiphanies the idea of the transcendent individual self emerging through epiphanic experiences of sensory awakening and merging with the other is both undermined, i.e. seen as naive and fallible, and respected as authentic. There is a strong suggestion, however, that this is because of Jimmy's ambiguous position in colonial society. As a man, Jimmy's epiphanies will inevitably come up against difference, opposition and closure, unlike those of 'essentially' female experience, which is seen as 'in touch with' nature. There is also a conflict between his position of power over black Zambesians as a white airman, which encourages feelings of primacy and control, and his being a working-class 'outsider/other' in white colonial society. This creates the confused mixture of responses to his epiphanies.

Jimmy's epiphanies cannot achieve the resonance and validity that Martha's are meant to have in the series, although as the only examples of such experiences in this novel, the reader and the narrator do allot them added status. An overview of *A Ripple from the Storm* would indicate that notions of the self as construct are centred around Martha's experience, while the surplus of 'real' self, occasionally rupturing her Communist persona in the form of dreams and illness, mainly centres on Jimmy's brief 'stardom' at the end of Part Two (he plays no significant part in the novel after this).

A closer examination of Jimmy's epiphanic moments shows that the narrator's tone often makes out his belief in the transcendent individual self to be naive, vulnerable and wavering. Simultaneously, though, the narrator and the reader sympathise with Jimmy more than with any character other than Martha (for example we actually follow his emerging understanding of race relations in 'Zambesia' rather than, as in the other novels, accepting them as a distant determining factor), and, given the terms of *Children of Violence*, we inevitably want to believe in the possibility of a transcendent self. However, the conflicting way that Jimmy is developed does not really leave us with any more satisfying way of understanding Martha as he is not meant to balance or comment on her in any structural or conscious way in the novel.

#### Landlocked: Towards (Post)Modernism

*Landlocked* is the fourth novel in the *Children of Violence* sequence, and displays a marked change in tone when compared with the preceding three novels. Doris Lessing took a break from *Children of Violence* to write *The Golden Notebook* and its influence can be seen in the text of *Landlocked*, as is well demonstrated in Gayle Greene's article, 'Doris Lessing's *Landlocked*: "A New Kind of Knowledge"'. (See note 7.)

*Landlocked* is simultaneously an open-ended, yet closed text, concerned thematically with beginnings, endings, and waiting. Martha has decided to go to England, but must wait



for her divorce from Anton to come through. The end of the war has brought the disintegration of the Communist group as the airmen leave Southern Africa, reducing its membership, and the Soviet Union loses its popular image as an ally against Nazism. Martha becomes increasingly disillusioned with the group, as its self-contradictions and the disparity between its doctrines and her experience of life force a slippage between her self and group ideology. There is a lot of unfinished business to be concluded, and several deaths (Martha's father, Thomas Stern, Johnny Lindsay).

*Landlocked* is less realist structurally and linguistically than the preceding novels. There is more chronological disruption in that crucial events are not actually narrated in the text, leaving 'time gaps', for example the start of Thomas and Martha's affair, or his and her father's deaths. There is a looser use of sentence structure also, where an increasing number of parentheses and dashes sets up a more open feel of differing alternatives. The increased importance of dreams and the unconscious creates a parallel existence that disrupts the realist surface of Martha's daily life, and there is a surreal quality to many of these episodes. The mixture of hopefulness and finality, openness and closure that characterises *Landlocked* is also apparent in the epiphanies in the text, and its treatment of them. There no longer seems to be the deep-seated belief in an essentially individual subject in *Landlocked*. Another change in the novel is that the place of gender in epiphanic experiences loses its significance in defining notions of subjectivity.

One of the novel's most interesting features is the re-emergence, early on in the novel, of the 'clear-lit space': Martha's critical, observing self, which has not been explicitly mentioned since *Martha Quest*. Initially this is identified as the individual, 'real' self that lies beneath the surface personas that are called into being by Martha's hectic social life:

And besides, what was real in her, underneath these metamorphoses of style or shape or - even, apparently, - personality, remained and intensified. The continuity of Martha now was in a determination to survive...it was in a watchfulness, a tension of the will that was like a small flickering of light, like the perpetual tiny dance of lightning on the horizon from a storm so far over the earth's curve it could only show reflected on the sky. Martha was holding herself together - like everybody else. She was a lighthouse of watchfulness. (LL p.20) [see list of abbreviations]

The metaphors of self-restraint and light actually suggest both the strength and vulnerability of the subject in the face of unnamed outside forces of fragmentation and break-up. These forces can best be seen in the extended metaphor or symbol of the self that runs through the text: the many roomed house. Martha has to keep the rooms separate or the house will crumble, like her first home on the veld, which has been attacked by the forces of nature since the Quests moved into town. This is a Jungian symbol of the self or psyche which suggests the emerging points of contact between Lessing's work and Jungian psychology. Jung himself dreamed of a house where each floor as he moved downwards was of an older historical period. He commented: 'It was plain to me that the house represented a kind of image of the psyche'.<sup>18</sup> The stress on keeping the rooms of the house/aspects of the self separate is also reminiscent of

*The Golden Notebook*, where it is apparent in the novel's structure.

On the next page, however, we are invited to doubt the constancy and continuity of the 'lighthouse of watchfulness':

Yes, she knew that - Martha knew that, if she could not trust her judgement, or rather, if her judgement of outside things, people, was like a light that grew brighter, harsher, as the area it covered grew smaller, she could trust with her life (and with her death, these dreams said) the monitor, the guardian, who stood somewhere, was somewhere in this shell of substance, smooth brown flesh so pleasantly curved into the shape of young woman. (LL p.21)

Because the light is variable, it is unreliable. Something less tangible has more 'truth' - and this 'something' is the epiphanic 'touchstone' of *Martha Quest* that was subsumed in the Communist group in *A Ripple from the Storm*. The re-emergence of both these symbols suggests directly conflicting ideas of the subject within the space of two pages. The text simultaneously offers an objective, observing self that is the one constant thing about Martha, and then rejects that self, and objectivity, as impossible. Martha then turns to her epiphanies, and implicitly, to the individual, essential self that they 'prove' exists.

The epiphanies in the novel continue these early contradictions. Many of them are centred around Martha's relationship with Thomas Stern. This relationship is in many ways very positive: he is the first man completely to satisfy her sexually and emotionally. Mary Ann Singleton calls the relationship 'the only powerful, reciprocal, loving relationship' and 'the turning point of Martha's life' (p.193). Thomas is seen as bringing into the forefront of her existence her individual, constant self,

of providing 'a new room to her house' which 'had ended the division' (LL p.103). This room is both literal (the loft in his brother's garden) and metaphorical (the new, satisfied self that Martha finds). However their relationship is not unequivocally positive: later in the novel Thomas becomes obsessed to the point of madness with Zionist activism, and then goes to help the natives in a distant part of Zambesia, dying of blackwater fever. He leaves memoirs, which find their way back to Martha to 'edit', which are an incredible mixture of factual record and apparently irrelevant detail. She finds herself distanced from him as the novel progresses, and although what he has represented for her is still significant, the part of her self which comes into life during their affair is to a certain extent transient. Other critics have pointed this out. Ruth Whittaker writes that love and sex in a beneficial relationship are 'phases to be grown through, early stages of development which must be left behind' (p.43), and Robert K. Morris cites the relationship along with Communism as 'another failed myth'.<sup>19</sup>

These contradictions can be implicitly seen from the beginning of their affair. Martha has found it difficult to 'become what Thomas insisted she must be' (LL p.105). Although her 'real nature had been put into cold storage for precisely this' (LL p.105), she has found it difficult to cope with anxiety over what will happen when the relationship breaks up. There is a sense in which their lovers' idyll is seen as part of a romantic construct, for example when Thomas says '"Martha, do you see this line here?"' and traces the line of her upper arm:

Martha, serious; Thomas, serious; looked at the curve of flesh, a line as mortal as that made by a raindrop sliding down glass; they looked as if their futures depended on looking... 'I couldn't ever be that, don't you see?'

His face lay, desperate, against the warmth of her upper arm; the 'line' that tormented him, was for Martha merely a surface of sensation.... 'But Martha... I'd give the whole of you and everything I am for that line there... That's something I'm not'... 'But perhaps they aren't what I am either?' (LL pp.106-107)

The stress that Thomas lays on the 'line' of her body is seen to be slightly ridiculous. It is 'mortal' and 'merely a surface of sensation'. Martha cannot get outside her own body to observe herself in the way he wants her to, and feels that her 'real' self consists of more than a pleasing line on her body. This criticism of the masculine visual sexual economy is reminiscent of the scene in *Martha Quest* where Douglas caresses Martha and forces her to experience her body through his eyes as an object (MQ p.242). The narrative wants us to believe that the whole self that emerges in Thomas and Martha's relationship is an authentic one, but also undermines this by the implicit link with a more definitely negative episode in *Martha Quest*. This works to question the existence of an individual, essential self.

This can also be seen in the epiphanies that centre around Thomas and Martha's relationship. The first of these happens just after the above episode. They are about to leave the loft when a sudden shower of rain catches them unawares: 'A handful of rain, blown in by a hard gust of wind, scalded them with cold. They leaped out of bed and stood below the tiny window, through which rods of strong wet drove and stung their strong, fresh, satiated bodies' (LL p.108). This episode has definite links with Martha's

epiphany in *A Proper Marriage* where she and Alice jump into the pot-holes in the rain. The pleasure in physical sensation here takes on an explicitly sexual quality: 'They laughed and rubbed the freezing water from the sky over each other's shoulders and breasts' (LL p.108). The importance of sensation, especially the sensory opposites (hot and cold; wet and dry) of body and rain emphasise the split between self and other which they attempt to overcome by drinking in the rain and by rubbing it into their skin to merge the two elements. The desire to do this is reflective of the way in which they experience each other as 'other' and 'foreign', are afraid of this, and desperately want to overcome it:

They felt as if they might never see each other again after this afternoon, and that while they touched each other, kissed, they held in that moment everything the other was, had been, ever could be. They felt half-savage with the pain of loss. (LL p.108)

There is a simultaneous feeling of complete unity with the other, and fear that this is only transient. There is more at stake here than merely Thomas and Martha's relationship: their feelings for each other articulate their need to affirm their own subjectivity through each other, and somehow access the fantasied pre-oedipal unity they have lost. Mary Ann Singleton writes that in this moment, Thomas and Martha's relationship, 'like the moments on the veld...creates for her an ecstatic yet powerful sense of unity' (p.197), but she does not comment on the somewhat desperate, fearful quality of the experience.

The next epiphany, at the Parklands Hotel, has many of the same contradictions. There is a very 'fin de siècle' feel about the occasion - it is after this that the group,

Martha's marriage, her relationship with Thomas, and many of her friendships, begin to break up. The double awareness of the happiness of the moment and its transience produces conflicting interpretations of the epiphany. It begins with Martha and Thomas experiencing a sense of oneness, but also of the other as other: 'Martha and Thomas sat side by side, hardly breathing - breathing, as it were, through each other. They did not look at each other, but felt Thomas, Martha, through their arms, their thighs, their stomachs' (LL p.152). Mary Ann Singleton writes that 'their fusion - together, and with everything around them - seems so strong that nothing should be able to disturb it' (p.209). Martha is able to experience all the details of the surrounding environment:

She simultaneously felt each beat of the music, the texture of the pockets of shadow in the tree trunks, the dull, scratched metal of the table and the sharp cold coming from it, the light splintering in the matrix of a drop of spilled wine. She had twenty senses and a heart so filled with delight it held all the night and everything about her. (LL p.153)

Martha here assumes an omnipotence and omnipresence that reveal an almost Wordsworthian confidence in her own subjectivity. The power of her self is so strong that it reaches out to the other and totally encompasses it. This moment has a strength and validity, but is also undercut by its context: Martha is extremely drunk and the narrator and reader place the epiphany as the result of too much alcohol. The next paragraph also reminds us of the imminent break-up of the relationship and the group:

Tonight, she and Thomas together, the six of them together - it was like the lift of a wave towards the sky before it breaks into a fragmented crest of flying white foam. She and Thomas would soon part, and soon...this love which had taught her what loving a

man was, would have gone, been blown apart. Like a town in Europe, dark under a sky bursting with bits of flying flame and steel. (LL p.153)

The images of fragmentation and break-up undermine ideas of love and comradeship. Mary Ann Singleton writes that 'the emotion...comes from the familiar situation of doomed love, although it gains added importance by its suggestion of universality, that no such thing as simple as romantic love can survive in such a world' (p.209). She does not note, however, that the essential, individual subject is also undermined. The reference to air-bombings and war reminds Martha how arbitrary life is: she only knows Anton, Athen and Thomas because of the war; all Thomas's relatives remained in Poland and were killed - it was mere chance that he left, and that they met.

This arbitrariness, once discovered, continues in the epiphany immediately following: 'She was a space of knowledge inside a shell of swaying drunkenness, and she swung from dark to light, from light to dark' (LL p.154). The metaphor of the shell re-emerges, but whereas in *A Proper Marriage* it indicates a constant self beneath its surface, here there is no such certainty. What exists is merely a 'space', which sways and swings with no consistency. Her experience of the other(s) is very different:

The others were there, and sat around her like many-coloured ghosts of people she had known a thousand years ago, under the cool, light trees over which the stars stood - but differently, they had moved across the sky....They sat in silence. Martha could not have said anything, nor did she want to, and she knew that they were in the same state. (LL p.154)

In this epiphany the other is familiar, but also different: the movement of the stars reflects the changes in the



people she knows, who are only 'like' the people of long ago. The point of this simile is its difference, not its similarity. An awareness of transience, change and impermanence, in both friends and the self, permeates this epiphany.

One final example of the way in which ideas of breakdown of the individual self attach to the epiphanies in *Landlocked* is Martha's drive to Gotwe with Jack to visit Thomas and his wife and family. Gayle Greene has also linked this scene with the Parklands Hotel epiphany, although she reads both as indicating 'an increasingly strong intimation of a transcendental reality and a sense of an "essential self" which is in touch with it' (p.96), which is directly opposed to my reading. In this experience Martha again feels the opening of a space inside her:

The empty space was opening inside her, and she was gazing into it with passionate curiosity. Martha and Jack, two minute fragments of humanity, rattling in the machine across immensities of empty country, they were only two of the figures that moved, small and brightly lit, against the backdrop, while she watched. (LL p.165)

The landscape across which they drive becomes the interior of Martha's self, which is again merely a space, or gap, across which various figures, including herself, move, as across a stage. The metaphor of the 'empty space' for the self links with the 'clear-lit space', of *Martha Quest*, which becomes the 'lighthouse of watchfulness' earlier in this novel. The light of objective judgement is a variable, and therefore flawed one, and the empty space has an arbitrary quality attached to it, as we see when Martha imagines the lives of various friends, as they are and as they would have been if there hadn't been a war, step as

alternatives across the 'space'. She imagines Maisie as a happily married middle-aged wife, and then as the prostitute she is rumoured to have become; reflects on the leg-amputation of the young airman who used to sleep in her flat if he had missed the bus; and of the probable future of Athen, who is planning to return to an almost certain death in his own country. The combined absurdity, arbitrariness and fatalism of this is difficult to take in: 'But what did it matter? The two pictures of Maisie stood side by side on the empty space - and cancelled each other out. Both were true. Both were untrue' (LL p.166). The result of this is the brief disappearance of Martha from the text as the empty space of her self becomes the landscape: 'The empty space swelled up to the great, wind-scoured skies: it was the size of the great landscape, this enormous stretch of country lifted high, high, under a high, pale-blue, cloud-swept sky' (LL p.166).

This disappearing act means that the epiphanies in *Landlocked* are extremely negative, no longer functioning to reaffirm belief in an essential, unitary, transcendental subject. This links with the increasingly Modernist content and structure of the text. In this novel, war becomes the major constructing force that creates the self, although to a large extent the situation of war is seen as an extreme version of normality. *Landlocked* also lacks the explicitly sexually differentiated epiphanies and subject of the previous novels. The sensitivity and understanding needed to achieve an awareness of the disappearing self is not dependent on gender. Thomas has similar qualities and

thoughts to Martha, and he is also (importantly in the context of the next novel), prone to 'madness'.

The loss of gender as an explicit way of discussing the subject in this novel is important in its implications for an analysis of epiphany and feminine subjectivity in *Children of Violence*, suggesting, in contradiction to previous novels in the sequence, that gender is not an important factor in subjectivity. The absence of the authentic, individual subject, and the loss of gender, mean that the novel does not really offer any answers to the question of how feminine subjectivity is constituted.

#### *The Four-Gated City: The Resurgence of the Individual*

In *The Four-Gated City*, the final novel in the *Children of Violence* sequence, there is some sort of 'conversion' to a renewed belief in the essentially individual subject, although this self may on the surface appear to be very different from the one we are familiar with. To contextualise this a little, the action of the novel covers a much greater time-span and variety of events than the previous ones. It describes Martha's arrival in London from 'Zambesia', her integration into the life of a large middle-class family as house-keeper, secretary, and surrogate wife and mother, and that family's experience during the oppressive fifties as the relatives of a defected spy. The novel then centres on Martha's attempted resolution of her relationship with her mother, who visits England. The important theme of the insights to be gained

through mental illness emerges through her experience at this time, and also through Martha's relationship with Lynda, the wife of Mark, the head of the family. Martha takes time on her own to come to terms with her own experience of mental disruption and growing psychic powers, learning to control and use them. This 'work' as it is called, is seen as a continuation of Martha's first epiphanic experiences of alienation at the beginning of the novel when she has no roots in the country she has come to. The novel ends with an appendix that describes how society gradually crumbled in the later part of the twentieth century, finally being destroyed by a series of small scale nuclear and chemical accidents. A small group of people, led by Martha, Lynda, and Mark and Lynda's son Francis, form a commune, and then attempt to escape the country when the accidents occur. Martha ends her life on a small island off the Scottish coast, where there is a grain of hope in the birth of several 'new' children, whose understanding of life, and paranormal powers, far exceed the weak abilities of Martha and Lynda - an 'interim' stage in the evolutionary process. Martha has two affairs during the course of the novel, the first with Jack, and the second with Mark, although this is brief, and a result of the independent problems and concerns of each at the time. Sexual relationships have diminishing importance in this novel. The most important relationship Martha has is with Lynda, who is often seen as her double. The much wider scope of the novel can thus be seen as a crescendo from beginning to end, as the concentration on Martha diminishes

until, at the end, she is merely one of many characters leaving 'information' for the future.

The increasing use of theories from Jungian psychology, anti-psychiatry (for example the work of R. D. Laing) and Islamic mysticism (Idries Shah is a major influence) has a part in the re-emergence of the individual subject, in whatever guise. Quotations from Shah first appear as part headings in *Landlocked*, although his theories only enter the text infrequently, for example in Thomas's ideas about human evolution (LL p.122), and in the story in his records/memoirs about the man and his enemy (LL p.277), which bears resemblance to a Sufi teaching story. They become more explicit in *The Four-Gated City* (the evolution theme, for example, is expanded). The influence of Laingian theories can be seen in the sympathetic treatment of madness throughout the series, although they do not emerge specifically until *The Four-Gated City*, where Lynda, and people like her, are seen as fundamentally failed by the medical profession and its system. The move away from the alienation and disillusionment with the essential self of *Landlocked* to a re-emerging belief in its existence in *A Four-Gated City* can be seen in the novel's attitudes to the subject in its epiphanies.

The self as constant appears frequently in the text in various different contexts. Martha appears to believe in a 'permanent person', that lies beneath the various permutations of personality that life brings out:

When a small baby looked straight at you, for the first time, its eyes having thrown off its milk-glaze, you looked into eyes that would stay the same for as

long as it lived...in fact one did speak to the permanent person in Paul, or Francis, or anybody else. (FGC p.369) [see list of abbreviations]

At other times she associates the 'watcher' with the permanent self. During her 'illness' before her mother arrives when she undergoes psychoanalytic treatment she experiences a splitting of her self into a part that watches and a part that is watched. This is to an extent merely an extension of the 'clear-lit space' that Martha has experienced since her teenage years. The threat here is that Martha will become entangled in the net of 'mental illness' and treatment. Dr. Lamb, the psychiatrist, (a wolf in sheep's clothing), asks her to define this part of her, and she replies: '"The best part of me. The only part that is real - that's permanent anyway"' (FGC p.249). But this is before she has learnt how to deal with her disruptive mental life, and find a way to what is perceived to be a *unified* constant self.

One of the major ways she achieves this is through the 'work' where she tries to recover her memories of her past life. After one of these sessions she loses all her normal self-awareness and experiences a breakdown of personality until the real constant self is discovered, like the kernel of a nut:

The sense of herself which stayed had no sex. Suppose shutting her eyes, holding that sense, that presence, she imagined herself into the body of a man?...Or even, letting the sense of herself go into a different shape, a horse, a small white horse....Who are you then? Why, me, of course, who else, horse, woman, man, or tree, a glittering faceted individuality of breathing green, here is the sense of me, recognizable only to me. (FGC p.243)

Although there may appear to be variation in the subject here, Martha is merely experimenting with moving her

constant self into different 'shells' or bodies. It is interesting that this constant self is not gendered, especially bearing in mind that elsewhere in the series it is very explicitly situated as essentially female. This emerging androgyny is an important change in that the self is no longer seen as closely linked with the female body. It also denies, however, that gender has any important influence on the 'deepest' sense of subjectivity.

Another symbol of the constant self is the four-gated city, which is also distinctly suggestive of Jungian symbolism. Jung dreamed that he visited Liverpool and found the centre arranged radially around a square. Individual quarters of the city were themselves arranged radially around a central point (*Memories, Dreams, Reflections* pp.223-4). He later dreamt that he was in an Arab city which had a wall around it with four gates (*Memories, Dreams, Reflections* p.270). He comments that 'a quaternity symbol...always points to the self'.<sup>20</sup> The symbol, present in *Martha Quest* as a fantasy which Martha sets against the Zambesian environment and social system (MQ p.17), re-emerges importantly in this novel, in the title and in Mark's story: 'The City in the Desert'. This story's gestation is helped by Martha, who comes up with ideas for it and types it. An important change is that the mythical city has a 'shadow' city grow up around it, modelled exactly on it, but without its secret of unity, which eventually over-runs it. This is an appropriate model for the conscious self, surrounded by its shadow, which Jung terms 'the inferior side of the personality, the "shadow"' (*Symbols of Transformation*, p.183). The taking-over of the

'inner sanctum' represents the dangers of repressing, rather than accepting and integrating, the shadow.

The epiphanies in the text frequently become agents of experimentation with mental disturbance and paranormal abilities in this novel. The 'alternative' world that is found in such experiments is the place where the real self can be discovered. Martha has intimations of this from the beginning of the novel, for example when she walks along the streets of London making her way to Jack's house. She has just had dinner with a friend of a friend in Zambesia who has attempted to integrate her into a job and a position in society that would circumscribe the odd feeling of freedom and rootlessness that she so enjoys at the beginning of the novel. It is this feeling that makes Martha unsure of her everyday identity and prone to the epiphanies in the text.

At this stage they appear to be about breakdown and fragmentation rather than revealing her real self. The experience has several stages: the first is one of physical awareness of her own receptivity to the epiphany: 'Her practical self checked her physical condition: the meal in the restaurant was the first proper meal for days; the wine the first alcohol for weeks; she had scarcely slept last night...And she had been walking and alert all day: the conditions were right, then' (FGC p.47). She then loses a normal awareness of identity and becomes 'nothing but a soft dark receptive intelligence' (FGC p.48). She experiences herself as different versions of her past selves: 'she was (but really became, as if nothing had intervened), Martha Quest, a young girl sitting under the



tree...But really, not in imagination - there she sat' (FGC p.48). The next stage, the 'band of sound', intrudes into Martha's mind. It is a mass of apparently unrelated sounds, fragments of words and songs, and incredible noise: 'somewhere in one's mind was a wave-length, a band where music jiggled and niggled, with or without words: it was simply a question of tuning in and listening' (FGC p.49). This is the first use of the increasingly important imagery of radio and electronic equipment. Although this wavelength has a superficial arbitrariness and randomness, Martha is beginning to recognise (although she can never remember) that through its 'choice' of sounds and songs, it makes relevant comments on her situation, informing her, for example, that she is actually very frightened of running out of money despite what she may think. The last stage is the moment of epiphany itself:

Even as she understood that she had reached, through acceptance, through not being afraid of or irritated by the silliness and jumble of this area, a state of quiet and distance as far removed from the state of quiet known up till now as that state was from the humdrum of ordinary life, she was already sinking away from it. (FGC p.51)

This is the moment of control of the process, achieved by not panicking, and this is the moment where later on in the novel Martha will find the real self. Several critics have pointed out the link between this moment and the veld epiphany in *Martha Quest*, for example Mary Ann Singleton (p.190) and Ruth Whittaker (p.55). Lorna Sage writes that in *The Four-Gated City* 'Lessing recalls and reworks her heroine's moments of "illumination"' (p.60). Other critics have more specifically noted the connection between this moment and the discovery of an essential, individual self,

although many do not find this problematic. Carol P. Christ writes that 'Martha recognizes this moment as being similar to the moment of insight on the veld' (p.59), and that 'she recognizes again that the core of her self is alone and independent of the relations and attachments she forms' (p.60). Margaret Scanlan comments on Martha's ability to 'sense a unified real self' (p.83) in the experience.

Martha's search for the authentic self in *The Four-Gated City* is about learning to control and utilise these experiences, which is made increasingly difficult because of society's attitude to such mental experimentation, which may involve extreme dislocation from 'normal' reality. Martha is shown to be hindered in her own search by accepted forms of psychoanalysis, by her own and others' attitudes to the mentally ill, and by the pressure of her role in the Coldridge household.

Martha makes other variously successful attempts throughout the novel to find her real, authentic self through such epiphanic experiences. One such attempt is through her sexual relationship with Jack. During their lovemaking Martha has similar experiences to the one discussed above: 'Martha was swung up and away: and as she went she thought...Good God, yes, I had forgotten, why is it we don't remember, with Jack there's this special place...but you can't "remember" it. Yes, exactly, like walking down the street in a high vibrating place' (FGC p.72). During this experience Martha has two visions, one premonitory. The first is an Eden-like picture of a beautiful man and woman surrounded by tame animals. This is definitely an archetypal image of pre-lapsarian humanity.

The second is of a large London house filled with children who are 'not children, half-grown people, and their faces as they turned them towards her were tortured and hurt, and she saw herself, a middle-aged woman, thickened and slowed' (FGC p.73). This last image is the fate she later finds in the Coldridge household, and the comparison of the two visions suggests the real, individual self that Martha will eventually find, and the hindrances that will slow down her search. It is not through Jack, however, that Martha can make any major achievements: he is severely limited by his stress on physical experience.

The clearest description of the self that Martha eventually finds is in the passage where she is meant to be looking after Lynda in one of her mad episodes, 'keeping her in touch with reality', and instead finds that she herself is 'losing touch'. What she discovers, and what the experimental epiphanies all lead up to, is the growing awareness of the existence of a collective unconscious: the band of sound, with all its simultaneous possibilities and terrors:

Behind these rivulets of words was a great chaos of sound. Martha could just hear it. She thought, or wondered: is it in Lynda's head or in mine? And, with a shock of impatience against her own obtuseness (for surely she had been here often enough not to have to ask, or wonder): well, of course, it is not a question of 'Lynda's mind' or 'Martha's mind'; it is the human mind, or part of it, and Lynda, Martha, can choose to plug in or not. (FGC p.513)

The imagery intensifies here, blending metaphors of radio, telephone, wind, water and electricity into an all-powerful collective force against which the conscious individual in the realist sense struggles helplessly, like a 'small boat' or 'tiny aircraft' (FGC p.514). This force is threatening

because it is easy to become frightened of it, and lose control. Its enormity makes it so different from normal self-awareness that the human frame seems too delicate to withstand it: 'Her whole body, organism, vibrated, shook, was being shattered to bits, by the force with which the sea of sound entered her' (FGC p.514). Fear of this force allows it to take over. What is needed is a way of keeping it simultaneously distant and present, under control. This is achieved by forcibly 'resisting the invasion' and calming herself, until she wakes, 'with the ocean of sound a low retreating booming noise safely far away' (FGC p.515). Lynda has failed to gain this control, because of the disastrous psychiatric treatment she has received, and she is perpetually afflicted by the 'band of sound'.

This notion of a 'collective unconscious' can be usefully compared with Jung's similar concept. He elaborates his theory as follows:

I have chosen the term 'collective' because this part of the unconscious is not individual but universal, in contrast to the personal psyche, it has contents and modes of behaviour that are more or less the same everywhere and in all individuals. It is, in other words, identical in all men [sic] and thus constitutes a common psychic substrata of a suprapersonal nature which is present in every one of us.<sup>21</sup>

He comments on the necessity of integrating the collective unconscious with consciousness, in a process known as 'individuation', which is what Martha has been seeking to do:

The reproduction of archetypal ways of psychic behaviour can create a wider horizon and a greater extension of consciousness - on condition that one succeeds in assimilating and integrating in the conscious mind the lost and regained contents. Since they are not neutral, their assimilation will modify the personality, just as they themselves will have to undergo certain alterations. In this part of what is

called 'the individuation process' the interpretation of symbols plays an important practical role.<sup>22</sup>

Jung also warns that 'if the conscious mind proves incapable of assimilating the new contents pouring in from the unconscious, then a dangerous situation arises in which they keep their original, chaotic, and archaic form and consequently disrupt the unity of consciousness' (*Symbols of Transformation* p.408), which casts light on what has happened to Lynda.

Although this version of the subject may appear to be very different from anything encountered before in *Children of Violence*, there are a number of similarities, or points of contact, between humanist individualism and ideas of individuation and the collective unconscious, which are also apparent in Jung's work. He termed individuation 'the process by which a person becomes a psychological "individual", that is, a separate, indivisible unity or "whole"' (*The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* p.275). His own stress on the importance of the individual is apparent in the following quotation:

The more the critical reason dominates, the more impoverished life becomes; but the more of the unconscious, and the more of myth we are capable of making conscious, the more of life we integrate. Overvalued reason has this in common with political absolutism; under its dominion the individual is pauperised. (*Memories, Dreams, Reflections* p.333)

Although Jung castigates 'critical reason', a traditional attribute of liberal humanism, the implication of this quotation is that to integrate the unconscious with the conscious allows the *individual* freedom and authenticity. His own stress on the conscious mind and its importance also indicates his adherence to a broadly humanist ethos. He remarks: 'In the final analysis the decisive factor is

always consciousness, which can understand the manifestations of the unconscious and take up a position towards them' (*Memories, Dreams, Reflections* p.212). This is also what Martha successfully does in *The Four-Gated City*.

Martha's ability to access and control her collective unconscious is presented in an increasingly elitist way in the text. Immediately after her experience with Lynda, Martha, enraptured by her discovery, goes out to look at what she expects to be a 'brave new world' because of her own realisation. Predictably, an epiphany results, which begins in the usual way with feelings of oneness and unity with nature. This reverie, however, is broken in upon by a terrible disgusting creature, who we slowly realise is a human being:

She stood on a pavement looking at a sky where soft white clouds were lit with sunlight. She wanted to cry because it was so beautiful. How long since she had looked, but really looked at the sky, so beautiful even if it was held up by tall buildings? She stood gazing up, up, until her eyes seemed absorbed in the crystalline substance of the sky with its blocks of clouds like snow banks, she seemed to be streaming out through her eyes into the skies, but then sounds came into her, they were vibrations of feet on pavement, and she looked down again at an extraordinarily hideous creature who stood watching her. (FGC p.519)

The almost Swiftian diatribe against the other human beings extends for several pages, attacking their appearance, social habits, poorness of intellect and intelligence. Their main crime, however, is their inability to experience what Martha is privileged to have discovered:

But the most frightening thing about them was this: that they walked and moved and went about their lives in a condition of sleep-walking: they were not aware of themselves, of other people, of what went on around them....They were essentially isolated, shut

in, enclosed inside their hideously defective bodies.  
(FGC p.522)

The exclusion of those 'less fortunate' than Martha and the way they are blamed for their 'failings' is suggestive of the way in which liberal-humanist individualism must define itself by the exclusion of various concepts, for example femininity. Carol P. Christ remarks that 'Her judgment is harsh' (p.66), but also thinks that Martha does not retain this attitude, because later on she tries to find others who have had similar experiences. However, there is always a sense that people like Martha are the 'chosen few', indeed the text will increasingly rely on religious myths of discipleship and sacred knowledge, as I intend to show. Frederic R. Karl writes that Martha 'sees herself in their image; she is of their kind',<sup>23</sup> but it is the *separation* of the enlightened and the unenlightened that is prominent. In this way the exclusivity of the idea of the individual who has been enabled to access her collective unconscious can be connected with Martha's earliest vision of the ideal city, in which she stands at the entrance, barring the way in from her parents and their friends. Claire Sprague calls this a 'revenge fantasy',<sup>24</sup> but its return here is more disturbing.

Martha's final experimentation with the collective unconscious and attempt to control it comes when she gets the chance to have several weeks on her own staying in Paul's house. This experiment is very similar to the epiphany at the beginning of *The Four-Gated City* although it is much more prolonged. It follows recognisable stages, the first the experience of the self-hater, where 'her whole life was being turned inside out, so that she looked

at it in reverse, and there was nothing anywhere in it that was good' (FGC p.551). She then moves through a phase of experiencing opinions and their opposites with equal conviction, becoming the tortured and the torturer. She recognises that both are aspects of the collective unconscious, and that it is possible for someone to lock into only one aspect, which is detrimental. This again suggests the Jungian 'shadow' which must be incorporated into consciousness through integration in order to achieve the whole unified self. Martha discovers that she now has the power to control the collective unconscious when necessary and keep it at bay in 'ordinary' situations.

The description of the final epiphany is extremely contradictory. The discovery and integration of the collective unconscious with the conscious is seen as a completely different, new form of subjectivity, involving the complete breakdown of the 'normal' self: 'In a panic she floundered about in a complete loss of her own personality' (FGC p.554). However, we have seen how belief in the liberal-humanist individual is actually covertly reintroduced in this concept through emerging suggestions of discipleship and exclusion of the unworthy. What is also apparent is the continued existence of a self that is able to watch, analyse and record: to make notes. The narrator tells us that the collective unconscious 'was not all chaos, it was not just a jumble', and that it was possible to use 'common sense here, in this uncommon area' (FGC p.552). But how can common sense be defined universally? Lorna Sage remarks on Lessing's ability, elsewhere in her work, to question accepted notions of common sense: 'The



main enemy, however, is common sense itself: the shared, realist perspective that places people in the middle distance and (as it were) takes humanity for granted' (p.65). In this experience, and others like it, Martha obviously does not lose all of her everyday self-awareness, she is not completely 'broken down', so as well as the implications contained in the idea of integrating the collective unconscious into conscious life, there is also an unquestioning acceptance of the existence of a 'common sense' self that watches and observes, and is somehow both free from contradictions and universally definable.

This is also apparent in the narration of the passages describing Martha's experience:

But, looking at Martha from outside...it might be hard to credit her with the calmness of mind which she was in fact using...better perhaps to skip the detailed blow by blow account of this 'work' which Martha was doing, and to rely on her notes.

Which of course must be inadequate; but then so would an attempt at a description.

The woman lying on the carpet crying: which would be more subjective? - to see thus, describe her thus, or to describe the contents of her thought?

The woman scribbling with agonised speed, to get everything down fast before it flew by: more subjective to describe her knotted pose, her clenched face, or to transcribe the notes?

Better, perhaps, the notes, like small signposts, or footmarks, for other people who may or may not find them useful. [first ellipsis mine] (FGC p.552)

The intrusion of an 'omniscient' narrator is oddly out of place in a passage about the 'breakdown of the self'. It is difficult to believe in this experience when the style of narration is recognisable as a nineteenth century, realist one. Martha's record of her experience is not particularly linguistically or structurally disrupted, but eminently comprehensible, and clearly separated with italics in the text from the narrator's comments. Nicole Ward Jouve points

this out, adding that 'the prose never really confronts you with the experience of madness...It never fully actualises the crisis it is about...The experience is only for the statement of it....The prose is interested in saying, *not* in doing' (p.115).

The appendix to the novel makes some of these implications and problems more specific. An elite group who also have the understanding Martha has found, attempt to escape England before the disaster. Francis Coldridge is 'converted' at the last minute and leaves a record of what happened for his step-daughter, in which he writes of the new subject:

The old right of the individual human conscience which must know better than any authority, secular or religious, had been restored, but on a higher level, and in a new form which was untouchable by any legal formulas. (FGC p.638)

Ingrid Holmquist relates this passage to 'the erosion of the concept of the individual' (p.158), and she concludes that the end of *The Four-Gated City* 'leads to an erosion of Lessing's humanism, to a nullification of the concept of the individual' (p.181). I would argue that it is the re-emergence of the individual, liberal-humanist subject that is most noticeable here, with several attendant implications. Martha, Lynda and Francis laugh at the present governmental machinery, which will soon be entirely obsolete: there will be no need for such clumsy apparatus in a world where advanced extra-sensory powers mean that the right decisions are accepted equally and intuitively by all.

The elitist and totalitarian implications of this reassertion of individualism are also apparent in the

appendix. Not all the human race has been 'chosen' to receive the gifts of Martha, Lynda and Francis. They remain a small, persecuted, privileged group in a world that retains the red tape, officialdom, and power structure of the late sixties, although the centre of power has shifted from the West. They are also meant to be an interim stage in the evolutionary process that eventually creates the children born on the island where Martha ends her life, who have even greater powers. The novel ends with one of these children, Joseph Batts, making his way into the centres of power in this new world as a sort of resistance worker or agent. There is an inevitability in the emergence of this 'new' subject that fits oddly with the blame attaching to those who, like Mark, were too stupid to recognise it and rejected it out of hand. What sort of society such children would introduce if they came to power can be deduced from Mark's story, 'The City in the Desert', and from Lessing's later science fiction: a benevolent dictatorship in which all have their place and everyone can know everything. What is lost in such a world is both the catalyst and possibility for change. Ingrid Holmquist notes 'a potentially totalitarian tendency in those social utopias' (p.161) and comments on the elision of class, race and sex conflicts, and the basically hierarchical, non-dialectical structure of power. The end of *The Four-Gated City* specifically, however, stops short of the dawn of the new age, and so retains a dialectical structure in the conflict between the bureaucracy of the eastern power base and the emerging abilities of the children. Mary Ann Singleton

notes that 'duality has not been overcome' (p.206), but the suggestion is that it soon will be.

Conclusion: The Repression of the Materiality of Language  
in *Children of Violence*

In *The Children of Violence* series the epiphanies are extremely important in establishing notions of subjectivity. In *Martha Quest* they seem to be points where rival ideas about the feminine subject, such as the self constructed by ideology and society; the liberal-humanist self, and the essentially female self linked to the female body, conflict, causing a tension in the view of selfhood. In *A Proper Marriage* this tension continues, but the one epiphany in this novel centres the self as an essentially female one, primarily connected to the female body and its sexual and reproductive function. *A Ripple from the Storm* finds Martha no longer a fit subject for such experiences, and transfers them to Jimmy, provoking interesting differences in the epiphany as it is experienced by a white working-class airman from an urban background, and a white middle-class Zambesian woman. *Landlocked*, the fourth novel in the sequence, is perhaps the most Modernist in its absurdist, nihilist version of subjectivity, although this novel is the first in which gender is not an explicitly determining influence upon epiphany and subjectivity. The last novel, *The Four-Gated City*, although it may appear to be about the breakdown of the personality, actually reinstates the liberal-humanist individual through the

growing awareness of the collective unconscious in the text, which must be integrated with consciousness through an individuation process. The importance of gender as an element in subjectivity is completely lost.

It is important that the rival, changing views of the feminine subject in the *Children of Violence* series do not question each other in a productive way that would stress the provisional and strategic way that the subject is always defined through language. Instead, they are all offered to the reader with an equal sense of their validity. It is difficult to speculate why this is so, but the issue seems to lie at the level of language and narrative. Nicole Ward Jouve's article, 'Of mud and other Matter - *The Children of Violence*' (see note 8), grapples with this but admittedly gets into difficulties with authorial intentionality and how that affects language and narrative. She remarks:

It is as if it [the text] did not try to envisage on the level of language the questions it is posing on a theoretical level - what is the relation between sex and politics, between the feel of the body and the economical or political infra-structure at work, determining (or not) each individual life. (p.111)

Ward-Jouve gives several good examples of this (she discusses the opening paragraph of *The Four-Gated City* (p.112) and the description of Martha's breakdown at the end of the novel (p.114)). She later comments that 'Neither the author nor the character doubt the *descriptive* power of language' [my italics] (p.112), and that 'nothing is going to happen from *inside* the language...the process of writing itself is excluded, except as a tool, from the operation that is taking place' (p.114). This feeling that the

language of the series represses its own materiality or constitutive function, and instead tries to believe in its descriptive power is particularly true when considering the treatment of the feminine subject.

#### Notes

1. 'The Small Personal Voice' in *A Small Personal Voice: Doris Lessing, Essays, Reviews, Interviews*, edited by Paul Schlueter (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1974), pp.3-21 (p.14).
2. Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', in *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, edited by Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (New York: Schocken Books, 1981), pp.245-264 (p.250).
3. Margaret Scanlan, 'Memory and Continuity in the Series Novel: The Example of *Children of Violence*', *MFS*, 26 (1980), 75-85 (p.79).
4. Jenny Taylor, 'Introduction: Situating Reading', in *Notebooks/Memoirs/Archives: Reading and Rereading Doris Lessing*, edited by Jenny Taylor (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), pp.1-42 (pp.3-4).
5. Lorna Sage, *Doris Lessing, Contemporary Writers* (London: Methuen, 1983), p.30.
6. Jean Pickering, 'Marxism and Madness: The Two Faces of Doris Lessing's Myth', *MFS*, 26 (1980), 17-30 (p.25).
7. Gayle Greene, 'Doris Lessing's *Landlocked*: "A New Kind of Knowledge"', *Contemporary Literature*, 28 (1987), 82-103 (p.83).
8. Nicole Ward Jouve, 'Of Mud and Other Matter - *The Children of Violence*', in *Notebooks/Memoirs/Archives: Reading and Rereading Doris Lessing*, edited by Jenny Taylor (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), pp.75-134 (p.97).
9. Ingrid Holmquist, *From Society to Nature: A Study of Doris Lessing's 'Children of Violence'*, Gothenburg Studies in English, 47, (Goteborg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 1980).
10. See for example Doris Lessing, *The Golden Notebook* (London: Granada, 1973), p.299.
11. Doris Lessing, 'Preface', in *The Golden Notebook* (London: Granada, 1973), pp.7-22 (p.19).
12. Mary Ann Singleton, *The City and the Veld: The Fiction of Doris Lessing* (London: Associated University Presses, 1977), p.127.

13. Paul Schlueter, *The Novels of Doris Lessing, Crosscurrents/Modern Critiques* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1973), p.59.
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21. *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung, Volume IX, Part One, The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, edited by Sir Herbert Read and others (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), pp.3-4.
22. C. G. Jung, 'Approaching the Unconscious', in *Man and his Symbols*, edited by C. G. Jung (London: Aldus Books, 1964), pp.18-103 (p.99).
23. Frederick R. Karl, 'The Four-Gaited Beast of the Apocalypse: Doris Lessing's *The Four-Gated City*', in *Old Lines, New Forces: Essays on the Contemporary British Novel*, edited by Robert K. Morris (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson, 1976), pp.181-199 (p.190).
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## CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis and its original contribution to knowledge has been to show the importance of moments of epiphany in suggesting and developing ways of reading feminine subjectivity in the novel. I have established that epiphanies are the means to highlight and often initiate approaches to the feminine subject that are crucial in the novels considered.

It would be difficult to form an opinion of any sort about many of the feminine characters and their relationship to masculinity, narrative and subjectivity without considering such moments. Miriam's moments of epiphany in *Sons and Lovers*, for example the scene where she shows Paul 'her' rosebush in the woods (SL pp.209-10); and her 'vision' of Paul outlined by the sunset (SL pp.216-217), are vital in developing these ideas. It is also important to consider them as a group of epiphanies which do display significant similarities to each other, and significant differences from Paul's, rather than as isolated scenes with no particular consistent characteristics. By doing this the cumulative, and often unconscious, effect that they have on a reading of the novel can be more effectively discussed, and the ways in which the novel considers the feminine subject can be more specifically elaborated. My discussion of how novels by Charlotte Brontë, D. H. Lawrence and Doris Lessing significantly use epiphany in creating particular views of the feminine subject highlights these aspects.



This thesis has not been an explicitly evaluative comparison of the three novelists considered, as it seems most important to establish how a text creates its own views of feminine subjectivity. However, there will inevitably be an implicit evaluation underlying a study that compares three different writers. Part of the purpose of this conclusion, then, is to offer up my own evaluative judgement, and justify it.

My own preferences, in terms of what a text should be doing 'as a force in this world of mine'<sup>1</sup> developed both from looking at the texts and considering theoretical issues. They could be expressed as follows: a text should not try to disguise its own materiality. It should not attempt to repress the constitutive, and not descriptive, aspects of its language in creating its own textual 'reality'.

Relating this to the feminine subject and ideas about feminine subjectivity means that I would prefer a text that made explicit the provisionality of different ways of writing, reading, and being a feminine subject. This would mean recognising that feminine subjectivity is fluctuating, open to change and sometimes strategic.

That alone is insufficient, however. There should also be a recognition and embodiment of the relationship between patriarchal, and other forms of power, and different forms of feminine subjectivity. Most importantly that means recognising that there is no essential innate self (of whatever sort), and that forms of subjectivity are developed and produced in dominant discourses.

For this reason, I see Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* and the way that it uses epiphany as an extremely positive 'writerly' text (Barthes, p.4). Moments of epiphany are central in Brontë's *Villette*, not so much in the promulgation of a particular view of feminine subjectivity (unlike the novels by Lawrence and Lessing that I have considered), as in the deconstruction of ideas about it presented elsewhere. The novel initially develops its feminine subject, Lucy Snowe, as split between what are identified as feminine personality traits and narrative structures/patterns, as opposed to masculine personality traits and narrative structures/patterns. By doing so, it manages to suggest that the female 'self' can be simultaneously radically polarised and inevitably essential: that it was, and always will be, the same. However, the epiphanies in the text continually suggest the fluctuation and shifts in this model, making clear that it has been developed as a response to the dominance of patriarchal attitudes to femininity. They also suggest, therefore, its insufficiency as a model of the feminine subject.

By contrast, in the epiphanies in their novels that I have discussed, both D. H. Lawrence and Doris Lessing prefer to set up models of feminine subjectivity which, although they may alter, seem to be dominant and exclusive for at least a short time, rarely conflicting with other simultaneous models in a way that would encourage productive questioning. For example, *Sons and Lovers* and *The Rainbow* seem to imply on the one hand that feminine characters are the mysterious and threatening objects of a

masculine quest relying on models of bildung and personal development from which they themselves are excluded; or alternatively that feminine characters can take on the traditional masculine role of hero of a bildungsroman without any apparent stress or conflict. *Women in Love* may seem to offer a more positive equality between masculinity and femininity in relation to desire, but this does not address the issue of femininity's marginal relationship to masculine desire in patriarchal society, and ways of disrupting or altering that.

Lessing's novels also offer various ways of understanding the feminine subject, but at the level of language and narrative any possible awareness in the reader of the conflicts between these different models is suppressed. It is only, perhaps, in *Landlocked* that there is any suggestion of provisionality in the subject, but this is not ever clearly seen in terms of gender. The reader has to work 'against the grain' to become conscious of the different ideas about subjectivity, and in the final novel in the series, a version of truth is offered which is retroactively imposed on the other novels in the sequence: it becomes possible to read Martha's earliest epiphanies as struggles for expression by the 'alternative' mystical and paranormal self that emerges in *The Four-Gated City*.

It is through discussing the epiphanies in these novels specifically as ways of treating the feminine subject that it is possible to become aware of how ideas about femininity and masculinity in character, narrative and subjectivity are developed, and to consider the texts in this thesis in the light of a specific feminist

commitment and poststructuralist theories of language and subjectivity.

#### Notes

1. Roland Barthes, *S/Z: An Essay*, translated by Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), p.4.

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