THE UNIVERSITY OF REDLANDS
REDLANDS, CALIFORNIA

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT THE DISSERTATION ENTITLED
CONCEPTS OF REALITY IN CERVANTES' DON QUIXOTE,
FLAUBERT'S MADAME BOVARY, DOSTOEVSKY'S
THE IDIOT, AND BARTH'S
THE SOT-WEED FACTOR

by

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HAS BEEN ACCEPTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DATE

May 20, 1971

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

(Chairman)

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A Dissertation
Presented to
the School of Graduate Studies
University of Redlands

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INTRODUCTION

The discovery of the real has been the claim of philosophers and artists for centuries. But each explicit statement regarding the real world has been followed by other statements, sometimes contradictory, each of which claims to be equally true and as valid as the previous one. Plato's treatment of the universal as the real was followed by Aristotle's preference for the particular. Marx's treatment of social relations as ultimately real is countered by Nietzsche's emphasis of the inner moral resources of the individual. Michelangelo's paintings and sculptures depicting man as God can be contrasted to Giacometti's work showing man as weak and lonely. Which of these views is correct? Which most accurately depicts the real world?

There has been a tendency in western thought to treat these questions seriously, and to assume that they have final solutions. Each of the contradictions mentioned above has been treated, at various times, as if it represents, in its two elements, two separate and unique categories of human experience, as if the two categories can be placed into a kind of absolute set of priorities. What seems to be the case, however, is that they represent the ends of connected polarities, or better, directions in a continuum. They are separated and dichotomized conceptually but not in experience.

The term "reality" as I shall be using it refers to these conceptualizations which are used to explain or organize our experiences. To assume that "reality" functions as other substantives, like "book" or "dog," and refers somehow to an entity which can be arrived at through reason or the senses or some special cognitive experience seems to me a mistake. When we use assertions that include "reality," we invariably focus on certain features of our experience and raise them to a special level of importance as meaning-giving factors for life. To discuss reality then is to engage in the descriptions of a specific view of human experience. This view has its limits, limits created by language, culture and physical environment.

Just as our experiences take on order as they are structured by the nature and condition of the sense organs, so the same experiences are given metaphysical meaning as they are shaped and ordered by our acquired models or concepts of reality. I want to avoid the notion that there are selves of certain "real" kinds confronting the world of "what is." I am assuming that there are experiences structured in certain specific ways, and that it is these structures to which we refer when we talk about reality.

Every human person is born into a culture with a language and with institutions which provide him with handles for grasping his experiences. All his behavior is governed by what his language and his institutions tell him is real. There are, built into each culture, models of specific kinds through

which men perceive the real and the unreal.

The model of the atom is a good (and literal) example of the way I am using "model" in this context. The interconnected spheres of the model provide physics students insight into the processes of energy creation. But it would be irrelevant to ask if atoms "really look like that." First, it is probably impossible to find out what atoms "really" look like, and second, it makes little difference. What is important is whether or not the model facilitates any understanding about the experiences we have had or can expect to have as observers.

Models of the world or concepts of reality, usually much less concretely defined than the model of the atom, serve to provide explanation and predictive insight like the models of science. They are acquired with the culture we grow into and are frequently so well suited to us that they become invisible.

As models are found workable or fruitful they congeal into institutions and are perpetuated by ritual behavior and in ritual language. The longer the models are used, the more they become accepted as ultimate descriptions of the world. It is then that we begin to think of them, when we use the word "reality" as referring to "the world." The alternative to treating "reality" as "model for organizing experience" is to assume that it refers to everything, the totality of events in the world. It is obviously false that anyone experiences such

a totality. Since, in this sense, "reality" would refer to a completely undifferentiated mass, it would mean so much that it would mean nothing. What we have at our disposal and that which is the referent for "reality" is the limit-producing model which serves to organize our experiences.

The artists and philosophers, as producers of aesthetic objects and metaphysical systems, provide the highlights which make our models visible. The novelist has at his disposal a form exceptionally suited to the creation of models or concepts of reality. He can provide as much as he wants of narration in which to focus on those objects or events which seem important to him. This focus will locate the objects or events in time and space and give them the special kind of qualities characteristic of a particular concept of reality. At the same time he can create characters who will react to these objects or events in ways which will reveal the dialectical relationship between the character and his environment. Since the novelist creates a little world inhabited by his own created beings, it is possible to observe, through examination of the narrative and the characterization, the outlines of the concept of reality which is being used as a framework for the novel. The novelist, then, uses his talents to look into old concepts of reality, sometimes exposing their philosophical weaknesses and sometimes formulating grounds upon which to make new models which will provide fresh understanding of our experiences.

Whether he wishes to or not, the person who sets about

making an analysis of any part of his world, will reveal, consciously or unconsciously, the specific concept of reality which dominates his thinking. This may or may not be consistent with the concepts of the characters in the novel. My concern will be with what I think are the outlines of the models of reality on which the novels rest. I am not interested, in this study, in tracing the philosophical antecedents of each writer's ideas. I am aware of the fact that novelists are not merely metaphysicians. They are craftsmen, psychologists, historians, and sociologists (among other things) as well. I choose to restrict my attention here to their activities as creators of models for grasping and organizing experience.

I have chosen four novels which make this analysis of reality in four quite different ways. Cervantes' Don Quixote deals with the old problem of appearance and reality. The novel proposes a pluralism of appearances which grows or develops out of a single reality. There seem to be serious doubts in the novel about the relation between the experiences and the supporting reality, doubts which become almost agnostic in Part II of the novel. Flaubert's Madame Bovary and Dostoevsky's The Idiot present more tightly structured and more narrowly defined concepts of reality. Where Don Quixote analyzes the experience of reality, Madame Bovary presents the experience of reality as object and event, and The Idiot presents the experience of reality as inner illumination.

Flaubert and Dostoevsky settle on apparently simple constructs for the bases of reality, while Cervantes is concerned with the ambiguous and puzzling relation between appearance and reality. The Sot-Weed Factor presents experience as reality. Barth's position is obviously most like my own, as outlined in this introduction.

I have looked at these four novels as four examples of our struggle with dualism. Cervantes is deeply immersed in a Christian theological tradition, highly seasoned with Platonism, in which a sharp separation exists between good and evil, Christ and Satan, and appearance and reality. He explores this last relationship with care, recognizing the difficulties of such a separation, but couching his statement in a dualistic fashion to the end. Dostoevsky and Flaubert both deal with the subjective-objective dualism, and attach themselves, yielding to the power of the traditional separation, each to one of the separate elements. Barth attempts to see through the conceptual dualisms to a position which eliminates them as completely as possible.

I shall attempt to describe the models of reality upon which these struggles against and capitulations to the dualisms of western thought take place, showing how changes in concepts of reality provide new ways of dealing with the old dualisms.

CHAPTER I

DON QUIXOTE

The Prologue to Part I of Don Quixote reveals much of what Cervantes intends to do in the novel regarding the development of a concept of reality. He illustrates the kind of dual or multiple vision he expects his readers to find in the novel itself. The Prologue is a philosophical preview of the novel.

To make apparent the importance of the implied or embodied meanings of his novel, Cervantes includes in his Prologue a well-known aphorism of his time: "For you know the old saying: under my cloak a fig for the king."¹ What is cloaked as an attack on the medieval romances is as well a gesture directed toward the problems of the age. Implicit in this aphorism is the philosophical problem of appearance and reality. This problem provides a framework upon which the structure of the novel and the thematic superstructure rest.

The suggestion that beneath what one sees as one form or structure of reality lies another structure of reality leads

¹Miguel de Cervantes, The Adventure of Don Quixote, translated by J.M. Cohen (Baltimore, Maryland, 1950), p. 27. All subsequent references to this novel will be from this edition; and will be noted in the text with page numbers in parentheses.

to the multiple meanings or what Spitzer calls the "perspectivism" of this novel.²

What is viewed as real by Sancho is not reality for Don Quixote. The two men view the world from different perspectives, and the vision which each man creates is his own imaginative construct. Don Quixote, Part I, presents a concept of reality which takes into account that the real varies with changing perspectives, but that there is something substantial, though undefined which supports that point of view.

"The Tale of the Foolish Curiosity"

Before treating the essential elements of the narrative, I would like to discuss what I think provides a microcosm of the world of Don Quixote. All the themes of the novel are summed up in "The Tale of the Foolish Curiosity." This tale provides a clue to the understanding of the adventures of the Knight of the Sad Countenance. It includes a treatment of love, reason, and reality, is essentially a metaphysical treatise on these matters, and stands at the heart of the philosophical problem of appearance and reality as it forces the reader to consider the nature of the real. Bruce Wardropper has suggested that this story, as well as the other material not directly related to the main narrative, is intended to provide philosophical comment on the action. The episodes, he suggests, serve "to present similar themes to

²Leo Spitzer, "On the Significance of Don Quixote," Modern Language Notes, Vol. 77 (January, 1962), pp. 113-129.

those of the historia under a different guise. The short story is set in a metaphysical framework; the history is made out of experience."³ I do not use the term "metaphysical" in such a way to suggest that philosophical statements embodied in the episodes are categorically different from those in the history as does Wardropper. But it does seem clear that the metaphysical insights of the episodes, especially "The Tale of the Foolish Curiosity," are different in structure from those of the history. Wardropper's criticism is important in that it points to that difference.

The story is introduced into the narrative material after Don Quixote's adventures in the Sierra Morena. All those characters with whom he has come in contact and about whom the second half of Part I is concerned have found their way to an inn whose keeper brings out a chest filled with manuscripts. One of these manuscripts contains "The Tale of the Foolish Curiosity." As the "adventurers" sit about the inn, the priest reads the story. As a result of what has taken place in the mountains, Don Quixote has found himself involved in a complex love relationship. Cardenio, who has been forsaken by Lucinda, masquerades as a shepherd in the mountains; Dorothea, who has been forsaken by Ferdinand, also seeks solace in the mountains. Don Quixote has met both, and now Dorothea, masquerading as the Princess Micomicona in need of a knight to restore her to her

³Bruce Wardropper, "The Pertinence of El Curioso Impertinente," PMLA, LXXII (December, 1957), pp. 587-600.

kingdom, is aiding in the attempt to get Don Quixote safely home. Soon after the tale is read, we are to meet the soldier with his Moorish bride and Don Louis and Clara, the two young lovers who are being separated by parental authority.

In the midst of all this treatment of the theme of love, Cervantes introduces this story of the man who was too curious for his own good. The characters of this story, Anselmo, Lothario, and Camilla become involved in the inevitable love triangle. Anselmo, who has been on the best of friendly terms with Lothario, asks him to make a test of his wife's virtue. He wants to know if his wife is as faithful, true, and chaste as he believes her to be. Lothario at first refuses. But under pressure from his best friend, he begins the seduction. Unfortunately for all, he himself is seduced by the beauty of Camilla, who innocently leads him on.

When the seduction has been accomplished the two continue to deceive Anselmo, and live in a kind of lovers' paradise until Leonella, maid to Camilla, accidentally brings about the revelation of the true relationship. Camilla and Lothario run off, the one to a nunnery, the other to die on the battlefield. Anselmo, tortured by his loss and by his folly, dies of a broken heart. The story is beautifully told. It is a spare and eloquent probing of the relations among love, reason, and reality. In the narrative, into which the tale is introduced, the love complications are all resolved happily; in the intruding story, the materials are handled tragically.

There are two sides to the story of love, Anselmo has

attempted to test the real. He poses the problem as follows:

It is the question whether my wife Camilla is as good and perfect as I think. I cannot be sure of the truth except by testing her by an ordeal which shall prove the purity of her virtue, as fire shows the purity of gold.
(p. 285)

Anselmo, like Don Quixote, wants to make a test. When Don Quixote first decided on his excursion as a knight errant, he made a helmet for himself and then gave it a blow with his sword to see how strong it was. The helmet was destroyed, and Don Quixote was forced to rebuild it out of the pieces. His illusion of knighthood suffered at this point, but after he rebuilt the helmet he did not test it again, and Cervantes makes a point of telling us that he did not. But Anselmo is not satisfied at any point along the way until he has destroyed his friend, his wife, and himself. He wants a verifiable truth in an area of experience not subject to verifiability. He wants a truth outside himself, which will bear the blows of any sword. Don Quixote recognizes that the reality he experiences is his own absolute, and since it is his own and has been created out of his own spirit, it need not and indeed should not be treated beyond endurance. What Anselmo lacks is the recognition that his wife's purity is partly of his own making, and that to test it is only to destroy it. Like King Lear, Anselmo believes or misbelieves that love or the real can be measured quantitatively. Lothario recognizes Anselmo's position and its weaknesses, and attempts to persuade him not to carry out this test. He likens Anselmo to the Moors who, he says,

cannot be convinced in the error of their sect by quotations from holy scriptures, nor by arguments drawn from intellectual speculation or based on the canons of faith, but have to have examples, palpable, simple, intelligible, demonstrable and indubitable, with irrefutable mathematical proofs like: if equals be taken from equals the remainders are equal. And when they do not understand this in words, as in fact they do not then you have to show it to them with your hands and put it in front of their eyes. (p. 287)

Lothario recognizes that area of experience for which there are no proofs of a logical sort or evidence of an empirical sort, that area which includes an individual's understanding, acceptance, and view of reality. His arguments are cogent and practical, but Anselmo is a man with an obsession and without imagination. Lothario's arguments are wasted.

Cervantes has given us, in Anselmo, a character with whom to contrast Don Quixote. Both men are obsessed, but as we shall see, Don Quixote's obsession is one of the imagination and is tempered with the recognition of the function of the imagination. Anselmo's obsession is one of the reason, in that he attempts to quantify and make logical human behavior. The foolish curiosity here shows us in very sharp focus the problems Cervantes deals with in the presentation of his hero Don Quixote. He makes this comparison explicit through Lothario's analysis of Anselmo's proposed test. He points out the impracticality of Anselmo's proposal, and says that it is sheer madness.

Difficult works are attempted for the sake of Heaven, for the world's sake or for both. The first are tasks undertaken by the saints, who attempt to live the lives of angels in human frames. The second are performed by men who navigate the boundless ocean, and journey through distant countries and changing climates, to acquire what

are called the goods of fortune. And those who brave hazardous enterprises for the sake of both God and man are stout soldiers, who no sooner see in the enemies' rampart a breach made by a single cannon ball than, regardless of all fear and danger, they are borne on the wings of ambition to fight for their faith, their nation, and their king, and rush boldly into the midst of death which awaits them in a thousand shapes. (p. 288)

This description is of no one if not of Don Quixote. If the attempt to test Camilla's virtue is madness, as Lothario says, then man, when he undertakes enterprises for the sake of both God and man, is sane. The question of Don Quixote's madness and the value of his vision of life is focused upon in this statement. After this description Lothario goes on to describe the opposite.

Such are the hazards commonly undertaken, and it is honour, glory, and gain to attempt them, however charged they may be with difficulty and danger. But the project you suggest attempting will gain you glory neither from above, nor the goods of fortune, nor renown among men. For, supposing that the result is satisfactory, you will be no happier, no richer, and no more honored than you are at present; and if you do not succeed, you will be in the greatest imaginable misery. (pp. 288-289)

All of Don Quixote's actions are directed toward the goals established by Lothario as having positive virtue. It is in this encounter between the mad Anselmo and Don Quixote, which lurks about the edges of every portrait made in the novel, that we see the power and the glory of the mad knight's vision. Anselmo's madness is graphically illustrated in Goya's etching with the title "The Dream of Reason Produces Monsters." Cervantes' treatment of this madness shows how it leads to the creation of monsters like Anselmo. The dream of the ideal, the madness of the visionary Don Quixote, leads to the creation of

monsters, but they are monsters of the imagination which can be controlled by the imagination. They permit heroic deeds, but do not lead to moral devastation. Anselmo recognizes this even at the beginning of his enterprise. After Lothario's long and tedious arguments rejecting Anselmo's plan, Anselmo answers:

I have listened with attention to all that you have said, Lothario my friend; and your arguments, examples, and comparisons prove--that if I do not follow your opinion but my own, I shall be abandoning the good and pursuing the evil. Yet, though I admit this, you must consider that I am now suffering from an illness common in women, which makes them long to eat earth, chalk, coal, and other worse things, loathesome to the sight and much more loathesome to the palate. (p. 293)

Opposed to this are the effects of the vision of chivalry held by Don Quixote. After all the adventures, the beatings, the pummelings, the vile words, Don Quixote can say to the Canon of Toledo as he is being carted home like an animal: "I can say of myself that since I became a knight errant I have been valiant, courteous, liberal, well-bred, generous, polite, bold, gentle and patient, an endurer of toils, imprisonment and enchantments" (p. 442). And we can accept this self-evaluation by Don Quixote because we have seen him just as he describes himself, polite, bold, gentle, etc.

The difference between Don Quixote and Anselmo is the difference between two approaches to the real. In the juxtaposition of these two visions we begin to penetrate the metaphysical statement implied in Don Quixote. In this particular comparison we see that one's conception of the real, one's imaginative construction of the real world, determines not only the values held but specific kinds of activities or

paths taken. We shall see, as we examine the illusions or visions which possessed both Don Quixote and Sancho, that individuals live by a number of visionary hypotheses, that experience is subject to multiple perspectives, and that what determines the structure of reality is the operation of the creative imagination. Don Quixote's conception of reality is characterized by his illusion that he can restore the values inherent in the medieval traditions about chivalry. This illusion is not simple or single-tracked; it is not treated by Cervantes as total madness, nor is it treated as a reflection of some saintly quest for perfection. An analysis of Don Quixote's illusion will reveal something of the multifacetedness of his vision of life.

The Adventures and the Creation of Reality

In the opening chapters of the novel it is revealed that Don Quixote has been driven out of his wits by too much reading of the medieval romances. This forthright statement is repeated frequently in the early pages of the novel, especially before the introduction of the Moorish historian as narrator.

So odd and foolish, indeed, did he grow on this subject that he sold many acres of cornland to buy these books of chivalry to read, and in this way brought home every one he could get. (p. 31)

The values of the literary world of the medieval romances serve to cause a qualitative change in Don Quixote's character.

In short, he so buried himself in his books that he

spent the nights reading from twilight till daybreak and the days from dawn till dark; and so from little sleep and much reading, his brain dried up and he lost his wits.
(p. 32)

The Don is shown to be made mad by too much reading.

Cervantes is bold and unequalifying. Out of this madness Don Quixote develops the idea of becoming a knight. Even at this stage, while Cervantes is intent upon showing Don Quixote's madness, there is a slight touch of irony in the author's presentation of the protagonist. To be sure, we are shown a man made mad; we are shown an individual who fails to cope satisfactorily with the ideas which have absorbed him, but at the same time we see that the values he expresses possess a certain moral dignity about them.

In fact, now that he had utterly wrecked his reason he fell into the strangest fancy that ever a man had in the whole world. He thought it fit and proper, both in order to increase his renown and to serve the state, to turn knight errant and travel through the world with horse and armour in search of adventures, following in every way the practice of the knights errant he had read of, redressing all manner of wrongs and exposing himself to chances and dangers, by the overcoming of which he might win eternal honour and renown. (p. 33)

This description, read in the light shed upon the narrative by the tale of the man who was too curious for his own good, carries with it a touch of the ironic, and we see in the mad knight a man with some measure of moral integrity. This "strangest fancy" becomes the essential part of the character of Don Quixote; he is a man questing for the good. We must also consider the relationship between his visionary reconstruction of the world and the actions he pursues.

While the sharp focus at this point is upon Don

Quixote's mad fancy, Cervantes consistently introduces narrative material which, while not developed, anticipates some of the more explicit statements of the later parts of Part I and the basic philosophical position of Part II. In the incident of the helmet, Don Quixote reveals the complicated and sensitive response to his experience which makes him a baffling and, at the same time, convincing character. After the Don has dealt the helmet the destructive blow with the sword, he begins to see through his vision.

He was not too pleased at the ease with which he had destroyed it, and to safeguard himself against this danger, reconstructed the visor, putting some strips of iron inside, in such a way as to satisfy himself of his protection; and, not caring to make another trial of it, he accepted it as a fine jointed headpiece and put it into commission. (pp. 33-34)

Don Quixote's distress and his hesitation at further testing help us see the man who possesses at least a certain measure of control over his imagination. He knows the difference between the fact and the value he has given it. Don Quixote discovers the possibility of the metaphysical recreation of reality. He does this as the medieval writers had done it, by creating his own romance. In chapter two we see him riding out onto the plain of Montiel reciting to himself the adventures which will be recorded for posterity.

And you, sage enchanter, whoever you may be, to whose lot it falls to be the chronicler of this strange history, I beg you not to forget my good Rocinante, my constant companion on all my rides and journeys! . . . O Princess Dulcinea, mistress of this captive heart! You did me great injury in dismissing me and inflicting on me the cruel rigour of your command not to appear in your beauteous presence. Deign, lady, to be mindful of your captive heart, which suffers such griefs for love of you. (pp. 36-37)

This last statement, addressed to his imaginary lover, was spoken "as if he had really been in love." (p. 36). As yet there have been no adventures; there has only been intention, but we see Don Quixote building up out of his poetic imagination the world of chivalry, adventures, and love.

Don Quixote arrives at an inn which he thinks is a castle, but he is not quite convinced; and we see him engage in dialogue which confuses and unsettles the patrons who are already there. It is the sound of the hog-gelder's whistle that finally convinces the Don that the inn is really a castle, that the pollack he had been eating was really trout, that the black bread had really been made of the whitest flour, and that the country wenches were really dainty ladies. The suggestion here is that Don Quixote's is a developing madness. Cervantes is not sure at this point where the madness will lead or of the extent of that madness. From time to time things and events convince Don Quixote that he is located in the world of chivalry. But it is after his beating at the hands of the merchants and his subsequent delivery to his home that Don Quixote reaches the peak of his madness, and at that peak Cervantes introduces the essentially ambiguous attitude toward his character. The laborer who is taking Don Quixote to his home reminds him that he is not Baldwin or another knight but the worthy gentleman master Quixada. Don Quixote replies in words that suggest total control of the imagination and at the same time a total commitment to a particular visionary view.

I know who I am, . . . and I know, too, that I am capable of being not only the characters I have named, but all the Twelve Peers of France and all the Nine Worthies as well, for my exploits are far greater than all the deeds they have done, all together and each by himself.
(p. 54)

"I know who I am" is certainly a strong statement from a man who is completely mad. It suggests that Don Quixote is structuring the real. For Cervantes that which constitutes reality is that structured perspective of the world which remains, at last "out there," "essentially real," and undefinable in absolute terms. At this point this particular theory of reality is enriched or extended by showing that not only does the mad knight reconstruct the appearances of the external world into some coherent and meaningful pattern but also that he is in full control through his imagination of the internal world, the world of the ego, the self, the person. At this point, the emergence of Don Quixote's richest insight, Cervantes leads the hero home. The narrative adventures in the first sally make up a self-contained story. It appears that Cervantes had in mind in this work another novella, working out in more detail some of the thematic philosophical material of the Glass Licentiate. But it is obvious that Don Quixote possesses much more in the way of literary potential, and the author, after completing one story, decided to send this knight out again in quest of further adventures. This time the knight is accompanied by a squire, and the author is ready to develop, for the first time in the history of literature, a fully formed prose novel.

Cervantes introduces in the interim between the first and second sallies another element which becomes a central feature of the novel in the second sally. In the first sally Don Quixote's vision controls his reactions to the world about him. It is really the appearance of the world of chivalry in a non-chivalrous world which constitutes the basic conflict in the first six chapters of the novel. After this first sally Cervantes introduces the possibility of other people in the knight's environment catching on to the madness and attempting to control the mad gentleman by means of deliberate deception. It is while Don Quixote is recuperating from the damages inflicted upon him during his first adventures that members of his own household attempt to deceive him. After his books have been destroyed it is decided that the whole library should be walled up and removed from Don Quixote's experience. When he is well enough to be up and around he looks for his library. When he asks about it, he is answered, "What room? Or rather what on earth is your worship looking for? There is no room and no books in this house now, for the Devil himself has carried everything off" (p. 64). For individuals interested in the cure of this man's madness, the people of his own household show strange ways of accomplishing it. They too see the value of the imagination; the difference is in the way they use it. Don Quixote deliberately deceives no one. That is not the purpose of the poetic imagination. The priest, the barber, the niece, and the housekeeper use imagination to deprive Don Quixote of his library. And it is

this qualitative difference between the illusions developed by the mad knight and the deceptions worked out by those about him that makes us sympathize with the hero of Cervantes' novel.

As Don Quixote and Sancho set out on the second sally, they encounter the beginning of a great number of adventures in which their different types of illusions are illustrated. The encounter with the windmills terrifies Sancho. His recognition that these are windmills and not giants reveals the solidity of character and judgment of the squire. After Sancho's warning about the windmills, Don Quixote replies, "It is quite clear . . . that you are not experienced in this matter of adventures. They are giants, and if you are afraid you may go away and say your prayers whilst I advance and engage them in fierce and unequal battle" (p. 60). Here Don Quixote refers to the obvious difference between the life views or visionary approaches to life between himself and Sancho. The novel is in effect an elaboration of that difference and an education for Sancho and for the reader on "this matter of adventures."

Shortly after this affair with the windmills, Don Quixote and Sancho become involved in an adventure which occurs as a result of Rocinante's desires. He leaves his master "to disport himself with the lady mares and, abandoning his natural pace and habits the moment he smelt them, asked no permission of his master, but set off at a brisk trot to acquaint them of his needs" (p. 112). The upshot of this

animal adventure was that the knight and his squire were severely beaten by the owners of the mares. Lying on the ground making an evaluation of the wounds he has sustained, Don Quixote says,

"If it were not that I imagine--why do I say imagine?--that I most certainly know what all these discomforts are inseparable from the profession of arms, I would be ready to die here of pure vexation." (p. 115)

The intrusion in the middle of the statement, "why do I say imagine?" reveals the recognition of Don Quixote, vague as it may be, of the role the imagination is playing in his reaction to the world. While Cervantes does not develop this recognition at this point, he includes it here to anticipate the further development of the theme as the novel moves on, especially in Part II. The major development in Don Quixote's character is just this fuller development of the consciousness of the function of the imagination.

Soon, the knight and the squire find themselves in an inn. At the beginning of this sequence of events Cervantes returns his knight to a state of complete or absolute obsession with his ideal, and returns at the end of it to another vague but more intense recognition of the relation between the world and the imagination. When the knight finally finds himself in bed alone he begins to conjure up the images of himself as a knight in the age of chivalry.

This phenomenal quiet and his habitual preoccupation with the adventures that are related on every page of those books that had been his undoing wrought one of the strangest possible fancies in our knight's imagination. He thought that he had arrived at a famous castle--for, as we have said, every inn where he stayed seemed to him a

castle--and that the innkeeper's daughter was really the daughter of the warden. Overwhelmed by his nobility, she had fallen in love with him, and, what is more, she had promised that very night, when her parents were asleep, to come and lie with him awhile. (pp. 121-122)

Shortly, Maritornes, daughter of the innkeeper, appears in the room on her way to a meeting with a carrier who is staying in the inn. When she mistakenly finds her way to Don Quixote's bed, she finds a man who accepts her as he wishes her, not as she is considered by others. He accepts and experiences her sackcloth as satin, her glass beads for pearls, her coarse hair as glistening gold of Arabia, her foul odor as a sweet aroma. Here we see the knight's senses completely controlled by his vision. The tumult that follows and the beatings which both Don Quixote and Sancho receive at the hands of the carrier, the innkeeper, Maritornes, and the local member of the Holy Brotherhood cause Don Quixote to think the castle is enchanted. Not only has the Don imagined the inn to be a castle, but he also transforms experiences within this imagined world into bewitchments which defy the ordinary. But in the midst of this madness, Cervantes shows us that Don Quixote still possesses some understanding of what experience is all about. When the innkeeper insists that the pair pay for their lodging, the knight replies questioningly, "Then this is an inn?" The violation of the rules the knight had imagined about chivalry--that is that knights were not somehow financially responsible like others--brings him to understand that he is in a place where his imagination does not have complete control. This is to say that not all people live by

the same structuring of reality. He says, "But, since it is no castle but an inn, there is nothing for it now but for you to excuse my paying, for I cannot contravene the knight errant's rule" (p. 130). The logic is consistent. Knights live in castles gratis; Don Quixote is a knight; this inn is not a castle but an inn; therefore the innkeeper must be gracious enough to excuse payment. This is the logic of chivalry as Don Quixote sees it. Experiences which seem to violate the knight's vision do not in fact have any effect upon that vision. There is no logic nor any experience which necessarily contradicts one's metaphysical construction of the real, for it is this construction which determines the nature of all experience. The piece of information which tells that the building is an inn does not destroy the vision; it merely places a new obligation upon the innkeeper.

The next four adventures of the sheep, the fulling hammers, Mambrino's helmet, and the galley slaves do not all substantiate Don Quixote's virtue. Even in the madness of the visionary, the slaying of the sheep, the acquisition of the barber's basin, and the release of the convicted criminals cannot be commended. But in these adventures Cervantes continues to play upon the function of the imagination in the construction of the real world.

The adventure of the sheep in chapter eighteen gives Don Quixote an opportunity to reveal his great knowledge of the medieval romances. His complete immersion into illusion at this point is not alleviated by any reference to his own

understanding of the function of the imagination.

The adventure of the fulling hammers is both the most comic and the most heroic in the novel. This adventure, in which Don Quixote is shown to be possessed of courage in the face of something to cause fear, might be compared to his adventure of the lions in Part II. The narrator describes the situation as follows:

What they heard was the sound of regular blows and a sort of clanking of iron and chains which, combined with the furious roaring of the water, would have struck terror into any other heart but Don Quixote's. (p. 149)

Don Quixote cries out to his squire,

"Sancho, my friend, you must know that, by the will of Heaven, I was born in this iron age of ours to revive the age of gold or, as it is generally called, the golden age." (p. 149)

This is a respectable kind of course, and at this point we see the knight acting in a brave and honorable way. The fact that the noise is made by fulling hammers is no reason to reject the heroic quality of the knight's response. Later Sancho finds it a reason for great merriment. Don Quixote recognizes the humor, but is more concerned for what has actually occurred during the night--the conquest of fear.

The adventure of Mambrino's helmet, like the adventure of the sheep, results in the transformation of one visual experience into another which fits into a previous construction of the real world. Don Quixote sees the barber, riding on his ass with his basin on his head, as a "knight coming . . . on a dapple-grey steed with a gold helmet on his head" (p. 161). Sancho's reaction is different: "What I

see and perceive . . . is nothing but a man on a grey ass like mine with something glittering on his head" (p. 161). Both men have seen the same thing; both sensory images have been the same. To the knight the shining headpiece is a helmet. He treats the experience as a means of drawing the new figure into his frame of reality. In a world where it is always essential to be prepared to fight against the forces of evil, the only reason for wearing a metallic hat is to protect oneself in such conflicts. On the contrary, Sancho's world, the world of the peasant, constituted of a constant struggle for survival, demands that new experiences be treated with suspicion. Sancho will remain conservative in his interpretations of data until he can see exactly how they will relate to him. Both men express concepts of reality. The two concepts merely have different limits, and consequently absorb new data differently.

The adventure of the galley slaves is built around the confusions and the illusions provided by the use and misuse of language. Here again Don Quixote's perceptions or understandings are shown to be weak in that he gives literal interpretations to everything mentioned by the galley slaves. The incident as a whole speaks to the problem of the relation between linguistic utterance and matters of fact. Harry Levin has pointed to the emergence of this problem as characteristic of the Renaissance.

The barrier that always separates words from deeds, expression from experience, was never more keenly

apprehended than in the Renaissance.⁴

One of the criminals, in response to Don Quixote's request for information regarding the cause of his captivity, replies that he is captive because he had fallen in love. Don Quixote accepts this statement of cause at its most elementary level of significance, even after it is explained that the love was directed toward a basket full of white linen. He does not go beyond that first interpretation.

Another criminal claims to be in chains because he is a musician or a singer. Don Quixote is surprised at this, and does not give up his surprise when he finds that the man has made a confession after torture on the rack. Don Quixote does not see behind the language; he learns only after being injured by the criminals that they are deceivers and that there is no simple and direct relation between what they say about themselves and what they really are. Don Quixote, on the other hand, lives a life in which there is a simple and integrated relation between utterance and action. He assumes that what these men say of themselves is what they are. He absorbs the data of their speeches into a concept of reality in which there is a consistency between words and deeds. Early in the novel he had said, ". . . every man is the child of his own works" (p. 48). This is the Don's view during the first sally. Toward the end of Part I, we see that Sancho has learned this as well as other lessons from the knight,

⁴Harry Levin, The Gates of Horn (New York, 1963), p. 43.

when he says,

"If I'm set on isles other people are set on worse. Every man is the son of his own deeds. And since I am a man, I can become Pope let alone governor of an island, especially since my master's capable of winning so many that he may have no one to give them to." (p. 423)

The test of a man's worth is not his words but his deeds. In the adventure of the galley slaves, Cervantes plays on this difficulty. Don Quixote is weakened by words and his vision of the real is controlled by deceptive language. He is deceived about the galley slaves in a way that he is not deceived about himself, for what he says and what he does are the same.

After this series of adventures, Don Quixote retreats into the Sierra Morena, there to perform acts of penance. At this point he encounters Cardenio, who is called the "Ragged Knight of the Sorry," and the reader is given the opportunity to compare a madman who pretends to be sane and a sane man who loses control of himself in fits of madness. This juxtaposition of characters emphasizes the control Don Quixote has over his own thinking. In one manner of speaking, the experience in the Sierra Morena is an example of madness which grows out of reason. This is not the dream of reason which produces monsters that we saw in "The Tale of the Foolish Curiosity." It is a madness according to the dictates of reason, which is shown to us as we witness Don Quixote's madness beside the fits of madness of Cardenio.

Sancho does not understand Don Quixote's motives or the significance of what he is doing. Don Quixote attempts to

explain:

And get it into your five senses that all my actions, past, present, and future, are very well based in reason and conform in every way to the rules of chivalry. For I know these rules better than any knights who have ever professed them in the world. (p. 201)

Don Quixote's actions here are not whimsical, are not anarchic, but are well thought out and are based on his understanding of the world. The experiences of the Don at this point are crucial for the understanding of the philosophical statement made by the novel. There is a kind of madness which is not rational according to the ways of the world but has a reason of its own, and that is the madness which grows out of the poetic imaginative response to the world. Don Quixote's experience here is of that nature.

Cervantes is careful to point out the difference between reason in madness and reasons for madness. He understands that there are never clear-cut reasons for our metaphysical commitments, but that there may be within those commitments a certain kind of inherent logical order. Sancho asks Don Quixote, "But what reason has your worship for going mad" (p. 203)? Sancho asks for the logical reasons for Don Quixote's activities. The knight responds:

"That is the point . . . and in that lies the beauty of my plan. A knight errant who turns mad for a reason deserves neither merit nor thanks. The thing is to do it without cause; and then my lady can guess what I would do in the wet if I do all this in the dry." (p. 203)

One is reminded here of some of the passages in the New Testament dealing with the notion of faith. In the Gospels, Thomas demands empirical evidence for the risen Christ; he

insists on seeing and touching the wounds of his master. In the epistles of Paul, faith is described as the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. On the one hand, Thomas is asked to believe without having seen. On the other hand, Paul speaks of faith as a visionary or metaphysical commitment to a set of values not necessarily validated by a particular experience. In fact, the faith itself is the evidence. The observer discovers that faith is real just as he becomes convinced that Dulcinea is real - because of the evidence for him in the life of Don Quixote. At this crucial point in the novel, Don Quixote makes his most elaborate statement as a man of faith and as a man committed to a special concept of reality which has an intense religious flavor. Don Quixote seeks renown from his activities in these mountains, and fails. But he is successful in his own way, and he is described by the narrator as he is compared to Amadis of Gaul in the following language:

All honour then to the memory of Amadis, and let him be the model, so far as possible, for Don Quixote de la Mancha, of whom it shall be said, as it was said of that other, that if he did not achieve great things he died attempting them. (p. 215)

The knight does not achieve great fame in the usual sense of that term, but his endurance, his integrity, and his courage are unsurpassed.

All of this activity by the mad knight and the intense treatment of reason and madness occur within a narrative context which is primarily concerned with the predicaments in which a group of lovers find themselves. The complexities of

the relationships between Cardenio, Lucinda, Dorothea, Ferdinand, all of whom are represented in one way or another in the Sierra Morena, and the Captive, Zoraida, Louis, and Clara, who are soon to come onto the scene, are all intended to support and illustrate the philosophical notions expressed in the words and actions of Don Quixote. Those forces which move the lovers to act as they do, including violence, tenderness, madness, etc., are the forces which are dramatized in the mad knight pretending to be mad. As we see the apparently sane or normal lovers work out their problems we think always of the ultimate statement regarding love made by Don Quixote, and we see that Cervantes is concerned with the philosophical structure of this basic human relationship. In the middle of this narrated experience, Cervantes, in order to keep us from over-enthusiastic responses to the knight's madness, reminds us that the ideal as it comes into confrontation with everyday experience may lead to practical consequences which no one can approve. Someone reminds the group in the Sierra Morena that Don Quixote had released the galley slaves. Don Quixote makes an emphatic defense of his actions.

"It is no concern or duty of knights errant to investigate whether the distressed, chained, and oppressed persons they meet on the roads are brought to that pass, or suffer that anguish, for their crimes or for their whims. Their only task is to succor them because they are in distress, taking account of their sufferings and not of their villainies. (p. 259)

It is too easy to be critical of Don Quixote's position here. How can we justify the release of criminals into society? Is

the knight not seriously misguided? It is necessary to keep in mind that what the Don is defending is an ideal, an ideal similar in its formulation to the one contained in the Sermon on the Mount. It is easy to charge the ideals of that statement with impracticality. Don Quixote makes his defense after he has suffered at the hands of the released prisoners, and is aware of the consequences of his action. The philosophical assertion implied and embodied in the fictional statement is about the complicated relationship between one's ideals and the experiences he has of others.

The ideal here is not to avoid ambiguous language, but to recognize the difficulty involved in oversimplifying the relation between what is held to be of value and what is a matter of fact. Don Quixote's values are important; the results of his activity promoted by these values lead from time to time to unfortunate consequences. The freeing of men may be beneficial, harmful, or both at the same time. The experience at Sierra Moreno points out the multiplicity of values attributable to any given idea or activity.

After the departure from the mountains, Don Quixote and Sancho and the traveling lovers find themselves in an inn once again. Here the resolution of the lovers' complexities occurs, and everyone lives happily ever after. It is during this resolution that Cervantes presents the tale of the man who was too curious for his own good. The structure of the narrative development here is typical. Never are we permitted to see a course of action or the development of a value

continue in a straight line. The Don's adventures never continue without interruption. We never see him in completed states of madness or sanity. Likewise we are not permitted to see love continue from complexity to happy resolution without being reminded that love may also lead to tragedy. In this section which deals with resolution, Cervantes leads his protagonist to a state of complete unconsciousness. The adventure of the wineskins which occurs during the reading of "The Tale of the Foolish Curiosity" takes place while the Don is asleep. He dreams this adventure. And as he slashes out at the giant, destroying the wineskins of the innkeeper, his eyes are closed, and he has no control at all of his actions. While the characters with whom he is associated are experiencing a literary tragedy, Don Quixote is experiencing a dream-world victory over a giant. This adventure which comes during a period of deception of the Don is considered by him to be the culmination of the relationships developed with the group of lovers.

"From today, I also am released from the pledge which I gave you. For, by the help of God on high and through the favour of her for whom I live and breathe, I have perfectly fulfilled it." (p. 318)

Three elements of the plot find culminative statements at this point in the novel. The theme of love is given a positive and romantic statement in the resolutions of the

conflicts of the characters of the novel.⁵ They all go off to live happily ever after. A tragic resolution of the problem is provided in "The Tale of the Foolish Curiosity," and Don Quixote's madness is driven to its ultimate form in the dream of the giants. From this point Part I of the novel proceeds to remove the characters from the action, to return the mad knight to his home, and to refine the statement regarding the nature of the Don's madness.

This refinement begins with the continuation of the adventure of Mambrino's helmet. The barber from whom the basin was originally stolen arrives at the inn and claims the basin for his own. During the conflict that ensues, all the attendants at the inn take sides with Don Quixote to prove that the basin really is a helmet. The barber of La Mancha, one of those attempting to return the knight to his home, speaks to the barber of the basin in an effort to deceive him:

"And I say, under correction, always submitting myself to better judgment, that this piece before us, which the good gentleman is holding, not only is not a barber's basin, but is as far from being one as black is from white, or the truth from a lie. But I do say that, though this is a helmet, it is not a complete helmet." (p. 404)

At the time Don Quixote had taken the basin from the barber, Sancho had also taken the man's pack saddle to use for his

⁵An illuminating analysis of the various structural and thematic tasks which Cervantes presented to himself in the writing of the episodes of the novel is provided by Raymond Immerwahr, "Structural Symmetry in the Episodic Narratives of Don Quixote, Part One," Comparative Literature X (Spring, 1958), pp. 121-135.

own. As the victimized barber attempts to repossess his goods he says, "Well, if this basin is a helmet, then, this pack-saddle must be a horse's harness as well, as this gentleman said" (p. 404). Don Quixote here shows that he is concerned only for those matters which touch him in the area of his knighthood. He responds, "It looks like a pack-saddle to me, . . . but, as I have already said, I am not interfering in that." (p. 404). The knight continues his statement:

"Concerning their statement that this is a basin and not a helmet, I have already answered; but as to declaring whether that is a pack-saddle or a harness, I am not so bold as to give a definitive decision, but leave the matter to your worship's better judgment. Perhaps, since none of you are knights, as I am, the spells in this place will have no effect on you, your understanding will be free, and you will be able to judge of the affairs of this castle as they really and truly are, and not as they appear to me." (p. 405)

This appears to be quite a large concession on the part of Don Quixote. He suggests that things really may be different from the way he sees them and that what he experiences is his own private and incommunicable experience. The philosophical assertion lurking behind or beneath the fictional statement seems to be that reality is a private conception. Don Quixote has used the basin for a helmet, and he knows it is a helmet. He is not concerned for the pack-saddle, for that has had nothing to do with him. He realizes that he has committed himself to a vision that others may not recognize. He can only make judgments according to his own values, not according to those of someone else. He can only live according to his reality and not the reality belonging to another person.

Part I of Don Quixote ends with the final enchantment of the knight, and his shameful return to La Mancha in an ox-drawn cart. The priest, the barber, the lovers in disguise approach him in his sleep, tie him, and take him to the cart. The experience is a confusing one for Don Quixote, because he has never read of such an occurrence related to the knights of chivalry. In this confusion Cervantes points out again that Don Quixote is a man attempting to incorporate ancient values in a modern setting.

"But to be carried as I now am on an ox-cart, God help me, it puts me to confusion. But perhaps chivalry and magic in our day must follow a different course from that pursued by the men of old; and it may be, too, that as I am a new knight in the world, and the first to resuscitate the long-forgotten profession of knight errantry, they have invented fresh kinds of enchantment and other methods of carrying the enchanted as well." (p. 418)

Cervantes' repetition of the notion that Don Quixote represents an intrusion of an ideal system of values into a less than ideal world is paralleled by Cervantes' own juxtaposition of historical narrative and literary intrusion. He makes his final statement as he pairs these two themes off in the closing sections of the book, in a conversation between Don Quixote and the Canon of Toledo. Don Quixote discusses the activities of the knights errant, and proceeds to make allusions to a great number of literary heroes of the past, gradually turning his attention to historical figures who actively pursued a life of arms. This mixture of literary and historical heroes is suggestive of the mixture of metaphysical, moral, and religious values throughout the book.

The Canon expresses surprise at this confusion.

The Canon was amazed to hear Don Quixote so mingling truth and fiction, and at the knowledge he displayed of everything in any way concerning the exploits of knight errantry. (p. 439)

The Canon points out that there is no doubt about the historical figures but that the activities of the literary figures are very doubtful matters. He recommends to Don Quixote that it is not reasonable to suppose that the statements in the literary works are really true. But Don Quixote treats the Canon's arguments lightly.

"Books which are printed by royal licence and with the approval of those to whom they are submitted, and which are read with universal delight and applause by great and small, poor and rich, learned and ignorant, plebeians and gentlefolk--in short, by all kinds of persons of every quality and condition--could they be lies and at the same time appear so much like the truth?" (p. 440)

What is it that constitutes literary truth? What is it that constitutes metaphysical truth? In an analysis of the character of Don Quixote we see that truth is worked out in action and that values are only as good as the deeds resulting from them. Related to this is the idea that reality is that structured approach to the objects or persons in one's environment created out of the imagination, which gives value and merit or demerit to all things. It is mysterious; it is inexplicable; it is metaphysical. In pointing out these features in experience Cervantes makes what I would consider a careful philosophical analysis. The shades and multiplicity of this analysis can be seen as we discuss and evaluate the development of character in the squire, Sancho.

Sancho: Another Way of Knowing

Many readers of Cervantes' novel have yielded to the temptation to oversimplify the relation between Don Quixote and Sancho. Harry Levin, for example, has created the following neat duality for the novel.

If Don Quixote's head was in the clouds, Sancho Panza's feet were on the ground. If the master was a feeble champion of the decaying nobility, the servant was a pushing advocate of the lower classes.⁶

It seems obvious that the knight is a representative of the ideal, or of one who lives according to some set of ideals, and that Sancho is the realist, the man with his feet on the ground. The preceding discussion of the adventures of Don Quixote suggests that his vision is not without some connection to the real world. In the following discussion of Sancho, I would like to show that, while remaining with his fellows as men of the earth, he is at the same time given to ideals as "other-worldly" or intangible as his master's. If we are able to see Don Quixote as a man of faith, we have as much evidence for looking at Sancho as a believer as well. His concept of reality is certainly different from that of his master, but it has some of the same characteristics which separate him from those individuals with whom he comes in contact as it does his master.

The picture I would like to draw of Sancho is one revealing the epistemological difficulties of every man. Unlike his master who is obsessed with a system of values

⁶Harry Levin, The Gates of Horn, p. 41.

which governs every move he makes, Sancho is metaphysically ambivalent. He possesses no thoroughly convincing orientation toward his experience. This accounts for his gullibility in a way far different from the gullibility of his master. Another way of describing the squire is to suggest that he possesses a multiple vision of the world. He is capable of shifting visionary ground from time to time for his own advantage. To be sure, this advantage is usually taken by him to be of a material nature, but this is not true all the time. The advantage which he gropes for is frequently as spiritual in nature as the goals of his master. The traditional dualism--idealism versus realism--is not presented in the contrasting characters of Don Quixote and Sancho. I would like to show more clearly how Sancho is very much like and very much unlike Don Quixote.

The ideal established by Cervantes for Sancho in Part I of the novel is related to the tangible. Just as Don Quixote's Dulcinea, the symbol for all that is good and pure for him, is taken from the real world in the person of Aldonza Lorenzo, Sancho's ideal, the governorship of an isle, is related to something tangible, something to be enjoyed in the flesh. It is no less "impossible" for Sancho to become the master of a society than it is for Don Quixote to really find his lovely lady Dulcinea. And the nature of the belief in their respective values--Don Quixote in his lady and Sancho in his governorship--is religious in that they control other features of their experience.

Sancho's belief in his ideal or the promise given him by his master is validated in the same way Don Quixote's belief in his lady is validated--in his actions. Sancho believes in spite of what he knows. Cervantes makes a distinction between the matter of knowing and the matter of believing. One's orientation to life or concept of reality is a matter of belief or of faith which is not validated or invalidated by what one knows.

Only Sancho Panza took all that his master said for truth, knowing who he was and having known him from his birth. (p. 101)

The peasant Sancho who, according to the description of poverty in sixteenth-century Spain given in the novel, would never be more than a peasant is ennobled because of his ideal.

Sancho Panza rode on his ass like a patriarch, with his saddlebags and his leather bottle, and a great desire to see himself governor of the isle his master had promised him. (p. 66)

Just as the belief in Dulcinea gives Don Quixote the kind of moral base needed by the knight errant, the master's promise of an island provide the squire with the same kind of spiritual motivation. The ideals are not categorically different.

Sancho enters adventure after adventure with his thoughts on his promised isle. Even after rough handling at the hands of those involved in the encounters, Sancho still hopes on. Sancho picks himself up from the ground watching his master in battle:

praying to god in his heart to be pleased to grant his master the victory, and that out of it he might gain an isle of which he could be governor, as he had been promised. (p. 79)

Sancho never gives up hope or faith in his master and friend. Even when he is in the midst of deception, when he is planning on returning an account of his meeting with Dulcinea, whom he has never in fact seen, he is capable of thinking ideally about the nature of his master's promise. The priest and the barber, who are planning to lure Don Quixote out of the Sierra Morena, suggest that they will talk him into becoming an archbishop instead of an emperor. Sancho is convinced that his master could become archbishop, but he is concerned about the kinds of rewards given by such churchmen to their squires. He knows that the knight errant turned emperor is capable of rewarding squires with governorships. Sancho has no doubts about his capacity to rule an island. He is not so sure that he is qualified to handle the duties which might be given him by an archbishop. His faith in his master's ability is unshaken, for he is also taken with an ideal.

Again when Don Quixote experiences his dreamed adventure of the wineskins, an adventure which takes place almost entirely in an unconscious state, Sancho holds on to his ideal. Indeed as the narrative of Part I develops, it becomes easier for Sancho to yield himself to the idea of enchantment, which is the explanation used by his master of this adventure. In the midst of all the spilled wine and the

torn wineskins we see the faithful squire looking for the head of the slain giant.

"All I know . . . is that I'm going to be very unlucky. If I don't find that head, my countship will melt away like salt in water." (p. 318)

Sancho suffers the discomforts of the squire's life to attain the glory of political power. His master suffers the same way to obtain the glory of the knight errant. Each is obsessed with an ideal; each determines to find some kind of fulfillment through faithfulness. Sancho's ideal is built on his longing for specific material conditions. While Don Quixote's ideal has a more spiritual base, it is no less unattainable in the social context provided by Cervantes. Seventeenth-century Spain could not countenance the peculiar ideals of the knight errant, nor could it permit peasants to rule kingdoms. Both men reach outside themselves for their goals. Both men invent for themselves a structure of reality which guides them in their actions, and their thinking. Cervantes does not judge either one, and the moral interpretations of the two characters are left in ambiguity. The philosophical statement of the novel regarding the nature of reality is clear. Concepts of the real are the products of the creative imagination.

I have emphasized Sancho's belief, and this emphasis provides something of a distortion. Sancho is in fact a great doubter, and it is this doubt which makes us love the man. It is his unbelief which makes him appear to us as Everyman. If we see Sancho as a man of belief, with the capacity to give

himself to a given set of values in his life activity, we also see him express the doubt that these things can be true.

Cervantes has shown us in the first part of the novel that Sancho believes in his master in spite of knowing Don Quixote from his birth. As they begin the second sally, and live through the adventure of the windmills, Sancho reveals his ability to believe in an ideal and accept his sensory experiences at face value at the same time. Don Quixote explains the wonders of enchantment and promises many adventures to come. Sancho replies, "I believe it all as your worship says. But sit a bit more upright, sir, for you seem to be riding lop-sided. It must be from the bruises you got when you fell" (p. 69). Only a man enchanted with an ideal of the highest kind could behold such things and not fly.

Sancho reveals his practicality in a response to Don Quixote's statement regarding the nature of service to one's ideal. The reward for a knight errant is the glory of being accepted as knight by the lady of his choice. Sancho sees the pragmatism behind this, and makes a pragmatic description of the same situation.

That's the kind of love . . . I've heard them preach about. They say we ought to love our Lord for Himself alone, without being moved to it by hope of glory or fear of punishment. Though as for me, I'm inclined to love and serve Him for what He can do for me. (p. 273)

It is this kind of statement which has inclined the interpreters to find Sancho the absolute realist which I have denied him to be. His insight here is important. It is that self-interest is always included in one's choice of ideals.

It is certainly a realistic analysis, and if Don Quixote would rise in indignation to it, and if Cervantes would play on it at length we could rightly make the dualistic interpretation frequently presented. But the master replies almost appreciatively, "The devil take you!" said Don Quixote. "What a peasant you are, and yet what apt things you say at times" (p. 273). Cervantes leaves the conversation at this point to develop another line of the narrative. Sancho must always eat a little of the finite bread along with the wine of eternity.

Don Quixote, in his conversation with the Canon of Toledo, toward the end of Part I, reveals his incapacity of making a clear line of demarcation between the historical and the poetic. Sancho also ends Part I in this way. He views the final enchantment of his master with some ambivalence, and he looks back upon the many adventures and enchantments with a dual perspective. When Don Quixote reminds him that everything that has happened to them in the inn has smacked of enchantment, Sancho replies, "Indeed, I believe it . . . except for the matter of that blanket-tossing. That really happened in the ordinary way" (p. 415). And he, too, in conversation with the Canon reveals a strange combination of understanding. The following passage reveals the way one vision of the world merges with another.

Now, gentlemen, whether you like it or not, the fact of the matter is that Don Quixote is no more enchanted than my mother. He is in possession of all his faculties; he eats and drinks and does his business like other men, and just as he did yesterday before they put him in the cage. As that's the case, how can they expect me to believe that he's under a spell? For I've often heard it

said that people who've been bewitched don't eat, or sleep, or speak while my master will out-talk thirty lawyers, if they'll only let him alone Oh Master Priest, Master Priest! Do you think I don't recognize you? Do you imagine I don't see through these new enchantments? Of course I know you, even though you've a mask on your face, and understand you, however much you disguise your tricks. In fact, where envy reigns virtue can't exist, and generosity doesn't go with meanness. Damn it all! If it wasn't for your reverence my master would be married to the Princess Micomicona at this very moment, and I should be a count at least, for I could have expected no less, considering the generosity of my master, the Knight of the Sad Countenance, and the greatness of my services. But I see now that it's true, as they say in these parts, that Fortune's wheel goes swifter than a mill wheel, and the man who was at the very top yesterday is on the ground today. (pp. 422-423)

This passage reveals the dual perspective by which Sancho sees the world. He is able to see through the deceptions of the priest and the barber. These are matters of experience and knowledge. But he immediately interprets all that has happened in the light of what his master has promised him. He immediately reverts to the values of the world of chivalry if you will. At the end of Part I of Don Quixote, we see that both knight and squire have been deeply moved by the values of the chivalric world. Sancho is not opposed to Don Quixote in philosophic position. They really live by the same set of values. Cervantes merely focuses on differences in character as he describes the differences in reactions to the same things. There is really not much ground for the reader's reaction to Sancho to be different from his master's reaction to him: "Really, Sancho . . . , as far as I can see, you are no saner than I am." (p. 213).

If there are dualities in Don Quixote they do not find

their polar expression divided between the master and his squire. They are discovered within each of the two characters. Cervantes does not present us with simple characters about whom simple judgments can be made. Both Don Quixote and Sancho retain their thoroughly paradoxical characters to the end.

Dulcinea: The Metaphysical Matrix

Dulcinea has the kind of philosophical position in Don Quixote that Beatrice has in The Divine Comedy. Like her medieval counterpart, Dulcinea is created out of the material of earth, and she is transformed by the protagonists of the work into something which goes far beyond the material out of which she is created. The differences between the characters is the difference between the medieval world and the modern world: Dante the pilgrim is more obviously convinced of the objective nature of the lady who is to lead him to Paradise, while Don Quixote is conscious of his function as creator in the development of Dulcinea.

Don Quixote decides on the creation of a lady love because it is necessary, according to the rules of knight errantry, to have such a lady. "For a knight errant without a lady is like a tree without leaves or fruit and a body without a soul" (p. 34). This initial statement about Dulcinea suggests the necessity of her place in the novel, and also introduces the ambiguity in Don Quixote's mind about her character. There is in his creation of his lady a conditional character from the

beginning.

"If I for my sins or by good luck were to meet with some giant hereabouts, as generally happens to knights errant, and if I were to overthrow him in the encounter, or cut him down the middle or, in short, conquer him and make him surrender, would it not be well to have someone to whom I could send him as a present, so that he could enter and kneel down before my sweet lady . . . ?" (pp. 34-35)

After he decides about the necessity of possessing a lady as part of his knighthood, and determines the nature of this lady he chances upon the memory of Aldonza Lorenzo, a country wench from a neighboring community. We learn later that Don Quixote has seen this young woman only four times. During the early adventures of the novel, Don Quixote insists on the physical nature of the ideal. He cannot think of Dulcinea without the experiential referent. There is no Dulcinea without Aldonza Lorenzo in El Toboso. The knight's ideal is firmly established in the physical world.

As he sets out on his adventures, the ideal Dulcinea with him in his heart and imagination, Don Quixote begins his insistence that all men bow down before his ideal. In his encounter with the merchants he reveals the demands made upon himself and upon all others by his Dulcinea. He cries out to the merchants on the road,

"Let the whole world stand, if the whole world does not confess that there is not in the whole world a more beauteous maiden than the Empress of la Mancha the peerless Dulcinea del Toboso." (pp. 50-51)

But the merchants are not impressed with this madman, and ask, as merchants will, to see the merchandise before agreeing to pay the price. Don Quixote's response to the merchants'

demand reveals some of the metaphysical significance of the mad knight's creation.

If I were to show her to you . . . what merit would there be in your confessing so obvious a truth? The essence of the matter is that you must believe, confess, affirm, swear and maintain it without seeing her. (p. 51)

The madness and the soundness of the philosophical statement made by Don Quixote is suggested by the allusion to the Biblical language in this speech. Don Quixote has raised his ideal as high as it can possibly be raised in the spiritual experience of an individual. It has taken on the qualities of a religious symbol. What is ultimate for the mad knight is invisible for other men. It is not to be seen to be believed. The fact of faith is its justification. No other experience is needed or is capable of validating it. It is the quality of ultimacy which creates the folly inherent in Don Quixote's commitment.

This folly is given more detail just before the Don hears Marcela, the shepherdess, justify herself and her activities. In the light of this cold and unreal woman, Don Quixote sees his Dulcinea. When he is questioned about the necessity of knights errant being in love and the possibility of a knight who was not in love, Don Quixote replies,

"That is impossible I say that it is impossible that there could be any knight errant without a lady. For it is as right and proper for them to be in love as for the sky to have stars; and I can vouch for it that there has never been a knight errant without a lady in any history whatever. For the very fact of his having no lady would show him to be no legitimate knight, but a bastard who has entered the fortress of chivalry not through the gate but over the fence, like a thief and a robber." (pp. 99-100)

Dulcinea is Don Quixote's folly, his necessary folly.

Cervantes makes the distinction between Dante's medieval ideal and Don Quixote's modern ideal by speaking of Dulcinea's lineage. Don Quixote's created vision cannot be like Beatrice with her theological features. She cannot possess the same kind of certainty as her predecessor. But she must be as effective spiritually. Don Quixote is aware of the difference between Dulcinea and the ladies of the past. She is not, the knight says, part of a great line of families, but

" . . . of El Toboso of La Mancha, a lineage which, though modern, may yet give birth to the most illustrious families of future ages." (p. 101)

The Dulcinea of Don Quixote is not just a parody of the ladies of the medieval romances, she is something new under the sun. She is expressive of the basic concept of reality of the novel. Cervantes is commenting upon the nature of reality, and his major female figure focuses on the creative function of the imagination as the essential ingredient in the understanding of that concept.

Don Quixote is conscious of this creative capacity of his philosophical thinking. When Sancho learns that the lady Dulcinea is really Aldonza Lorenzo he is surprised because he knows about the girl from Toboso. He wonders why Don Quixote has chosen such a homely female for his love. The knight reveals the ontological status of Dulcinea.

"So Sancho, for what I want of Dulcinea del Toboso she is as good as the greatest princess in the land. For not all those poets who praise ladies under names which they

choose so freely, really have such mistresses. Do you think that the Amaryllises, The Phyllises, Sylvias, Dianas, Galateas, Phyllidas, and all the rest that books and ballads and barbers' shops and theatres are so full of, were really flesh-and-blood ladies, and the mistresses of the writers who wrote about them? Not a bit of it. Most of them were invented to serve as subjects for verses, and so that the poets might be taken for lovers, or men capable of being so. I am quite satisfied, therefore, to imagine and believe that the good Aldonza Lorenzo is lovely and virtuous; her family does not matter a bit, for no one will inquire into that for the purpose of investing her with any order and, for my part, I think of her as the greatest princess in the world." (p. 201)

The material features of Aldonza Lorenzo are irrelevant. What matters is what Don Quixote makes of her and what his creation makes of him. The novel is in fact about just that: the spiritual function of Dulcinea in the life of the mad knight.

Don Quixote has seen Aldonza Lorenzo, but he has imagined her as Dulcinea, and while the distinction between the two is not always made explicit in Don Quixote's language, we may assume that at any moment, if questioned, he would be able to make it. Following his statement about Aldonza Lorenzo, he points out to Sancho that his imagination is crucial in the understanding of Dulcinea.

"To make an end of the matter, I imagine all I say to be true, neither more nor less, and in my imagination I draw her as I would have her be, both as to her beauty and her rank; unequalled by Helen, unrivalled by Lucretia, or any other famous woman of antiquity, Greek, Barbarian, or Roman. Let anyone say what he likes, for though the ignorant may reproach me for it, men of judgment will not condemn me." (pp. 211-212)

Few statements about the imaginary quality of Dulcinea in Part I of the novel are as explicit as this one.

Dulcinea is an expression of structured reality. Her name becomes a word like "God" which is used to refer to those

frames of reference through which we look out at our experiences. When we attempt to discuss those forces in our experience which motivate us and seem to influence our actions we frequently invent poetic language to express ourselves. "Dulcinea" is such an invention. Don Quixote is not clearly aware of the linguistic function of the name, but he does make the connection between the poetic character he has created and the conception of God. The similarity to the Pauline statement is obvious. "She fights and conquers through me, and I live and breathe and have my life and being in her" (p. 264). If Cervantes were not careful to present the configurations of reality which are prominent and functional in other characters in the novel, one would be tempted to parallel Don Quixote's creation with Tillich's "ground of being." Cervantes does not pretend to be able to identify the "ultimate" ground, beside which other creations are inadequate, but shows us through the philosophical perspective of the novel just how these structures work in the lives of his characters.

There is no simple, clear-cut statement regarding Dulcinea's ontological status. She is presented in the early pages of the novel as a delusion, a silly figment of Don Quixote's imagination. She is presented as being as obviously illusory as Dante's Beatrice is an obviously objective force operating in the world for the redemption of men. As Don Quixote progresses, the delineation of Dulcinea becomes more and more ambiguous until it comes to share some of the

objective features of Dante's Beatrice. Dulcinea, however, never becomes simply one thing or another.

Cervantes' commitment to the traditional dualistic view of the world forced him to consider reality from only two perspectives. What is called real is either some objective state of things, beyond the touch of the individual's manipulation, or an illusion which is spun of the fibers of the imagination. As he plays these two notions off against one another in the novel, they both lose their rigid categorical qualities and produce a serious sense of ambiguity about the nature of the real.

I infer from this ambiguity that Cervantes was deeply troubled by simple dichotomous thinking about the nature of reality. He senses the difficulties in dualistic thinking and presents a novel based philosophically on that difficulty. Every concept of reality, Cervantes implies, has its illusory quality about it, and is, in fact, the product of the imagination which is frequently associated with delusion and madness.

CHAPTER II

MADAME BOVARY

1. The World of Things

The one characteristic that dominates Flaubert's concept of reality in Madame Bovary is his concern for objects. This itemization of the objects in the environment within which his characters operate is overwhelmingly complete. The rich and profuse use of detail presents the fabric of the world of things. It is within the limits established by objects and events rather than an explicitly stated vision of the world that Emma works out her destiny. The use of the word "destiny" here may be misleading in that it may suggest some strong force, either psychological or sociological, which might seem to demand certain kinds of behavior of the characters. There is no such determining force expressed in the novel. The emphasis upon detailed description of discrete units of the physical world or of human behavior weakens the notion of causality in the affairs of the characters. There is an absurd quality about the novel which anticipates the unmotivated and uncaused events in contemporary literature of the absurd.

The richness of detail expresses Flaubert's radical empiricism, the treatment of the world as reducible to the experiences of the senses. There are no eternal or temporal

patterns which give ultimate meaning to man's collection of experiences. Madame Bovary is a novel which incorporates this empirical interpretation of "reality," and dramatizes the futile attempts to make order out of chaos.

Early in the novel, when Charles Bovary makes a medical call at the home of Monsieur Rouault, Emma's father, we are given a sequence of descriptive passages which reveal Flaubert's use of sensory detail. Charles has been awakened in the middle of the night, and has made a sleepy journey to the Rouault home, arriving at last at his destination.

The ruts were becoming deeper; they were approaching the Bertaux. The little farmboy, slipping through a hole in the hedge, disappeared; then he came back to the end of a courtyard to open the gate. The horse slipped on the wet grass; Charles had to stoop to pass under the branches. The watchdogs in their kennels barked, dragging at their chains. As he entered the Bertaux the horse took fright and stumbled.¹

The reader is deluged with detail about a given moment. There is nothing to indicate Charles' state of mind (he has, in fact, been dreaming of his student years), nothing to set a mood for the encounters to come. The boy, who appears furtively to open the gate, has no dramatic relevance. The barking dogs and the stumbling horse have nothing to do with either the character of Charles or the mood of the moment. The details of this and the following paragraph in the novel are perfectly

¹Gustave Flaubert, Madame Bovary, translated from the French by Paul DeMan (New York, 1965), p. 114. All subsequent references to this novel will be from this edition, and will be noted in the text with page numbers in parentheses.

neutral.

After a descriptive passage on the general features of the Rouault home, Flaubert leads his character into the house.

A young woman in a blue merino dress with three flounces came to the threshold of the door to receive Monsieur Bovary; she led him to the kitchen, where a large fire was blazing. The servants' breakfast was boiling beside it in small pots of all sizes. Some damp clothes were drying inside the chimneycorner. The shovel, tongs, and the nozzle of the bellows, all of colossal size, shone like polished steel, while along the walls hung many pots and pans in which the clear flame of the hearth, mingling with the first rays of the sun coming in through the window, was mirrored fitfully. (p. 10)

The detail of the interior, while it gives us some ideas of Rouault's class status, is not primarily sociological. The description of the servants' meal in preparation does suggest the relative wealth of the Rouault household, but it is followed characteristically by a detail about the drying clothes which might be found in a passage about a hovel. The shining objects hanging on the wall provide distinctly visual experiences for the reader. The appeal of the whole paragraph is to the eye. The experience of the reader is highly visual, but there is no suggestion of a larger philosophical context within which these details take on special meaning. The eye wanders randomly. It is this apparent randomness, characteristic of much of the description, which reveals the radically empirical concept of reality which pervades the novel. There is no psychological or sociological principle revealed in the novel determining the choice of objects to be described..

As Charles begins to treat the fracture of Monsieur Rouault, he meets Emma for the first time. In the initial

description of the young woman she is presented in the same neutral colors as the estate.

Charles was surprised at the whiteness of her nails. They were shiny, delicate at the tips, more polished than the ivory of Dieppe, and almond-shaped. Yet her hand was not beautiful, perhaps not white enough, and a little hard at the knuckles; besides, it was too long, with no soft inflections in the outlines. Her real beauty was in her eyes. Although brown, they seemed black because of the lashes, and her look came at you frankly, with a candid boldness. (p. 11)

The interesting feature of this description is the subtle juxtaposition of images to create a somewhat ambiguous visual realization of Emma. Her nails are delicate and ivory-like, while her knuckles are hard. Her eyes are brown but they seem black. Each particular feature stands out clearly, but the overall effect is ambiguous. Pots and pans will stand still while we examine them, but persons are always on the move and provide a difficult target for the eye. The major philosophical problem of the novel, hinted at vaguely in this passage, is the nature of the self in a world where reality is made up of things. Even when the description becomes "personal" it maintains its objective neutrality. Emma is said to have a look which is frank and bold. But the look comes at you much like the light rays off her fingernails. The idea of a person with a past and with anticipations for the future is avoided in this initial description of Emma. She is presented as an event, a look, experienced like other events and other objects. Emma is an empirical fact.

As Flaubert continues to provide a picture of his main character, he reverts to the clear and unambiguous

descriptions he had used when describing the objects in the kitchen.

Her neck stood out from a white turned-down collar. Her hair, whose two black folds seemed each of a single piece, so smooth were they, was parted in the middle by a delicate line that curved slightly with the curve of the head; and, just showing the tip of the ear, it was joined behind in a thick chignon, with a wavy movement at the temples that the country doctor saw now for the first time in his life. The upper part of her cheek was rose-coloured. Like a man, she wore a tortoise-shell eyeglass thrust between two buttons of her blouse. (pp. 11-12)

Image by image the visual form of Emma Rouault is revealed. She and her environment are presented brilliantly like a well-executed oil painting. This treatment remains consistent throughout the novel. Character emerges through a variety of dramatic confrontations but remains always secondary to the presentation of the world of things.

According to Georg Lukacs, Flaubert advised Maupassant to observe a tree until he could determine all the specific details which characterize that tree from all other trees and then seek out the words to express those special characteristics. Lukacs comments,

Both master and disciple often achieved this aim with great artistry. But the task itself was a narrowing of the purpose of art itself, and a blind alley so far as realism was concerned. For--to consider only this particular example--the task set by Flaubert isolated the tree from nature as a whole and from its relationship to man. One may thus discover in what the unique character of the tree consists, but this uniqueness amounts to nothing more than the originality of a still life.²

² Georg Lukacs, Studies in European Realism (New York, 1964), p. 142.

The philosophical model upon which Madame Bovary is based, emphasizing the priority of empirical phenomena, does not provide a clear understanding of the relationship between particular events and a larger philosophical content within which the particular takes on meaning.

The world of behavior is presented in the same way as the world of things. Just as ruts in the road and knots of hair are presented as discrete and self-contained particles of the "real world," so human behavior patterns are treated as particular empirical phenomena. The following passages reveal the discontinuity of Charles' activities as he moves through the world of things.

He came home late--at ten o'clock, at midnight sometimes. Then he asked for something to eat, and as the servant had gone to bed, Emma waited on him. He took off his coat to dine more at his ease. He told her, one after the other, the people he had met, the villages where he had been, the prescriptions he had written, and, well pleased with himself, he finished the remainder of the boiled beef, peeled the crust of his cheese, munched an apple, finished the wine, and then went to bed, lay on his back and snored. (p. 30)

The description is specific and general at the same time: it is one particular evening and it is evenings in general. We get an accurate account of Charles' life, which consists of a sequence of events which have no identifiable overall pattern. In one sentence the reader is given an account of Charles' day as a physician, meeting patients and making prescriptions, and his activities at board, peeling cheese, munching apples, etc. The discontinuity of the two worlds is obvious. But the whole paragraph indicates the discontinuity of all the activities.

Finishing the wine and going to bed are two things. There is nothing to bring them together as a part of a whole, not even a character to be identified by the name "Charles Bovary." The treatment of the world as a conglomeration of discrete units extends to the world of behavior. Relationships are always secondary to the presentation of facts. This lack of concern for psychological insight is commented upon by Martin Turnell.

Flaubert's characters do not deepen our knowledge of human motives like those of the French classic novelists. The relations between them are not personal relations in the normal sense. They are figures in the pattern rather than people.³

The "pattern" is one which is not framed by the novel, it is like a mural which extends beyond the boundaries of our vision in all directions.

Probably the most dramatic example of the priority of objects in the narrative material of Madame Bovary is the reaction to Emma's dead body.

"Look at her," said the innkeeper, sighing: "how pretty she still is! Now, couldn't you swear she was going to get up in a minute?"

Then he bent over her to put on her wreath. They had to raise the head a little, and a rush of black liquid poured from her mouth, as if she were vomiting.

"Heavens! Watch out for her dress!" cried Madame Lefrancois. (p. 242)

Flaubert has presented a world of objects and a society where objects have taken on the most important value. The horror evoked by Emma's final dehumanization, a dehumanization which is finally accepted by the novel as merely "there," is avoided

³Martin Turnell, "Madame Bovary," Sewanee Review, LXV (Autumn, 1957), pp. 531-550.

by the banal response, "Heavens! Watch out for her dress!" Emma's death is treated with more detail but with no more compassion and in no less neutral terms than the death of Charles' first wife.

A week after, as she was hanging up some washing in her yard, she was seized with a spitting of blood, and the next day, while Charles had his back turned and was closing the window curtains, she said, "O God!" gave a sigh and fainted. She was dead! What a surprise! (p. 14)

Horror is a quantitative matter. Here death comes in a paragraph. With Emma it takes a number of pages. The objectivity is the same in both cases. Persons are facts and their behavior is made of facts, even the last piece of behavior, death.

It is not that none of the characters ever feel compassion or horror, it is that in his realistic portrayal of character and event Flaubert has not created the overall philosophical framework which would give them perspective. There is no world view in Madame Bovary.

The world, it would seem, does not mean anything for Flaubert. His repeated insistence on phenomena strongly suggests this, as does his characters' repeated failure in their search for dominant significance in every experience.⁴

2. Fantasy

The persons dwelling in Flaubert's world of things long for some kind of unifying pattern, for meaning in the

⁴P.M. Wetherill, "Madame Bovary's Blind Man: Symbolism in Flaubert," Romanic Review, LXI (February, 1970), pp. 35-42.

chaos of unrelated events and objects about them. The major device available to these characters is fantasy. Fantasy takes on a variety of meanings in the novel. For Emma it is the imaginative construction of a "real World" using the building blocks of memory. Homais, the pharmacist, engages in the contemporary fantasies of science; he believes everything can be measured. The local priest lives in a world of ritual. These fantasies are the only tools Flaubert gives his characters, and they are all faulty. In the end the novel reveals that no means of unifying experience into meaningful wholes is available, that man is left ultimately with the world of things and that is all.

Cervantes created a model of reality where there was a close, although vague, relation between the imaginative constructs and some supporting "essential reality." The fantasies and illusions of Don Quixote and Sancho give structure to their experience and relate directly to the moral complexion of their behavior. Allegiance to Dulcinea, who represents all that is good in the code of chivalry, gives meaning to all that Don Quixote does.

When the mad knight lies beaten and bleeding in the field, he can refer to his illusion for spiritual sustenance. The fantasies in Madame Bovary do not have that kind of sustaining force because the model of reality assumed by Flaubert in the novel does not admit of such forces.

An ideal for understanding is stated implicitly in the novel, but is everywhere denied. If somehow the immediacy of

sensations of the fragmented world could be infused with the sense of unity longed for and frequently provided by fantasy, a man would discover his own meaning. This unifying experience flickers now and then as a possibility but is always extinguished under the smothering weight of the world of things.

Emma began her experience with fantasy as she looked at the engravings in the books she read secretly in the convent as a young girl. She experienced the contents of these pictures so intensely that she became part of the engravings, and they became for her "pictures of the world." It is the material of these pictures that provides much of the content for Emma's later fantasies. They were made up, for the most part, of pictures of exotic and ancient places filled with tranquility, beauty, and innocence. As a youth Emma enters into fantasies created by others. Later, after her marriage to Charles Bovary, she is shown creating her own fantasy world, made of the memories of the innocent past.

On the way home from her first grand ball, Emma finds a cigar case which she imagines belongs to the Viscount with whom she had danced the night before.

She looked at it, opened it, and even smelt the odour of the lining, a mixture of verbenia and tobacco. Whose was it? . . . The Viscount's? Perhaps it was a present from his mistress. (p. 40)

From this slight beginning she constructs a world for the Viscount and his mistress. She purchases a map of Paris and creates a world of gaiety which sustains her in her fantasy.

But Flaubert shows how this fantasy world is far from adequate for the creation of a unifying pattern to give meaning to experience. While she creates a world of beauty in her imagination she is also creating, indirectly, a world of ugliness around her.

All her immediate surroundings, the wearisome countryside, the petty-bourgeois stupidity, the mediocrity of existence seemed to her the exception, an exception in which she had been caught by a stroke of faith, while beyond stretched as far as eye could see an immense land of joys and passions. (p. 42)

The ugly world around her is just as much a matter of her own creation as the glittering world of Paris. Her idealization of the far-off generates an automatic rejection of the immediate. Both judgments are faulty. Emma, in an effort to transcend the world of objects and become a self, has established a scheme of values which places her in awkward and ultimately destructive contradictions.

Emma develops the capacity to translate almost anything into her own fantasy language, and Flaubert takes great pains to show the reader the process of that translation. In the following passage we see how sensory experiences are linked together to permit Emma to create a small segment of her fantasy world. Flaubert is careful to show that Emma does not look at one thing and see another. She is not engaged in that kind of delusion. Her fantasies are not presented in the novel as delusions; they are, as I have suggested, efforts to create patterns of meaning. To categorize Emma's fantasy world as delusion, it would be necessary to find some standard

for veracity within the novel. This standard is not to be found, and Emma's fantasizing is presented as a piece of behavior having the same kind of value as the behavior of any other character in the novel. The actual process of Emma's fantasy-creation is dramatized accurately in the description of the organ grinder, in which the reader experiences a series of visual images of an event which is experienced by Emma aurally.

Sometimes in the afternoon outside the window of her room, the head of a man appeared, a swarth head with black whiskers, smiling slowly, with a broad gentle smile that showed his white teeth. A waltz began, and on the barrel-organ, in a little drawingroom, dancers the size of a finger, women in pink turbans, Tyrolians in jackets, monkeys in frock-coats, gentlemen in knee breeches, turned and turned between the armchairs, the sofas and the table, reflected in small pieces of mirror that strips of gold paper held together at the corners. The man turned the handle, looking to the right, to the left and up at the windows. Now and again, while he shot out a long squirt of brown saliva against the milestone, he lifted his instrument with his knee, to relieve his shoulder from the pressure of the hard straps: and now, doleful and drawling, or merry and hurried, the music issued forth from the box, droning through a curtain of pink taffeta underneath an ornate brass grill. They were airs played in other places at the theatres, sung in drawing-rooms, danced to at night under lighted lustres, echoes of the world that reached even to Emma. Endless sarabands ran through her head, and, like an Oriental dancing-girl on the flowers of a carpet, her thoughts leapt with the notes, swung from dream to dream, from sadness to sadness. When the man had caught some pennies in his cap he drew an old cover of blue cloth, hitched his organ on to his back, and went off with a heavy tread. She watched him going. (pp. 46-47)

Emma's fantasy is not created out of a refusal to experience the highly visual and fragmented images of the passage in the same way the reader does, but is an extension of, or an elaboration on, the aural experience of the music. As Emma is

"experiencing" her life as an Oriental dancing-girl, she is attempting to discover herself as a person. Flaubert breaks into the imaginative world with the continuation for the reader, of the hard visual account of what is happening outside her window. He frames Emma's fantasy experience here with the hardlined depiction of the world, which is characteristic of the frame for the whole novel. Flaubert has created a world where events and objects occur at random. Emma and the characters he deposits in that world can believe what they will about the function of their dreams and fantasies, but they are random events also.

Gradually Emma's efforts at fantasy-creating are weakened, and her imaginative use of her memories leads only to the recognition that nothing can provide a substantial meaning for her. Her fantasies only provide a sharper awareness of her boredom. The fact of the world of things is a great abyss: it is a terror. Fantasy holds off this terror for a while, but finally persons must come to this:

Besides, nothing was worth the trouble of seeking it; everything was a lie. Every smile concealed a yawn of boredom, every joy a curse, every pleasure its own disgust, and the sweetest kisses left upon your lips only the unattainable desire for a greater delight. (p. 206)

There are from time to time suggestions that there is a way out of the epistemological impasse, that there is a possibility of some kind of pattern, of meaning which will organize the world of things. One of the first glimmers of this possibility comes with Charles Bovary's dream on his way to the Rouault estate.

Charles from time to time opened his eyes but his mind grew weary, and sleep coming upon him, he soon fell into a doze wherein his recent sensations blending with memories, he became conscious of a double self, at once student and married man, lying in his bed as but now, and crossing the operation theatre as of old. The warm smell of poultices mingled in his brain with the fresh odour of dew; he heard the iron rings rattling along the curtain-rods of the bed and saw his wife sleeping As he passed Vassonville he came upon a boy sitting on the grass at the edge of the ditch. (p. 9)

The blending of sensations and memory seems to provide the promise of insight, but then the dream settles into a chaos of images which do no more than reiterate the uniqueness of given events in time. The dream provides little, if any, insight into Charles' character. The dream itself is just another event in the sequence of events of Charles' life..

Again, at a moment when Emma is recalling some image from the past, Flaubert suggests the combination of sensation and memory as a means of understanding. As she thinks of her husband and Leon, her lover, "the comparison again forced itself upon her, almost with a clarity of direct sensation, and with that lengthening of perspective which memory gives to things" (p. 73). Emma had, in fact, at this moment had some clear insight into Leon's character and future behavior, but she is unable to do anything with her understanding. The ideal for imaginative understanding is worthless to her as her memory again breaks things down into discrete particulars. It is at the moment of Charles' experience of the dead body of Emma that this illuminating experience is almost reached by him.

The watered satin of her gown shimmered white as moonlight. Emma was lost beneath it; and it seemed to him that, spreading beyond her own self, she blended

confusedly with everything around her --the silence, the night, the passing wind, the damp odors rising from the ground.

Then suddenly he saw her in the garden at Tostes, on a bench against the thorn hedge, or else at Rouen in the streets, on the threshold of their house, in the yard at Bertaux. He again heard the laughter of the happy boys dancing under the appletrees; the room was filled with the perfume of her hair; and her dress rustled in his arms with a crackling noise. It was the same dress she was wearing now! (p. 243)

In the first paragraph, Flaubert begins to place Charles and Emma in a kind of relationship which might become significant to Charles. There is a recognition that what is a moment of a continuum in which the relationships are infinite and grand. It is almost a moment of mystic union with the totality of things. But memory intrudes, and the unified moment crackles into fragments again. The priority of things asserts itself and an understanding of the world is sidestepped.

III. Juxtaposition of Images

Madame Bovary presents a concept of reality which is rich and multifaceted. The world of things and events is shown as it is experienced through the senses. It is through a constant bizarre juxtaposition of these objects and events that Flaubert created a concept of reality. The world is made up of a single fabric of things and events; nothing is strange or foreign to it. There is a grand and god-like sense of neutrality which pervades the novel, and expresses itself in frequent grotesque and incongruous juxtaposition.

Flaubert is aware of the constant functioning of the sensorium. An individual is always computing the information

supplied by his combined senses, and this information, coming as it does with varying levels of intensity via the different senses, is in a constant state of being balanced. The characters in the novel are frequently experiencing the multi-featured character of the mass of information provided by the sensorium and attempting to cope with shifting balances in it. As Emma ponders her role as wife to Charles she becomes contemplative and settles back into a receptive state.

How sad she was on Sundays when vespers sounded! She listened with dull attention to each stroke of the cracked bell. A cat slowly walking over some roof put up his back in the pale rays of the sun. The wind on the highroad blew up clouds of dust. A dog sometimes howled in the distance; and the bell, keeping time, continued at regular intervals its monotonous ringing that died away over the fields. (p. 45)

Flaubert has shown, in as few words as possible, how all the senses join together to give the experience of the moment. Here we have a combination of the visual and the aural, with a hint of the tactile in "cloud of dust," as it is put together by Emma to support or to create her melancholy. In this passage the images of sense come together to create a single experience. At other places in the novel Flaubert makes additional incongruous juxtapositions.

At the fair, where all the citizens of Yonville have gathered to celebrate Commerce, Agriculture, Industry, and the Fine Arts, a colorful display of the various ways of life in Flaubert's time is shown. One of the most dramatic juxtapositions is provided in the descriptions of the people attending and the animals being shown.

The meadow was beginning to fill up, and the housewives were hustling about with their great umbrellas, their baskets, and their babies. One often had to make way for a long file of country girls, servant-maids with blue stockings, flat shoes and silver rings who smelt of milk when one passed close to them. They walked along holding one another by the hand, and thus they spread over the whole field from the row of open trees to the banquet tent. But this was the judging time, and the farmers one after the other entered a kind of enclosure formed by ropes supported on sticks.

The beasts were there, their noses turned toward the rope, and making a confused line with their unequal rumps. Drowsy pigs were burrowing in the earth with their snouts, calves were lowing and bleating; the cows, one leg folded under them stretched their bellies on the grass, slowly chewing their cud, and blinking their heavy eyelids at the gnats that buzzed around them. (p. 98)

The author places these paragraphs in sequence. There is nothing in the context to suggest animality of the citizens, cruelty to the animals, or any particular social dogma. The two sets of objects are merely there together. The only difference one finds in the two groups is that the one is more mobile than the other. The obvious banality of the political speeches which follow is presented with equal objectivity; the juxtaposition of images is intended to reveal the fragmented multiplicity of the world.

This commitment to objectivity in the novel is reflected in the contrary judgments made by critics. Emma, "immersed in despair and vague wish-dreams"⁵ is the expression of a "negative, passive, self-delusion."⁶ She is also

⁵ Erich Auerbach, Mimesis (Princeton, 1953), p. 489.

⁶ George Gibian, "Love by the Book: Pushkin, Stendhal, Flaubert," Comparative Literature, VIII (Spring, 1956), pp. 97-109.

described as a passionate and incorruptible heart, "a Christian in a Satanic world,"⁷ who is expressive of the "drive in each of us so to overreach ourselves that we hang on for dear life . . . to the image of what is other than we are."⁸ Charles is characterized as the expression of "stupid philistine self-deception"⁹ and "a person of the utmost delicacy of feeling."¹⁰ These conflicting judgments of character reflect the philosophical objectivity of Flaubert's radical empiricism in his development of a concept of reality.

Flaubert attempted to write a novel from a god-like position. He wanted to be "scientific and impersonal," to express "neither love nor hatred nor pit nor anger."¹¹ What seems beautiful, he says, is to write a book "about nothing."¹²

⁷ Andrew Lytle, "In Defense of a Passionate and Incorruptible Heart," Sewanee Review, LXXIII (Autumn, 1965), pp. 593-615.

⁸ R.P. Blackmur, "Madame Bovary: Beauty Out of Place," The Kenyon Review, XIII (Summer, 1951), pp. 475-503.

⁹ Auerbach, p. 489.

¹⁰ Mary McCarthy, "On Madame Bovary," Partisan Review (Spring, 1964), pp. 174-188.

¹¹ Quoted from Flaubert's letters by Ernst Fischer, The Necessity of Art (Baltimore, 1959), p. 76.

¹² Quoted from Flaubert's letters by Francis Steegmuller, Flaubert and Madame Bovary (New York, 1950), p. 290.

This apparently impersonal and objective view of the author results in an attendant ambiguity in the moral setting, an ambiguity noted by some critics.¹³

The thrust toward objectivity in the novel permits the grandest and most bizarre kinds of juxtapositions of images which produces the rich landscape of sensory experience.

The social setting of the fair at Yonville is a natural place to show the variety of the world. But since this variety is the basic principle of the novel, its concept of reality, the same kind of juxtaposition is to be found at other levels of experience. After Emma has at last abandoned herself to Rodolphe, the two are depicted in the following scene, which reveals the uses of the senses, and the bizarre juxtaposition of images, which are important in Flaubert's creation of a concept of reality.

The shades of night were falling, the horizontal sun passing between the branches dazzled the eyes. Here and there around her, in the leaves or on the ground, trembled luminous patches, as if hummingbirds flying about had scattered their feathers. Silence was everywhere; something sweet seemed to come forth from the trees. She

¹³The novel is a "stunning achievement of describing a world which represents nothing." Leo Bersani. "The Anxious Imagination," Partisan Review, XXXV (Winter, 1968), pp. 48-66. Flaubert "leaves us with the impression of a blur at the centre of his work." Martin Turnell, The Novel in France, p. 413. "In Flaubert, then, the moral theme although not wholly absent, is presented fitfully and intermittently, it remains unrelated to the main theme of the novel, unsustained by the substance of the story itself." J.P.M. Stern, "Effie Briest: Madame Bovary: Anna Karenina," The Modern Language Review, LII (July, 1957), pp. 363-375. "A universal despairing pessimism descends on the greatest writers and in the tragic figures of Flaubert and Baudelaire this pessimism degenerates into nihilism." Lukacs, p. 246.

felt her heartbeat return, and the blood coursing through her flesh like a river of milk. Then far away, beyond the wood, on the other hills, she heard a vague prolonged cry, a voice which lingered, and in silence she heard it mingling like music with the last pulsations of her throbbing nerves, Rodolphe, a cigar between his lips, was mending with his penknife one of the two broken bridles. (p. 116)

The heart beat, the tingling of the senses, the distant sounds, and the practical behavior of Rodolphe point to the ecstasy and triviality of the sexual encounter. The abrupt shift at the end of the paragraph pulls the reader from Emma's post-coital revery. Again, Emma's fantasy world is connected to aural experiences. The experience of the world of the self is identified with the non-directional and encompassing sense of sound and is broken into with the sharp visual image of Rodolphe repairing the bridles. Whenever the events of the novel seem to be leading us into a particular kind of judgment or emotional setting, Flaubert presents a contradictory judgment or mood to neutralize the reader's response.

The two illustrations just used rely on the juxtaposition within a given setting. Another device used for the effect is the contrast of two different settings.

Hippolyte is a mentally deficient, club-footed boy who does odd jobs around Yonville. He is chosen as the object of Homais' use of the miraculous powers of science. It is decided that the club-foot can be repaired by surgery. Charles Bovary is to make his name in medicine in the performance of this modern miracle. After the operation the boy's leg becomes infected with gangrene, and it is necessary to call in

a surgeon from out of town to perform the amputation. Hippolyte's screams of pain during the amputation are heard in Bovary's home over the marital conflict between Emma and Charles. Just as Flaubert constantly juxtaposes visual objects in space and pulls together a variety of sensory experiences in a fixed moment, he also juxtaposes events in time. Just as the reader finds himself in the Bovary living room witnessing a crucial conflict in the failing marriage, we hear the screaming lad who is a victim of Bovary's failing medical career. The trying and painful day ends with Emma's rendezvous with Rodolphe in the garden. The whole matter of Hippolyte's leg and Charles' failure is treated in such a way as to create the most exquisite kind of physical and psychical pain, and then the whole business is neutralized by a brief description of the amorous embrace of Emma and Rodolphe. The boy subsequently receives an artificial leg, and the horror of the stupid surgery and the awful amputation is soon forgotten.

The concept of reality expressed in Madame Bovary assumes the separability of events and objects. There are no essential relationships which inhere between times and spaces. Each object and each event stands for itself, and in the structure of the "real" world things have priority. This separateness applies to persons as well, and efforts on the parts of persons to transcend the world of objects must at last fail. The juxtaposition of these discrete objects in space and events in time is intended to reinforce this concept of reality by showing the crazyquilt pattern existing in

experience.

IV. Images of Reality in the Social Structure

While Emma's fantasies fail her, and she finally succumbs to an ultimately meaningless world, Homais and the local priest in Yonville are shown to be involved in creating the same kind of fantasy, Homais in the world of science and the priest in his traditional religion. Both men rely on the routines established by their respective institutions to prove meaning. Homais is convinced that the measurement of phenomena is adequate knowledge for man, and the priest can only turn to the ritual of the church for his "salvation." Neither is shown responding to individuals as persons.

On the occasion of the first meeting of Charles and Emma Bovary, Homais expresses himself in the explicit language of the scientist.

"The thermometer (I have made some observations) falls in winter to 4 degrees, and in the hottest season rises to 25 or 30 degrees Centigrade at the outside, which gives us 24 degrees Reamur as the maximum, or otherwise states 54 degrees Fahrenheit (English scale), not more. And, as a matter of fact, we are sheltered from the north winds by the forest of Argueil on the one side, from the west winds by the Saint Jean hills on the other; and this heat, moreover, which, on account of the watery vapours given off by the river and the considerable number of cattle in the fields, which, as you know, exhale much ammonia, that is to say, nitrogen, hydrogen, and oxygen (no, nitrogen and hydrogen alone), and which sucking up the humus from the soil, mixing together all those different emanations, unites them into a single bundle, so to speak, and combining with the electricity diffused through the atmosphere, when there is any, might in the long-run, as in tropical countries, engender poisonous fumes,--this heat, I say, finds itself perfectly tempered on the side from where it comes, or rather from where it ought to come, that is the south side, by the south-eastern winds, which, having cooled themselves in crossing the Seine,

reach us sometimes all at once like blasts from Russia." (p. 57)

His concern for translating the Centigrade figure into Fahrenheit reveals his concern for a certain kind of knowledge as important, and the long complicated sentence about the climate indicates his disregard for his new friends as participants in dialogue. Flaubert shows the discontinuity of the relationships by making the response by Emma to Homais' lecture a completely unrelated question: "Do you at least have some walks in the neighborhood" (p. 57)? Most of Homais' conversation is like this.

Homais' view of the world is no more nor less fantastic than Emma's. We do not "really" experience the world this way any more than we experience it through the creation of special personal values like Emma's. Again, Flaubert presents a person and his fantasy, as being unrelated to other persons. Its failure is not that it is a delusion but that it is not integrated into the world as Flaubert has established it.

Because of his "scientific" turn of mind, Homais is hostile to the church, and tries whenever possible to belittle the priest and what he represents. Homais has in fact attributed to science all the saving power of religion. He supposes that Charles' efforts on behalf of the clubfooted Hippolyte will result in a kind of modern miracle. He claims, "What fanaticism formerly promised to a few elect, science now accomplishes for all men" (p. 128). But the surgery is a

failure and necessitates the amputation of the boy's leg. He does not treat this scientific failure with the same harshness with which he treats religion.

None of Homais' cures for mankind is either applicable or efficient. His fantasy is no less a failure than Emma's. It is consistent, however, with the generally accepted values of his society. And regardless of the success or failure of his "science," he does receive social recognition. The closing sentence of the book gives us some insight into the values of the social setting: "He has just been given the cross of the Legion of Honor" (p. 255).

The priest has as much trouble curing the spiritual ills of man as Homais has curing his bodily ones. While Homais adheres to a rigid scientism, the priest holds to a ritualistic view of religion that sheds very little light on the human condition. When Emma, in a state of despair visits the priest for advice, their conversation is drawn out in the same way as that between Emma and Homais, referred to above; there are connected sentences, but no communication. Unable to perceive the distress of the woman, the priest misunderstands each of her appeals and leaves her to teach a catechism class. The following passage from their conversation reveals the emptiness of their encounter. The priest is comparing his duties in the community with those of Emma's husband, the physician.

"Always very busy, no doubt; for he and I are certainly the busiest people in the parish. But he is a doctor of the body," he added with a thick laugh, "and I of the soul."

She fixed her pleading eyes upon the priest. "yes," she said, "you solace all sorrows."

"Ah! don't tell me of it, Madame Bovary. This morning I had to go to Bas-Diavuille for a cow was all swollen; they thought it was under a spell. All their cows, I don't know how it is But pardon me! Longuemarre and Soudet! Bless me! will you stop it?"

And he bounded into the church. (p. 80)

At this point we are unable to see that the priest is possessed of any sort of unifying principle for life. He treats the world as object as much as does Homais.

His failing fantasy is revealed when he attempts to deal with the suffering Hippolyte whose leg has become gangrenous as a result of Charles Bovary's incompetent surgery. When he hears of the boy's condition he visits him. He begins by offering his pity and then telling the boy to rejoice because it provides him an opportunity to reconcile himself with Heaven.

"For," said the ecclesiastic in a paternal tone, "you rather neglected your duties; you were rarely seen at divine worship. How many years is it since you approached the holy table? I understand that your work, that the whirl of the world may have distracted you from your salvation. But now the time has come. Yet don't despair. I have known great sinners, who, about to appear before God (you are not yet at this point I know), had implored his mercy, and who certainly died in a truly repenting frame of mind. Let us hope that, like them, you will set us a good example! Thus, as a precaution, what is to prevent you from saying morning and evening a Hail Mary and an Our Father? Yes, do that, for my sake, to oblige me. That won't cost you anything. Will you promise?" (p. 130)

His appeal is to ritual. His concern is in part his own self-aggrandizement. The fantasy of institutionalized religion is insufficient for the moment, and after the ordeal of the boy's suffering is over we find him hobbling along on his artificial

leg doing the same things in life that he had done before. The miracle fantasies of science and religion yield the same results. Men stay as they are.

Homaïs and the priest are expressive of the failure of men to make sense of the world. They seem, at first glance, to be opposites in ideology and character. In the end they are seen as patterns cut from the same cloth, the one relying on nonsense from the past, the other creating his contemporary nonsense. Flaubert brings them together at Emma's death, and over the dead body they argue such petty issues of religion as what books to read, the value of celibacy, etc. Their two apparently contradictory characters blend into one beside Emma's casket.

They sat opposite one another, with bulging stomachs, puffed-up faces, and frowning looks, after so much disagreement uniting at last in the same human weakness, and they moved no more than the corpse by their side, that also seemed to be sleeping. (p. 243)

The remedies drawn from tradition represented by the priest and the remedies drawn from modern science represented by the pharmacist are all inadequate. They must yield, in the end, to the meaningless chaos of the world of things.

Flaubert uses as a framework for the novel a specific concept of reality. It is a reality which admits of nothing of value outside the world of things. It is a world of "ultimate pointlessness."¹⁴

¹⁴Harold Kaplan, The Passive Voice (Athens, Ohio, 1966), p. 38.

There is no Dulcinea in the world of Madame Bovary, neither is Flaubert interested in the ambiguous functioning of the imagination as a self-conscious creator of concepts of reality. Flaubert chose to create a model of reality in which characters who seek transcendence encounter a world made of objects and events which are ultimate. Beyond these there is no overall pattern. He presents the sad and frustrating human experience of looking for something that doesn't exist.

Madame Bovary and The Idiot, by Dostoevsky, represent opposite extremes in the creation of concepts of reality. While Flaubert presents the external and objective as ultimate, Dostoevsky attempts to penetrate the interior experience to discover the essential features of the real world. Both works are created in the context of the traditional dichotomy of the subjective versus the objective, each work claiming, in its basic assertions about the nature of reality, the priority of the one over the other. Cervantes had attempted to bridge the dichotomy, but his Platonic Dulcinea interfered, and in The Sot-Weed Factor we will discover a concept of reality which embraces both elements of this and other polarities.

CHAPTER III

THE IDIOT

One of the problems built into the empiricism of Madame Bovary is the problem of the self: how is it most adequately described, and how does it acquire knowledge of other selves? The problem is resolved within a concept of reality which posits objects and clearly defined events as ultimate. We watch the characters emerge and develop much as we watch the personalities of our own acquaintances, through behavior. In the subjective--objective dualism Flaubert permits the objective to dominate and determine the subjective. Dostoevsky's The Idiot turns to the subjective as the more important feature of human experience. The inner man, with all his conflicts and complexities, is the heart of reality for Dostoevsky. Objects and events (such as behavior) fall into the background, while the novelist focuses on the psychic-spiritual history of his characters.

The protagonist of The Idiot, like Don Quixote, Emma Bovary, and Ebenezer Cooke of The Sot-Weed Factor, is an outsider. It is this similarity which brings these four novels together in a special way. Each main character adopts a set of values which is not in line with his social environment, and his conflicts, both psychological and social, arise from the allegiance he pays to this set of values. Each protagonist is,

in a sense, quixotic, the three later ones bearing some obvious similarities to their Renaissance progenitor, Don Quixote. But the resemblance lies in that particular feature of their personalities only; the philosophical motifs of each novel are quite different from one another.

The traditional dualism which divides the world into selves who know and objects which are known has been resolved, at one time or another, by reducing the whole process to one or the other of the two elements in the duality, with various kinds of dialectical interpretations in between. At one end of the continuum of resolution is a thoroughgoing empiricism and at the other a prison-like solipsism, neither of which provides satisfactory solutions to the problem. Artists who are attempting to make statements about the human adventure seldom fall off into such abstraction, because they are constantly confronted with the ambiguity of human experience, but they do reflect the philosophical traditions of their respective cultures. Dostoevsky was clearly aware of man's encounter and conflict with the external world, and his novels show a sensitive treatment of the social environment within which his fictional characters are developed. His primary concern, however, was with the truths and revelations of the inner experience. He saw man's moral life, his notions of identity, his understanding of reality, and his ultimate redemption (all problems which are difficult if not impossible to raise in a strict empiricism) rising out of the inner depths of the individual. The Idiot, with its protagonist

subject to seizures which border on the mystical experience, provides special insight into Dostoevsky's concept of reality.

1. Psychic Reality

Dostoevsky's novel The Idiot is an episodic narrative of the encounters of Prince Myshkin, an unsophisticated young man subject to epileptic seizures, with a variety of characters representing various levels of human frailty. He is always the outsider, and comes to the end of the novel as a completely non-communicative idiot. Through the dramatization of the inner lives of the Prince and the characters with whom he makes contact we detect the form of the psychic reality which dominates the novel.

Flaubert presents the reader with palpable objects for the senses, which we know as objects separate from ourselves, whereas Dostoevsky presents us with the psychic experience which is not approachable through the senses but which we know just as well as we know the empirical objects of knowledge. He does not merely emphasize the emotional, which can be presented in behavioral terms, but he carries us well within the psychic structure of man by dramatizing the most subtle kinds of awareness. The real is that which informs the process of our knowing with the special identity we call self. When Dostoevsky first discusses Myshkin's epilepsy he reveals the essential view of reality which pervades the novel. Just before Myshkin falls unconscious, he experiences a grand sense of enlightenment and well-being, a moment within which time ceases to exist. This moment of "understanding" is the most

real thing in Myshkin's experience. "What indeed was he to make of this reality? For that very thing had happened."¹ Reality, in The Idiot, is what is experienced psychically. The "moment" was not available to any of the senses, nor could it be called upon at will, but it was real, and, in fact, provided the center for Myshkin's history as a person. There is a temptation to say that between the two alternatives Flaubert's is the more lucid because of the ease with which one can establish criteria for determining what is real empirically, and what is not. But the ease is merely apparent, and the discussions of sense-data necessary to clarify criteria regarding the reality or non-reality of particular sensory experiences are complex indeed, no less complex than the elaboration of similar criteria for subjective or psychical experience. Consequently both Madame Bovary and The Idiot are convincing in their own ways and inadequate in their own ways, the one with the assumption that sense data are primary and the other that psychic experience is primary.

The soul, however, is indescribable, and its objects are also. Dostoevsky's novel must, of necessity, use objects and events which can be perceived empirically to point us to the inner life; but it is the degree to which he subordinates the sensory experience to the spiritual which reveals the

¹Fyodor Dostoevsky, The Idiot, translated from the Russian by David Magarshack (Baltimore, 1955), p. 259. All subsequent references to this novel will be from this edition, and will be noted in the text with page numbers in parentheses.

characteristics of his vision of reality.

Flaubert gives us a world of detail about his character's appearance and behavior. Dostoevsky provides just the briefest clue as to these matters and points immediately to the psychic-spiritual quality of his characters. Prince Myshkin shows us the way. His interpretation of his acquaintances reveals something of the way Dostoevsky works out the characters in the novel. When the Prince first meets the Yepanchin family he gives a "reading" of their faces. He starts with Adelaida, the eldest daughter.

You asked me about your faces and what I noticed in them. I'll tell you that with pleasure. You, Miss Adelaida, have a happy face, the most sympathetic face of the three. Besides your being very good-looking, one can't help saying to oneself when one looks at you, "She has the face of a kind sister." (pp. 103-104)

References to the color of hair or shape of nose are missing. What the Prince "sees" in the young woman's face are inner qualities. His reading of Mrs. Yepanchin's face goes even further, suggesting something about the total moral and spiritual structure of the woman's soul.

Mrs. Yepanchin . . . your face tells me--and I am not conjecturing but I say so with absolute confidence--that you are a perfect child in everything, oh, in everything, in everything good and in everything bad, in spite of your age. (p. 104)

And the Prince is correct. His description is accurate, and Mrs. Yepanchin acts out this role throughout the novel. Myshkin, the spiritual artist, sees beyond the empirical to the spiritual. Dostoevsky builds his novel on this kind of procedure--always delving into the presented object for a spiritual truth about man's inner life.

Dostoevsky opens the novel with a description of the Prince and Rogozhin. These two men are to remain unequivocally opposed and inextricably united throughout the novel. Rogozhin is presented first.

The most striking thing about his face was its deadly pallor, which, in spite of his rather sturdy build, gave the young man a look of utter exhaustion and, at the same time, of something agonizingly passionate, which seemed to be out of keeping with his coarse and insolent smile and his surly and self-satisfied expression. (pp. 27-28)

The visual focus is on the face, but the reader comes away from the descriptive passage without any data that will help in calling up an empirical image of the man. What is remembered is the apparent contradiction of his exhaustion and his passion. We would have been many chapters into a Flaubertian novel before we knew so much about our characters. Dostoevsky directs our attention to those features of a character that will matter in subsequent action, and he leads us immediately to that level of human experience where we will be operating throughout the remainder of the novel.

The description of the Prince is handled in the same way.

His eyes were large, blue, and piercing, and there was something gentle but heavy in their look, something of that strange expression which makes people realize at the first glance that they are dealing with an epileptic. The young man's face, however, was pleasant, sensitive, and lean, though colourless and, at this particular moment, blue with cold. (p. 28)

The blue eyes are fairly easy to call to the visual imagination, but it is the "something gentle but heavy in their look" that strikes hardest, and these words provide strong qualitative metaphors but weak sensory images. The thrust of

the description is psychic and spiritual. The conflict of the book is established here: the passionate-aggressive versus the sensitive-passive. The level of the conflict is identified. Rogozhin and Myshkin are, in fact, seldom together in the novel, yet their qualities of character are always coming together in one way or another. Physical description is brief, and its function is to guide our attention away from the physical. The novel has been characterized as a morality, in which the goal is to present cosmic or universal forces at work, rather than to project a hard-edged picture of the world. "There are no characters, no scenery, no plot. Instead there are superhuman forces locked in merciless struggle."²

These broad-stroked portraits are used in the initial introduction to the major characters of the novel, and we are led through the complicated conflicts within their individual souls. These conflicts build to grand heights of tension, and provide much of the pleasure in reading the novel. But it is even more impressive to notice Dostoevsky's similar treatment of characters who appear only momentarily in the action. A man appears in Nastasya's entourage as they enter a park for entertainment. Dostoevsky describes him in one sentence, and he never appears in the novel again.

One was a middle-aged man of rather modest appearance, who looked absolutely respectable, but conveyed the impression of a solitary man--that is, one of those men whom nobody knows and who knows nobody. (p. 385)

²Robert Payne, Dostoevsky: A Human Portrait (New York, 1961), p. 241.

He is a hanger-on, and is absolutely irrelevant to the development of the plot. He is, however, a small part in the development of a point of philosophical reference. Dostoevsky reaches into the character, breaking through the external appearances, and attempts to identify the reality of the individual--his solitude and his alienation from the world. The face for Dostoevsky serves as the map of the soul, and the soul is the focal point of the novel.

When Flaubert took Charles Bovary into Rouault's home we were treated to a wonderfully explicit description of the household. The objects in the environment took on a life of their own. A comparable scene in The Idiot reveals an altogether different approach to the materials. Rogozhin and his followers break in on the birthday party of the beautiful Nastasya. One would expect this scene to be rich with the artifacts related to the status of the most beautiful mistress in St. Petersburg. The physical appearance of the apartment disappears into the background as the personalities of Rogozhin and his friends dominate the narrative.

As in the afternoon, Rogozhin walked in front of his followers, who advanced behind him rather timidly though fully conscious of their advantages. They were most afraid of Nastasya Filippovna--goodness only knows why. Some of them even thought that they would all be 'kicked down stairs'. Among these, incidentally, was the dandy and lady-killer Zalyozhnev. But the rest, and most of all the pugilist regarded Nastasya Filippovna, at heart, though never in words, with the utmost contempt, if not with hatred, and had gone to her as though expecting to take her place by storm. But the magnificence of the first two rooms, the articles they had never seen or heard of, the exquisite furniture and pictures, the enormous statue of Venus--all that inspired them with respect and almost fear. (pp. 190-191)

The environment is filled with "exquisite" and "enormous" furnishings and fearful, anxious men. There is no question as to the direction of Dostoevsky's thought; the psychic must dominate the physical.

In a weaker passage Dostoevsky reveals his concern to present verbally that psychic world which lies beyond the reach of the senses. In fact, he reveals it a bit too blatantly. Rogozhin's home reflects his character. It is dark and brooding as he is dark and brooding. As Myshkin approaches it for the first time, he experiences some of the reactions he has had to the man Rogozhin.

Without as well as within, the house looks drab and inhospitable, somehow; everything in it seems to be hiding away in some dark corner, and it is difficult to explain why one should get such an impression from the mere exterior of the house. (p. 235)

The novelist gives too much away here by claiming a difficulty. Flaubert would have stacked detail upon detail until the house would appear in all its gloominess. Dostoevsky cuts through all that concern for the empirical and tells us that it is a gloom greater than he can describe. The effort to transcend the empirical seems to dominate even to the point of dulling his aesthetic sense.

Flaubert dealt with faces, Dostoevsky with the soul to which the face is merely a guide. Flaubert created image upon image to create characters who are part of an empirically perceived environment. Dostoevsky established spaces and things in his narrative as points of departure for exploring the psyche. The moral positions of the two novels are also

highlighted by similar contrasts. If moral judgments are to be made of Flaubert's characters, these judgments are also to be made of their behavior. In contrast to this treatment of morality as being concerned solely with what one does, Dostoevsky presents a moral world where an individual's moral worth is determined by what he is or believes. Prince Myshkin's intrusions into the affairs of others causes pain and confusion, but he remains untouched and innocent as Christ in "The Grand Inquisitor" remains pure in his silence, while the Churchman is condemned because he acts from the wrong motives. The external is subordinated to the internal; inner states have priority over behavior. Dostoevsky illustrates this in a game that is suggested at Nastasya's party. Each person is asked to tell of the most despicable act he has ever committed. Some are bewildered at the prospect of having to make such a disclosure, and they are told, ". . . your conscience and the promptings of your heart will immediately suggest to you what to tell" (p. 182). As the tales are related, the actions begin to fade into the background, and the states of conscience and the "promptings of the heart" become the basic concerns of the storytellers.

The concern for the external forms of morality are attacked by the Prince. Burdovsky, a young nihilist, has come to extort money from Myshkin by claiming he deserves part of an inheritance left to the Prince. When it is revealed that the young man has no legal grounds for his argument, those in attendance become angered at him. The Prince lashes out at

them.

You all hate Burdovsky because in your opinion his behaviour to his mother is not pretty but ungracious. Isn't that so? Isn't it? For all of you are terribly fond of prettiness and gracefulness of external forms, and that's all you care for, isn't it? (p. 328)

Myshkin implies that there are more important criteria for morality than mere practice, that the state of one's soul must be taken into account.

Goodness does not seem to be the function of a man's observable behavior, but in the condition of his soul, the degree to which he is acquainted with the forces which proceed from deep within himself and drive him to explicit forms of behavior. But when we have said so much about the origins of morality we still have no clearly stated criterion for making moral judgments. The illumination of the inner man can be used to support any morality merely by giving specific definitions of the code one "discovers" when one achieves illumination. Dostoevsky, in leading us into the interior experience as the ultimate reality, has in fact led us to a world no less impenetrable and inexplicable than the world of facts and events.

2. Dualisms: Greater and Lesser

While Dostoevsky chose the inner side of the subjective-objective dichotomy (the Greater Dualism), he established, as a center of conflict, other dualisms (the Lesser ones) which reveal his original assumptions about the nature of reality. He does not treat the man-nature relationship; the reader is seldom conscious of the natural

environment. There is little to suggest that there are even seasonal changes in St. Petersburg. Except in a very indirect way the individual society relationships are avoided as well. The dualisms which emerge in the novel are those which reinforce the emphasis on the psychic-spiritual part of man's experience.

The dark passion of Rogozhin is the background against which the light of Myshkin's inner illumination is played. These two characters seem to be dramatic representations of the two parts of man's inner life which lead him to fulfillment. Mrs. Yepanchin makes the duality clear.

A fool with a heart and without brains is the same sort of unhappy fool as one with brains and no heart. It's an old truth. I am a fool with a heart and no brains, and you're a fool with brains and no heart. We are both unhappy. We are both suffering. (p. 109)

Mrs. Yepanchin treats man as driven from within by either reason or passion, assuming, on the surface at least, that the two forces are unique and separable. This is consistent with Dostoevsky's model of the world in which important tensions and conflicts which develop in man are those which are created within him, not those which confront him from outside himself. Social forces are treated with a special kind of scorn by Dostoevsky, and he condemns any kind of social criteria for morality or spiritual well-being.

An example occurs in a discussion of the place of self-preservation in a moral situation. The assumption that morality is purely an individual matter regarding the self and its motives would, it seems to me, ordinarily be opposed by a

position which would assume sociality as a major element in moral behavior. The concept of the real which dominates this work permits moral discussion only within the context of the soul. To the assertion that self-preservation is the normal law of humanity, the following questions are raised:

It's true it is a law, but no more normal than the law of destruction, and perhaps of self-destruction, too. Surely, self-preservation is not the whole normal law of mankind? (p. 412)

Laws of mankind refer to laws of the inner man, and the notion of self-preservation is countered with the notion of self-destruction. The lines of Dostoevsky's thinking avoid any serious attention to the external side of the subjective-objective dualism.

Within the concept of reality posited by Dostoevsky, dualisms arise which are consistent with that general concept. He realizes the danger of dichotomies, and shows how a complete acceptance of one side of such an artificial separation can be disastrous. The Prince himself is shown to have fallen into this danger. Mrs. Yepanchin points out that he is "a fool with a brain and no heart." As the light-seeker and seer, he comes to represent mystical understanding without passion, and he is shown finally as a person completely withdrawn into himself, incapable of communication with others. Aglaya, the Yepanchin daughter who is thought to be in love with the Prince, says to him: "You have no tenderness: only truth and that's why you're unfair" (p. 465). Later, Radomsky points to Myshin's "love" for Aglaya and Nastasya, suggesting that the Prince has fallen off the end of one of the

dichotomies.

Aglaya loved like a woman, like a human being, and not like--a disembodied spirit! Do you know what I think, my poor Prince? Most likely you've never loved either one of them! (p. 627)

Between heart and brain, Myshkin has become all brain, all truth. He is a fool of the mind as Mrs. Yevanchin said earlier.

Rogozhin, on the other hand, is a person driven almost entirely by passion. He takes Nastasya away to Moscow, attempts to murder Myshkin, carries Nastasya off again on the day of her wedding to the Prince, and finally murders her. Both Myshkin and Rogozhin are examples of men following the "normal laws of mankind," the law of self-destruction. The two men can be considered to represent the two basic drives in man--passion and reason--and the results of their separation. The implication here is that the two forces are in conflict, and it is the conflict which lies at the heart of man's existence.

Dostoevsky recognizes the dichotomies within man and the danger of their fragmentizing effect, but he does not recognize that he has built his concept of reality on one half of the subjective-objective continuum and has created a dichotomy in his view of man which is as dangerous as the ones he sees within man. Conscious of lesser dualisms, his thinking is subject to a greater one. His is an example of a concept of reality becoming invisible. His tendency toward dichotomous thinking provides the tools for his analysis of the self, but his initial assumption of the priority of the

subjective over the objective keeps him from seeing the equally important sociality of man.

3. Motives

When we look into the structure of the psyche we see that man is often driven by contradictory forces, that he is hardly capable of a single-valued course of action. This characteristic of the self and its decisions is especially true of modern man as Dostoevsky sees him. Whether or not he would agree with the notion that man has changed radically, he does seem to present the characters in The Idiot in the form suggested by the Prince in the following passage.

But then, you see . . . , I'm saying this because men in those days . . . were not at all the same people as we are now. They were not at all of the same race as nowadays. Quite honestly, they seem to have been quite a different breed of men. In those days people seem to have been animated by one idea, but now they are much more nervous, more developed, more sensitive--they seem to be animated by two or three ideas at a time--modern man is more diffuse and, I assure you, it is this that prevents him from being such a complete human being as they were in those days. (p. 563)

There is a longing for a kind of spiritual simplicity which must have existed in some Edenic past. This quest is characteristic of the moral and spiritual atmosphere of Dostoevsky's novels. The need for salvation comes from this fragmentation, which he sees as the basic characteristic of modern man. This multiple and ambiguous thrust expresses itself in the novel in the mixed and unclear motives of the characters. Some questions of motives are never resolved. Dostoevsky recognizes that motives are never pure, and that any simple explanation of any particular action will be misleading.

He makes a general statement regarding motives toward the end of the novel.

Don't let us forget that the motives of human actions are usually infinitely more complex and varied than we are apt to explain them afterwards, and can rarely be defined with certainty. It is sometimes much better for a writer to content himself with a simple narrative of events. This is what we shall do in the rest of our account of the present catastrophe with the general; for, try as we may, we have no choice but to bestow on this secondary character of our tale a little more attention and space than we had originally intended. (p. 523)

It is the infinite complexity of man's inner life which provides the coloring and the texture of this novel.

It is Keller, one of Rogozhin's aggressive friends, who, coming to ask for money from Myshkin, introduces the notion of the "double thought." He wonders at himself that even when he is consciously developing reasons for his actions, there is the recognition of other, sometimes opposite motives in operation. He presents this notion to the Prince, suggesting that it must be something evil and mean in a man. The Prince responds,

Two ideas occurred to you at one and the same time. This happens very often. It always happens to me. Still, I don't think it's a good thing and, you know, Keller, I blame myself most of all for it. You might have been telling me about myself just now. Sometimes, indeed, I couldn't help thinking . . . that everyone is like that, so that I even began patting myself on the back, for it is terribly difficult to fight against these double thoughts. (p. 346)

Even in the process of identifying the double thought, Myshkin is involved in creating one: he judges them negatively and defends them as foibles of human beings.

Another illustration of this psychological insight is given through Aglaya, who alternately adores and despises the

Prince. She has made an allusion to Myshkin as "the poor knight," a character from a poem by Pushkin, at a gathering which included the Prince.

If, when I read you about the "poor knight" that day, I wished to--express my admiration for you at the same time, I also wished to express my disgust with you for your behaviour and to show you that I knew everything. (p. 472)

Dostoevsky provides enough of these obvious examples of the double thought to make us slightly suspicious of the conscious defense that any character makes in the novel.

This is especially appropriate to the character Ippolit. He is suffering from consumption, and is from his first appearance in the novel, on the verge of dying. He appears at Myshkin's home on the night of Prince's birthday celebration, and reads a long confession which announces his determination to commit suicide. Shortly after reading his statement he aims a revolver at his head and pulls the trigger. Ippolit has failed to load the revolver. He claims he forgot. Others claim he is grandstanding. The reader never knows, and remains skeptical about Ippolit's sincerity.

Most critics seem to accept the sincerity of the Prince and accept the characterization of him as the "fool of Christ."³ But he too is shown as experiencing the same kind of

³It was Dostoevsky who first used the phrase in his notebook sketches for The Idiot. It has caught the imagination of some critics and, it seems to me, caused some distortion in the interpretation of the Prince. Payne uses the descriptive phrase, and continues, "He is Paradise walking through Hell." (Robert Payne, Dostoevsky, p. 248). Spinka refers to Myshkin as a "new presentation of the human character of Christ, which frees us from many misunderstandings and misinterpretations." Matthew Spinka, Christian Thought from Erasmus to Berdyaev (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1962), p. 244.

mixed motives in his action. He admits to Keller that he has also experienced the double thought, and it is tempting to see him as one who, knowing the pitfalls of self-deception, could avoid that common human failing. But he seems perfectly blind to many of the forces which operate within him. When he is waiting to meet Aglaya in the park, he thinks over the significance of the special invitation made by Yepanchin's youngest daughter. Dostoevsky tells us that he has not the slightest idea of the kind of relationship developing between himself and Aglaya.

All this was perfectly sincere, and he never doubted it or admitted the presence of the slightest 'double' thought that this girl could possibly be in love with him or that he could possibly be in love with this girl.
(p. 399)

The reader is frequently in doubt about what Myshkin says about himself, and, while Dostoevsky does not say that the Prince is, in fact, troubled by double thoughts, it appears that the Prince is in a mild state of self-deception. This means, in the context of Dostoevsky's concept of reality, that he will not face the complication of his own inner reactions.

In the end, Flaubert and Dostoevsky say the same thing about motives. By focusing on events in the behavior of his characters, Flaubert suggests that motive is inexplicable in psychic terms, and that we can know only the behavior which expresses the unknown and unknowable motives. Dostoevsky, in his attempt to show the mysterious complexities of man's inner world, suggests that motives are, at last, inexplicable, regardless of how deeply we probe into a man's soul.

It is the search for some absolute source of motives which lies at the heart of Dostoevsky's novel. Whereas Flaubert sought to create a novel around a conception of reality which posited the external world as ultimate, Dostoevsky posits the soul as the ultimate reality. In both cases the ultimate takes on the quality of mystery through being finally unexplainable.

4. The Mystery of the Self

Regardless of the structure of any given concept of reality, the question of the knowledge of other selves will always be a serious and difficult problem to resolve. In a world such as the one Dostoevsky describes, where men are capable of handling many different, and sometimes contradictory thoughts at the same time, the knowledge of other selves becomes more and more important because of the sense of separation which results from the recognized multiplicity of psychological states attending any example of behavior. This problem expresses itself in The Idiot in the horrible sense of alienation experienced by each of the characters and in the dream-like atmosphere which obtains through most of the novel. Rogozhin seems to take some pleasure from the fact that the Prince does not know what his feelings are. Myshkin seems bewildered at the strange and always ambiguous responses of Aglaya. At last, the Prince laments directly, "Why is it we can never know everything about another person . . . (p. 627)? The self remains a mystery, and in that sense is central in any consideration of Dostoevsky's theology.

At the same time that the psychic world of the characters provides the basic fabric of the novel, Dostoevsky manages to keep us from a complete understanding of any character by providing insight only at a distance. The kind of direct description of inner states used in the following passage on Myshkin is characteristic of the whole novel.

The Prince was not so much out of breath as 'overflowing with the milk of human kindness' as Adelaida expressed it next morning to her fiance Prince Sh. [Sic] (p. 582)

We are not confronted with a narrator who tells us of Myshkin's emotional states. We learn of them indirectly as Adelaida interprets Myshkin's behavior. While this technique of indirect description is not used exclusively, it is used frequently enough to keep us from feeling that we are getting simple and straightforward descriptions of what a character is really like. Depending on the specific kind of perspective we are taking at the moment, we could take this passage to be an assertion about the Prince or about Adelaida. It is obviously both.

Courses of action are initiated during the novel which have the same kind of ambiguity, and which keep the character and the reader from knowing exactly what is happening. General Yepanchin expresses his bewilderment about the activity related to the match between his daughter Aglaya and the Prince.

If I haven't heard, you haven't heard, he hasn't heard, and someone else hasn't heard, then who, I ask you, has heard? How do you suppose it can be explained except that half of it is a delusion and doesn't exist, that it is something like--er--moonshine or--other kinds of

spectres. (p. 393)

He describes exactly the response of the reader at that moment. We do not know what has been happening between the two, and we are left as informationless as the General. The reader experiences the alienation which Dostoevsky suggests is one of the essential characteristics of man. "All the characters move and speak as if in a dream in which people appear and events happen with little logical coherence."⁴ Because the knowledge of selves is always problematical, a man is always on uneasy ground with other persons.

The world of the self as opposed to the world of empirical objects is filled with ambiguity and contradictory meanings. In support of a concept of reality which places the highest priority on the psychic world, Dostoevsky treats the problems of the self and the entailed problems of knowledge with some care. But there are times when it is not clear if he is sure of his own vantage point. He slips from being the omniscient overseer of the action to the limited narrator with excessive ease, and sometimes with no apparent reason. At once he will know all the secret thoughts of one character and then not know at all what is going on in another. In the following passage, which occurs at the preparation of the marriage between Myshkin and Nastasya, it is not clear why Dostoevsky makes the shift in his level of knowledge about his characters' inner lives.

⁴Temira Pachmuss, F. M. Dostoevsky: Dualism and Synthesis of the Human Soul (Carbondale, Ill, 1963), p. 235.

She had one more secret dream, but she did not speak of it; she hoped that Aglaya, or at least someone sent by her, would also be in the crowd, incognito, in the church, and would see it all, and she was secretly preparing herself for it. She parted from the Prince, still preoccupied with these thoughts, at about eleven o'clock at night; but before it had struck midnight, a messenger came running to the Prince from Darya Alexeyevna with a request 'to come immediately, she is very bad'. The Prince found his bride shut up in her bedroom, in tears, in despair, in hysterics; for a long time she could hear nothing that was said to her through the closed door. At last she opened the door, let only the Prince in, locked the door after him, and fell on her knees before him. (So, at any rate, Darya Alexeyevna, who had managed to catch sight of something, reported afterwards). (p. 636)

We are given some intimate insights into Nastasya's personality, and we tend to think of them as believable. Then we are informed that the information comes from a second-hand source. The treatment tends to create a mysterious aura around the personalities of all the characters. The impossibility, or the extreme difficulty, of knowing other selves is dramatized by the mood established by this ambiguity. But there are times when the shift in levels of knowledge by the author seems all too obvious and a bit too arbitrary. Even if considered arbitrary and aesthetically unacceptable, however, this treatment of the material is consistent with the concept of reality which supports the action of the novel. When we enter the world of the spirit and decide that inner psychic structures dominate experience, we find ourselves in an area where few if any clear criteria for judgment are available. Dostoevsky operates within that world, and his model of reality becomes obvious from examining his treatment of the knowledge of other selves.

Again Dostoevsky becomes caught up in the traditional

dualisms. When treated as a completely independent entity, the self becomes the opposite of others, and in Dostoevsky, a completely separable entity. When this independent entity is given the highest priority in a concept of reality, the problem of the knowledge of other selves becomes crucial. I think Dostoevsky, neglecting as he does, the sociality of man, provides no means for the discovery of other selves, as the reducing of the Prince to a completely non-communicative state suggests.

5. Dreams and Epilepsy: Resolution of Lesser Dualisms

The dualisms which Dostoevsky recognizes as aspects of the interior experience find resolution in the mythic world of the dream and in the mystic illumination of the epileptic seizure. He attempts to reconcile the contradictory forces within the self, and present a "whole man" operating as a unified psychological-moral force. He considers the opposing rational and irrational forces in the psyche:

Sometimes one dreams strange dreams, impossible and grotesque dreams; on waking you remember them distinctly and you are amazed at a strange fact. To begin with, you remember that your reason never deserted you all through the dream, you even remember that you acted with great cunning and logic during all that long, long time But why does your reason at the same time reconcile itself with such obvious absurdities and impossibilities with which, among other things, your dream was crowded? . . . Why, too, when awake and having completely recovered your sense of reality, you feel almost every time, and sometimes with extraordinary vividness, that you have left some unsolved mystery behind with your dream? You smile at the absurdity of your dream, and at the same time you feel that in the intermingling of those absurdities some idea lies hidden, but an idea that is real, something belonging to your true life, something that exists and has always existed in your heart; it is as though something new and prophetic, something you have been expecting has

been told you in your dream; your impression is very vivid; it may be joyful or agonizing, but what it is and what was said to you--all this you can neither understand nor remember. (p. 492)

He does not choose a piece of "irrational" behavior, such as an act of violence. He chooses, in accordance with the concept of reality which supports the novel, an inner state which does not conform to the "reality" experienced through the senses. The dream is that inner experience which seems to be "opposite" waking experience in which logic and a specific kind of order obtain. But Dostoevsky is careful to suggest that there is order and structure--reason--in the world of dreams. The reconciliation of the dream world with the world of reason lies at the heart of human experience and represents that highest of understandings of the world and of the self available to an inhabitant of the world of The Idiot. And yet Dostoevsky expresses this insight as a question because, while he sees that reason and logic are present in the dream, they do not represent the total experience. There is also the experience of some ultimate reality which remains a mystery. It is implied that the dream reveals that inner core of self, seldom experienced, if ever, during "waking" life, which is the source of all our desires and longings. It is the center of reality; it bears considerable similarity to some traditional concepts of God. It appears that Christ, for Dostoevsky, is the expression of that ultimate union of the absurd and the rational. If we assume that "truth" in the following quotation should be taken to mean the kind of arbitrary truth inherent in the structure of mathematics or language, we can see

Dostoevsky rejecting the pragmatic and empirical for the ultimately spiritual. He said in a letter, " . . . If someone were to prove to me that Christ is not the truth, I would rather remain with Christ than with the truth."⁵ Christ is for him the center of reality.

Myshkin arrives at the experience of this center through epilepsy. Just before he falls into unconsciousness the world is revealed to him by way of some eternal light. He is troubled by this experience, but the reader is impressed with the purity and the all-embracing quality of the experience.

Then suddenly some gulf seemed to open up before him; a blinding inner light flooded his soul. The moment lasted perhaps half a second, yet he clearly and consciously remembered the beginning, the first sound of the dreadful scream, which burst from his chest of its own accord and which he could have done nothing to suppress. Then his consciousness was instantly extinguished and complete darkness set in. (pp. 267-268)

In this brief description of the epileptic seizure Dostoevsky points in the two opposite directions taken by the experience. There is immediately provided an ecstatic experience of inner light followed by darkness. The scream which accompanies the fit is described as coming from "someone inside the man who is screaming" (p. 268). Something occurs in the depths of a man during this moment that results in a kind of non-human or extra-human language. George Steiner points out that Dostoevsky presents the epileptic fits "as realizations of total experience, as outward thrusts of the most secret and

⁵Matthew Spinka, Christian Thought, p. 197.

central forces of life. In the moment of seizure the soul is liberated from the constricting hold of the senses."⁶

Early in the novel, the Prince reflects on those strange experiences.

His sensation of being alive and his awareness increased tenfold at those moments which flashed by like lightning. His mind and heart were flooded by a dazzling light. All his agitation, all his doubts and worries, seemed composed in a twinkling, culminating in a great calm, full of serene and harmonious joy and hope, full of understanding and the knowledge of the final cause. (p. 258)

The illumination intensifies his senses, provides an ultimate sense of understanding, and fills his soul with a feeling of peace. While the Prince has some questions about the value of such moments he finally comes to accept them as "beauty and prayer" and "the highest synthesis of life" (p. 259). As he attempts to draw a moral implication from his illumination, Myshkin finally concludes that after confronting the ultimate reality, the essential self, "Compassion was the chief and, perhaps, the only law of all human existence" (p. 263).

But the illuminating experience does not provide this moral implication. What is resolved are personal anxieties. There is no insight regarding the individual's relation to others. The experience speaks only to the independent self, as the concept of reality in the novel dictates. The conflict between reason and passion may be resolved in this experience, although the way this resolution is expressed remains unclear, but the gulf between the self and others remains unbridged,

⁶ George Steiner, Tolstoy or Dostoevsky (New York, 1959), p. 17.

and the moral about compassion seems to be pulled out of a magic hat.

6. Belief and Unbelief

In the world of The Idiot, it is in liberating the forces of the soul that a man reaches toward salvation. God is to be found in the depths of the soul by means of special illumination not through the rituals of institutions or the promotion of social well-being of other people. The man who works out his life according to his passions is not necessarily cast into hell. It is the man who fails to probe the dark parts of the self, who claims social behavior or formal behavior as the means to the good life, who becomes the "unbeliever." It is the Roman Catholic with his focus on a common ritual and the socialist with his socio-economically oriented moral values who bears the brunt of Dostoevsky's criticism. The problem of belief and unbelief is used by Dostoevsky to probe into the inner experience. He attempts to discover what prompts both the believer into his belief and the unbeliever into his disbelief, and to indentify that well-spring of the spiritual life. Myshkin points out the misleading character of the arguments and behavior centered around belief.

The essence of religious feeling has nothing to do with any reasoning, or any crimes and misdemeanours or atheism; it is something entirely different and it will always be so; it is something our atheists will always overlook, and they will never talk about that. (p. 253)

The word "that" refers to that reality underlying personality which is constantly expressing itself in the structured

absurdity of the dream and in the illumination of the mystical experience. The Prince points out that all the unbelievers whose ideas he had encountered always avoided the basic issue of theism--the reality located in the depths of the soul.

Whenever I met unbelievers and however many of their books I read, I could not help feeling that they were not talking or writing about that at all, though they may appear to do so. (pp. 251-252)

The problem of belief and unbelief finds a focus in The Idiot in the reproduction of the Holbein painting of Christ being taken from the cross. The print hangs in the dark home of Rogozhin. Both Myshkin and Ippolit respond strongly to the picture. The most complete description of the picture is given by Ippolit.

The picture depicted Christ, who has just been taken from the cross. I believe that painters are usually in the habit of depicting Christ, whether on the cross or taken from the cross, as still retaining a shade of extraordinary beauty on his face; that beauty they strive to preserve even in his moments of greatest agony. In Rogozhin's picture there was no trace of beauty. It was a faithful representation of the dead body of a man who has undergone unbearable torments before the crucifixion, been wounded, tortured, beaten by the guards, beaten by the people, when he carried the cross and fell under its weight, and, at last, has suffered the agony of crucifixion, lasting for six hours It is true, it is the face of a man who has only just been taken from the cross--that is, still retaining a great deal of warmth and life; rigor mortis had not yet set in, so that there is still a look of suffering on the face of the dead man, as though he were still feeling it (that has been well caught by the artist); on the other hand, the face has not been spared in the least; it is nature itself, and, indeed, any man's corpse would look like that after such suffering. (pp. 446-447)

Like the description of the characters in the novel, this passage reveals Dostoevsky's concern for the meaning which lies beneath the surface. We are given no information regarding

color, line, or composition in the picture. The words lead the reader into the agony which preceded the descent from the cross, and to the question which seems to run like a thread through all of Dostoevsky's works: what is the meaning of suffering?

Rogozhin has told the Prince that he likes to look at this picture. Myshkin is shocked at this, although it seems perfectly consistent with Rogozhin's brooding character, and he tells his friend, "Why, some people may lose their faith by looking at that picture" (p. 251).

Ippolit's interpretation of the picture seems to support the general view of spirituality which runs through the novel in which nature is the all-destroying force which brings down every man.

Here one cannot help being struck with the idea that if death is so horrible and if the laws of nature are so powerful, then how can they be overcome? How can they be overcome when even He did not conquer them, He who overcame nature during his lifetime and whom nature obeyed The picture seems to give expression to the idea of a dark, insolent, and senselessly eternal power to which everything is subordinated, and this idea is suggested to you unconsciously. (p. 147)

To lose one's faith is to rely on the easily available but inadequate information of the senses. Creatures die, bodies decay, and nature claims its own. This is what our senses tell us, and this is what Holbein's painting seems to portray. But Christ rose from the dead, and in the resurrection there is conquest of the laws of nature. There is a spiritual reality which can be discovered, if not through the senses then in some illuminating moment which permits the forgotten language of the

soul to be heard.

The atheist is the utilitarian and the socialist because they focus their attention on the information available to the senses, and do not, or can not, recognize the information of the soul or spirit. The "believer" is the man who, if not a participant in the mystical moment of insight, is at least responsive to the most basic drives and passions of the spirit.

In Flaubert's empiricism we found a remoteness which seems to avoid the humanistic view characteristic of Western literature, which elevates man. In Dostoevsky's view of the inner reality as the ultimate concern for man, there is an evasion of the notion of moral behavior and the place of man's sociality has in the development of his inner life. While Dostoevsky saw, and seemed to overcome, the dichotomies within man's spirit, he fell prey to one outside the narrow limits of the soul. His thinking is dominated by the subjective-objective dualism which he accepts by giving the subjective priority over the objective. His too-easy judgment of socially oriented behavior narrows his concept of reality considerably. The recognition that man is spiritual being is important, but so is the fact that he is a social being. Dostoevsky's emphasis on the one at the expense of the other is a serious and damaging weakness in his concept of reality.

CHAPTER IV

THE SOT-WEED FACTOR

John Barth's The Sot-Weed Factor may be one of the most intricately plotted novels ever written. It is, at the same time, a hilariously funny and profoundly serious image of the world. The mysteries of epistemology, the awesomeness of the objective world, and the unfathomable depths of the soul are treated with mocking laughter, which makes nonsense of the futile quest for certainty.

Barth confronts the traditional views of reality with the "spirit of dubiety."¹ He creates a model of the world that does not contain the radical separations entailed in the dualisms which have dominated western thought. Barth does not assume that there is an independent and separable self opposed to or isolated from other selves or the outside world. He does not accept the notion that there is an absolute good identified with God and an absolute evil identified with Satan. There is no eternal world of values fixed for all time either within or without the universe. The concept of reality presented in this novel reflects the relativism and the consequent "anomic terror"² of a world where absolutes have

¹Beverly Gross, "The Anti-novels of John Barth," Chicago Review, XX (November, 1968), pp. 95-109.

²Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckman, The Social Construction of Reality (New York, 1967), p. 103.

gone down and all old values are in danger. But unlike other writers facing comparable times, like Donne ("Tis all in peeces, all cohaerence gone") or Yeats ("Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold"), Barth takes on his world with a smile, and revels in its confusions.

The plot revolves around Ebenezer Cooke who, armed with a document declaring him poet-laureate of Maryland and with his own declaration of virginity, sets out from London to test his poet-virgin essence in the New World. At the same time Henry Burlingame III, Ebenezer's former teacher, is involved in the quest for his origins in the colonies. Both characters become involved in the complicated political struggles which have brought the forces of the Roman Catholic Lord Baltimore and the revolutionary John Coode into conflict. The key to the plot is Henry Burlingame III, who takes on one different personality after another. Ebenezer finally writes an epic poem on Maryland, only to be misunderstood by his readers, and gives up his virginity to a former London prostitute. Henry, finding his biological roots in the Ahatchwhoop Indian tribe in Maryland, disappears into savagery. Along the way Barth develops an articulate and moving statement regarding the nature of the world. His view is much more inclusive than either Flaubert's or Dostoevsky's. Like Cervantes, Barth's comic sense permits him to see farther than either the remote, god-like Flaubert or the morbidly serious Dostoevsky.

1. The Heraclitean Flux

The image that best characterizes the concept of reality which controls the action of this novel is Heraclitus' river. The nature of reality is its change. We must recognize not only that each step we take is in new waters but that each step is taken by a new "self." Ebenezer attempts to fight against this reality by positing an "essence" for himself, and Henry, by immersing himself in the process. Eben is the poet-virgin against the world; Henry "becomes" each of the disguises he wears.

Before Ebenezer chooses a role for himself he faces the world of infinite possibilities with complete paralysis: there is no reason to choose one course of action over another. Henry attempts to cure him of his "cosmopsis," a philosophical disease,³ by recommending large steps.

Lookie, the day's nigh spent; 'tis gone careening into time forever. Not a tale's length past we lined our bowels with dinner, and already they growl for more. We are dying men, Ebenezer: i'faith, there's time for naught but bold resolves!⁴

The flowing nature of reality which is expressed in Heraclitus'

³Barth has given a description of the disease in another novel. "It is the malady cosmopsis, the cosmic view, that afflicted me. When one has it, one is frozen like the bullfrog when the hunter's light strikes him full in the eyes, only with cosmopsis there is no hunter, and no quick hand to terminate the moment--there's only the light." End of the Road (New York, 1960), p. 60.

⁴John Barth, The Sot-Weed Factor (New York, 1960), p. 136. All subsequent references to this novel will be from this edition, and will be noted in the text with page number in parentheses.

figure functions as the center of Henry's world view.

He later assumes the same characteristics for persons that he claims for time and space. There are not essential selves which experience a constantly changing world. Man himself is a river.

Nay, a man must alter willy-nilly in's flight to the grave; he is a river running seawards, that is ne'er the same from hour to hour. What is there in the Maryland Laureate of the boy I fetched from Magdalene College?
(p. 140)

This is the reality to which Ebenezer must awaken: "the very universe is naught but change and motion" (p. 140).

One of the dominant themes of the novel is the search for identity. Henry is the dramatic portrayal of that quest. Here again he suggests the similarity between that self, or inner man, which is the goal of man's quest, and the nature of the cosmos. When we have come at last to that core of human being we will find the same thing we find when we look out into the vast reaches of space.

Here we sit upon a blind rock hurtling through a vacuum, racing to the grave. 'Tis our fate to search, Eben, and do we seek our soul, what we find is a piece of that same black Cosmos whence we sprang and through which we fall: the infinite wind of space. (p. 364)

Words like "soul" and "self" refer to processes, and do not have static, unchanging referents. The recognition of this fact is disruptive to the poet's thinking. Henry, proceeding from the inner quest to the outer experience, tells Ebenezer, "Forget the word sky, . . . 'tis a blinder to your eyes. There is no dome of heaven yonder" (p. 366). The fact that categorization is a convention imposed on experience by man is

expressed by Heraclitus. "To God all things are beautiful, good and right; men, on the other hand, deem some things right and others wrong." "The way up and the way down are one and the same."⁵ Shriven of his old metaphysics, Eben sees the stars in a new way, and Barth illustrates the utter meaninglessness of the reality within which he is creating his characters.

Viewed in this manner, the constellations lost their sense entirely; their spurious character revealed itself, as did the false presupposition of the celestial navigator, and Ebenezer felt bereft of orientation. He could no longer think of up and down; the stars were simply out there, as well below him as above, and the wind appeared to howl not from the Bay but from the firmament itself, from the endless corridors of space.

"Madness!" Henry whispered.

Ebenezer's stomach churned; he swayed in the saddle and covered his eyes. For a swooning moment before he turned away it seemed that he was heels over head on the bottom of the planet, looking down on the stars instead of up, and that only by dint of clutching his legs about the roan mare's girth and holding fast to the saddlebow with both his hands did he keep from dropping headlong into those vasty reaches! (p. 366)

The terrifying exhilaration of this experience of relativity which characterizes our time is intensified by being placed in the eighteenth century and by being part of an extremely tightly structured novel. In this literary contest the experience of chaos and disorder is striking.

This is the nature of existence into which man is born. There are no essential categories. Language, especially philosophical language, provides blinders for men. There is

⁵Quoted in Alan Watts, The Two Hands of God: The Myths of Polarity (Toronto, Ontario, 1969), p. 47.

no constant world or any constant self to oppose it: "the very universe is naught but change and motion." The Heraclitean view of the world as process, which was eclipsed by the dualism of Platonic philosophy in the ancient world, is here reinstated. The world views of Madame Bovary and The Idiot are antithetical to this conception. Cervantes' perspectivism recognizes the flow of the world but insists on keeping some notion of a "real" and supporting force for what we experience as change.

2. The Quest for Identity

How then, in such a world, does one engage in a quest for one's identity? Where, if everything including the self is in a constant state of flux, does one discover his identity? Henry, who recognizes the relativity of things, is the character seeking to find out who he is. His life is devoted to discovering his identity, and much of the machinery of the novel turns on the activities of this search. In the end, when he has learned of his Indian parentage, he knows no more than when he began; he merely has a new role, that of the American savage, to work out in his own artistic fashion.

It is Ebenezer who assumes an identity, and assumes it without reservation, who is always being leveled by the notion that he does not really have any certainty about who he is. Leaving Malden, the tobacco plantation he was to inherit from his father, he meditates on the morning star, creating a poetic vision of the star leading him to his destiny as the star over Bethlehem had led the wise men many years before.

There's a figure Henry Burlingame would make mincemeat

of I know not whether I am Magus, Messiah, Lazarus, or the Prodigal. (p. 507)

At the same time that he continues to proclaim himself the poet-virgin, he is stricken with doubt about his "real" self. He is not sure how he is to think of himself because he has not seen that each of the selves which present themselves is a real one.

Earlier in the novel Ebenezer had attempted to refute Henry's notion of the Heraclitean flux.

Nay, this very flux and change you make so much of: how can we speak of it at all, be it ne'er so swift or slow, were't not that we remember how things were before? Thy memory served as thy credentials, did it not? 'Tis the house of Identity, the Soul's dwelling place! Thy memory, my memory, the memory of the race: 'tis the constant from which we measure change; the sun. Without it, all were Chaos right enough. (p. 141)

In an effort to find some constant by which to measure the constant change, Ebenezer has settled on the notion of the constant self which maintains itself intact through memory. Henry charges that his friend has been "seduced by metaphors, as was Descartes of old," and that there are four solid arguments against the ghost in the machine, the metaphor which controls Eben's thought.⁶ He claims that (1) memory is not a continuous thread, that it has breaks in it: (2) there is no

⁶ The metaphor is Gilbert Ryle's, who uses it to label the "Official Doctrine" of Cartesian dualism. "I shall often speak of it, with deliberate abusiveness, as 'the dogma of the Ghost in the Machine' It represents the facts of mental life as if they belonged to one logical type or category (or range of types or categories), when they actually belong to another." Gilbert Ryle, The Concept of Mind (New York, 1949), pp. 15-16.

criterion for settling disputes when there are disagreements between memories: (3) we tend to call up from memory those events we wish to remember, and suppress the ones we do not wish to remember; and (4) memory tends to embellish and change the things it retains. Where Don Quixote says of his objectification of reality, "God only knows if Dulcinea exists or not." Henry will say that only a fool is convinced of the existence of ghosts in the human machine. There is no identity outside behavior, no hidden self lurking beneath the skin. This denial is shown in Henry's constantly shifting character and in the utter frustration encountered by Ebenezer in his assumption that there is a hidden inner being, the essence or soul of man.

When Ebenezer becomes completely disoriented by all the philosophical discussion, he calls for a halt, and claims nonetheless to assert that he is himself and Henry is, in fact himself. Henry accepts this position, and points out that man's every assertion of self is an act of faith.

"True enough," Burlingame said good humoredly. "I wished only to establish that all assertions of thee and me, e'en to oneself, are acts of faith, impossible to verify."

"I grant it; I grant it. 'Tis established like the--" He waved his hand uncertainly. "Marry, your discourse hath robbed me of similes: I know of naught immutable and sure!"

"'Tis the first step on the road to Heaven," Burlingame smiled. (p. 143)

Dostoevsky had said as much in his analysis of the self, but in his profound seriousness, and in his allegiance to the dualistic theological traditions of Christianity, he felt obliged to insist on something down there to oppose the

external world, some mystery to which theological language could refer. Barth, a post-Christian⁷ writer, does not feel that necessity, and looks at the old language habits as a bit of good humor.

When Ebenezer looked at the stars of the constellations, he found that there was really no pattern there of bear or hunter or drinking cup; those were imposed designs, accepted as conventions by man. When he searches out the self, he finds nothing there but the conventions of behavior. This interpretation of the self is consistent with the basic concept of reality which controls the philosophical patterns of the novel.

3. Ebenezer Cooke and the Essential Self

Ebenezer's attempt to define himself absolutely reveals the outlines of the philosophical relativism of the novel. He is described in the first pages of the book as being incapable of taking any action on his own because he considers every alternative equally appealing. Henry recommends "bold resolves," but his former student seems hardly capable of reaching such decisions until he is confronted with the body of the prostitute Joan Toast. It is at this moment that Ebenezer makes a choice which thrusts him into the stream of life. He chooses innocence by refusing to take Joan's body and by proclaiming his love for her. In his choice he assumes he has

⁷ The term seems to have been used first by Gabriel Vahanian. He suggests that both theologically and culturally the modern world is expressed most accurately in terms not identifiable with Christianity. Gabriel Vahanian, "This Post-Christian Era," Nation (December 12, 1959), pp. 438-441.

discovered the "essence" of his identity, a final definition which will give him the needed direction in life. Joan Toast's naked body stands before him, and he refuses her, discovering his "true self." After she leaves his room he ponders his new life.

What am I? What am I? Virgin, Sir! Poet, sir! I am a virgin and a poet; less than mortal and more; not a man, but Mankind! I shall regard my innocence as badge of my strength and proof of my calling: let her who's worthy of't take it from me! (pp. 71-72)

This then becomes his citadel, his central self. His every action is intended to preserve this new self and to redefine it after each encounter with a reality which does not admit of such essences. But the poet is not aware of this real world except as it batters away at the protective walls of his created self. He is in a constant state of perturbation at the failure of his defined self, but he continually rejects the relativity which confronts him. His innocence is constantly shown to be identical with his ignorance, and his virginity becomes more and more a matter of mere convention. "What is the difference," asks Henry, "'twixt innocence and ignorance, pray, save that one is Latin and the other Greek? In substance they are the same: innocence is ignorance" (p. 408).

Ebenezer's rejection of Joan Toast reveals the shallowness and essential non-human character of his avowed innocence. When John McEvoy, Joan's pimp, arrives to collect payment from the poet for the time his woman has spent, Ebenezer refuses to pay--on principle--claiming that he truly loves her. "To you, haply," he says to McEvoy, Joan Toast is a

whore; to me she is a principle" (p. 75). McEvoy, a man acquainted with the real world of motion and change, replies, "To me she is a woman, . . . To you she's a hallucination" (p. 76). Ebenezer's principle of innocence becomes the most destructive force in the novel.

Ebenezer does not want to give any practical definition to his essence. He takes the position, which must be considered faulty in the world of The Sot-Weed Factor, that being has priority, somehow, over action, that essence precedes existence.

Henry, in the guise of Lord Baltimore, asks what the word "poet" means when added to one's name. He knows, he says, how to treat Ebenezer Cooke, Tinker or Ebenezer Cooke, Physician. He even would know how to react to Ebenezer Cooke, Gentleman. He wants to know what poets do, what kinds of work to hire them for. Ebenezer, who has written only one poem at this moment of his career, replies, " . . . 'tis of no moment what I do; poet is what I am" (p. 85). Ebenezer is not willing to say that he is a poet also, along with a host of other attributes; he desires to define himself absolutely. It is the label which dominates his personality, not those attributes to which those labels direct our attention.

I prize it not as a virtue, but as the very emblem of my self, and when I call me virgin and poet 'tis not more boast than who should say I'm male and English. (p. 172)

• Ebenezer's virgin innocence is confronted with constant harassment. He is brought to the verge of a rape when the men of a pirate ship on which he is a captive board another vessel

carrying a boatload of prostitutes to the colonies. His natural desires are aroused at the sight of all the sexual activity around him. The woman he almost attacks is, unknown to Eben, none other than Joan Toast of London. He is almost ravished, himself, by the homosexual men on board the pirate ship. He is tempted into bed by a loathesome swineherd who, unrecognized by Eben, is none other than Joan Toast of London. When in disguise as a mill-inspector for the province (a betrayal of his vow never to disguise his true identity), he is left alone with the wife of the miller, Ebenezer is sexually aroused, but persists in his virginity. But by now he is beginning to see the shallowness of his unyielding allegiance to a principle as the heart of his innocence. He admits that his "innocence had come to be limited to the mere technical fact of his virginity -- which fact itself . . . was not as unqualified as he might wish" (pp. 669-70). Relativizing his principle completely, the miller's wife points out to the poet, "The truth of't is then, this precious Innocence you cling to hath been picked at and pecked at till you've scarce a meager tit-bit of't left" (p. 670). Later Ebenezer confesses, "My innocence these days is severely technical" (p. 752).

The poet's virginity is the symbol to himself of his innocence, and it is this insistence on his own innocence, regardless of what is happening around him, that brings harm to those he loves. Besides his indirect destruction of Joan

Toast, he brings about the transfer of his father's sot-weed plantation into the hands of those who are attempting to destroy Maryland. When Ebenezer looks back over his "innocent" career, he begins to see something of the ravages caused by his allegiance to principle.

'Twas an outrage against Justice I sought to rectify Howbeit, when my innocence was stripped from me I saw I had not rectified but perpetuated injustice: not only did I grant what was not mine to grant -- I mean morally, not legally -- but in so doing I ruined a good and faithful man, Ben Spurdance; and indirectly, by giving this house to William Smith to turn into a den of viciousness, I ruined many another man as well, for which God forgive me. (p. 772)

He comes at last to see the chaos and meaninglessness which lies at the heart of human experience. Just as he had experienced the nausea of directionlessness when he contemplated the stars and their incomprehensible distances, he now sees the emptiness of the soul and the falseness of the constellations called the self and its innocence.

4. Henry Burlingame III, The Protean Man

Henry Burlingame III, alias Lord Baltimore, alias Peter Sayer, alias Tim Mitchell, alias Nick Lowe, etc., is the embodiment of the relativistic world view developed in *The Sot-Weed Factor*. He is Everyman, not in the sense that he embodies essentially human traits which are universally affirmed, but in the sense that he is

capable of taking on the behavior patterns of any number of different individuals and different cultures. This "taking on" is not merely the disguising of his "real" features. Henry, in his thirst for experience, becomes the roles he adopts. Barth makes the transformations so complete that we are never sure if some new character introduced into the plot will turn out to be Henry or not. Ebenezer is frequently confused by the shifting personality of his former teacher. When he first meets Tim Mitchell and learns that it is the same body which had functioned as his tutor years before, Eben asks: "Is't once, or twice, or thrice I am deceived . . .? Is't Burlingame that stands before me now, or was't Burlingame I left in Plymouth? Or are the twain of you imposters" (p. 349)? Tim (the old Henry) states his own attitude in response, and this statement is a good description of the Heraclitean concept of the world expressed in the novel.

'Tis but to say what oft I've said to you ere now, Eben: your true and constant Burlingame lives only in your fancy, as doth the pointed order of the world. In fact you see a Heraclitean flux: whether 'tis we who shift and alter and dissolve; or you whose lens changes color, field, and focus; or both together. The upshot is the same, and you may take it or reject it. (p. 349)

The setting for this expression of reality is the

eighteenth century, but the mood is contemporary. Henry's constantly developing self, his search for and adoption of a variety of roles, and his rootlessness is characteristic of much of the analyses of the modern "age of anxiety."

Who grieves for me, prithee, or cares a fig be
I fop or philosopher? Who sets me goals to turn
my back on, or values to thumb my nose at? In
fine, sir, what business have I in the world,
what place to flee from, what credentials to
despise? Had I a home I'd likely leave it; a
family alive or dead I'd likely scorn it, and
wander a stranger in alien towns, But what a
burden to be a stranger to the world at large,
and have no link with history! 'Tis as if I'd
sprung de novo like a maggot out of meat, or
dropped from the sky. Had I the tongue of
angels I ne'er could tell you what a loneli-
ness it is! (pp. 145-46)

Part of Henry's search is the recovery of Captain John Smith's Secret Historie of the Voiage Up the Bay of Chesapeake, which is a bawdy account of Smith's sexual potency and his adventures with Indian maidens in the New World. This account is written on the reverse side of governmental documents important to the political turmoil of eighteenth-century Maryland. Barth deals with the imaginative and mythic qualities of history, and we see Henry, with his doubts about having no connection with history, becoming crucially involved with the developing history of the new colonies. Henry feels alienated; he experiences that special kind of anxiety which seems to be characteristic of urban-

ized technological society. Barth is not a reactionary here. He does not pretend that it is all so serious that tragedy must emerge from the situation. He does not retreat to some unfathomable mystery of the spirit which will lead us to some needed redemption. Bold resolves are the only redemptive acts: "A pox on all steps but great ones!" Henry's great step is his decision to locate himself in the history of Maryland, to find the missing link between himself and Henry Burlingame I, a portly voyager with Captain John Smith and author of The Privie Journall of Sir Henry Burlingame.

His desire develops well beyond the search for his own history. He becomes an insatiable quester after new experiences. Ebenezer charges him with being a glutton for adventure. Henry responds, "Mayhaps I am . . . a glutton for the great world, of which I ne'er can see and learn enough" (p. 160). Sexually he is attracted to male and female, man and animal. Nothing is perverse to him. Ebenezer calls him the "embodiment of cosmic lust" (p. 425). He is unwilling to accept one part of the world as having priority over another.

I love no part of the world, as you might have guessed, but the entire parti-colored whole, with all her poles and contradictories. Coode and Baltimore alike I am enamored of, whate'er the twain might stand for; and you know already what various ground hath held my seed. (p. 519)

For much of the time Coode and Baltimore are considered the embodiments of good and evil respectively. Henry accepts both of them and, in fact, has at one time or another acted out their roles in the political confusion of Maryland.

Henry seeks out the apparent contradictions of the world to bring them together.

I am Suitor of Totality, Embracer of Contradictories
Husband to all Creation, the Cosmic Lover! Henry
More and Isaac Newton are my pimps and aides-de-chambres :
I have known my great Bride part by splendid part,
and have made love to her disjecta membra, her sundry
pieces; but I crave the Whole -- the tenon in the
mortise, the jointure of polarities, the seamless
universe. . . . (p. 526)

Unlike Dostoevsky, who could see perverse dichotomies at one level, but built his view of reality on the acceptance of one outside his vision, Barth seems to pursue the traditional dualisms to their destruction, and develops a vision which accepts all opposites. He rejects the meaningless as well as the absolute, attempting to express both his experience of chaos and of order. Toward the end of the novel Henry makes the half-serious proposal to Ebenezer and Anna to buy a piece of land in Pennsylvania and open a convent where his religion, Cosmophilism, will prevail, a religion for "thwarted seekers after Truth" (p. 752).

In a world where all things change constantly

anyone who is a seeker after Truth will become automatically thwarted. The one satisfactory response to such a world is to celebrate it, as Henry does. He dramatizes the positive response to an everchanging world by immersing himself in it, while Ebenezer attempted to transcend the world by adopting specific virtues and activities as absolute. Henry merely disappears from the plot of the novel to continue, the reader presumes, to adopt one new role after another. Ebenezer's absolutes are gradually destroyed when he yields his virginity to the syphilitic and dying Joan Toast.

5. The Moral Life in a Chaotic World

There is no force or influence in the world that dictates what is right for man. In every case an individual makes decisions for himself. He will yield to some authority or attempt to carve out a moral space for himself: "If you'd live in the world, my friend, you must dance to some other fellow's tune or call your own and try to make the whole world step to't" (pp. 349-50). Henry is the absolute relativist, and he is constantly making moral decisions for himself and others. Ebenezer is a seeker after the rules which

will give him certainty. As a result he is always dancing to some other fellow's tune. Henry frequently becomes involved in "wrong" activity which produces good for other characters. Ebenezer's insistence on choosing for the "good" (according to his principles) usually produces evil for others.

Even Quassapelagh, the savage, recognizes the pragmatic quality of moral choices. This aging chieftan who is, in fact, Henry's father, and is his likeness in many ways, asks, "Who knows what deeds the gods regard as crimes . . . until they take revenge" (pp. 608-9)? The conflict in values between white civilization and Indian tribal life emphasizes the ethical relativism of The Sot-Weed Factor.

The question of ethical priorities is treated in a rather long speech by Ebenezer on the morality of motive and the morality of deed. The poet, his servant, John McEvoy, and a sailing captain have been captured by the rebellious Indians. They have been scheduled to die when Quassapelagh learns that Ebenezer has some news of his two missing sons. The chief grants the poet a month to bring one of his sons back to the Indian village; Ebenezer asks if John McEvoy may join his search. The chief grants permission, and the two men set out for Maryland. Eben promises to return after one month to die with his friends if he is unsuccessful in finding

either of the children of the chief. McEvoy wonders why he has been chosen to escape, since he and Eben are enemies. As he ponders this problem and asks himself about returning to his own death, Ebenezer speaks to him about how individuals tend to resort to moralities of motive to defend their own cowardice.

A fart for these airy gonads of the soul; lay your flesh-and-blood privates on the line, as I have, and we're quit for all eternity How's that for a pathway, John McEvoy? I'Christ, 'tis a grande avenue, a camino real, a very boulevard; at one end lies your Slough of False Integrity -- to call it by its name on the Map of Truth -- and at the other stands the storied Town . . . where Responsibility rears her Golden towers. (p. 617)

Even the poet recognizes the priority of deeds over motives as a means of maintaining integrity. He has learned much from his tutor, not only about the nature of reality but about the means for getting along within it as well.

But Henry is always conscious of the meaninglessness which skirts every moment of decision. The limitlessness of the cosmos is paralleled by the limitless nature of moral decision-making. The image of life as highway would never occur to Henry. He is conscious of life as a limitless sea with no center line or guideposts. Life is a chaotic sea where man nevertheless sets his sails on the basis of a bold

resolve. Outside the decision there are no imposed patterns of behavior. The alternative to decision-making is madness.

One must needs make and seize his soul, and then cleave fast to't, or go babbling in the corner; one must choose his gods and devils on the run, quill his own name upon the universe, and declare, "'Tis I, and the world stands such-a-way!" One must assert, assert, assert, or go screaming mad. What other course remains? (p. 365)

Just so, Henry asserts himself constantly and in ever-changing patterns of behavior.

This is the nature of man's morality, then -- he asserts himself to avoid the "anomic terror." It was from this directionless state that Ebenezer was saved when he chose the role of virgin-poet for himself. This assertion is no more or less valuable than that of governor, plantation owner, or adventurer. Henry recognizes it as one of the roles men adopt to stay alive. Ebenezer's only weakness is that he does not fully understand the nature of his decision. He feels that there is something inherently good in the role. His subsequent creation of a principle which denies the shifting nature of experience causes him to reduce every situation to the scope of his necessarily limited rules of behavior. As the novel wears on and Eben's principle wears thin, he becomes more and more aware

of the philosophical implications of his decision.

When erst I entered the lists of life, . . .
 Virginity was a silken standard that I waved,
 all bright and newly stitched. 'Tis weather-
 blast and run now, and so rent by the shocks of
 combat e'en its bearer might mistake it for a
 boot rag. Notwithstanding which, 'tis a banner
 still, and hath earned this final dignity of
 standards: since I must lose it, I'll not abandon
 it by the way, but surrender it with honor in
 the field. (p. 671)

It is in such adherence to a role that gives man his
 dignity, and here even the foolish poet takes on a
 noble aspect. As Anna and Ebenezer are captured by
 the pirates, Scurry and Slye, they philosophize about
 their places in the world and their imminent deaths,
 pondering on some of the sayings of their former
 teacher.

Granted that the Earth, as Burlingame was fond of
 pointing out, is a "dust-mote whirling through the
 night," there was something brave, defiantly human,
 about the passengers on this dust-mote who perished
 for some dream of Value. If from Andromache's
 point of view they seemed insane, from their own
 they were godlike; her "Nature" was precisely
 their enemy, and her fatalism a surrender to
 oblivion. In a word, their behavior was quixotic:
 to die, to resist death, even to raise a finger for
 any cause was to pennon one's lance with the
 riband of Purpose, so the poet judged, and had
 about it the same lunacy of a tilt with Manchegan
 windmills. (p. 732)

To choose and to act out the implications of one's
 choice is quixotic. It is the elaboration of an impos-
 sible dream. In a world where no values exist separate

from the world as a whole there is a kind of folly and a kind of heroism in choosing or creating a value.

In the world Barth created the words "folly" and "heroism" will have to be hedged about with qualifications. The adoption of either one of the values as an absolute would be a severe limitation in grappling with human experience. It would be falling into the trap of the traditional dualisms. In this Heraclitean world one recognizes the humanness of the concepts of good and evil. The radical separation of good and evil as expressed in traditional dualisms is challenged in the person of Henry Burlingame as he acts out the roles of the historical characters, John Coode and Lord Baltimore.

6. History as Myth

Lord Baltimore is the Roman Catholic governor of Maryland. His political efforts are intended to transcend any Protestant-Catholic conflict which might flare up. He is a humanist who would have Ebenezer Cooke sing the praises of the wonders of Maryland. John Coode is the rebellious spirit who has tried every treacherous method thinkable to discredit Baltimore and any or all of his supporters.

The first doubt cast on the morality of these two historical figures comes when we learn that the extended meeting between Baltimore and Ebenezer, when

Baltimore explained the troubled political situation in Maryland, was a masquerade. It was not Baltimore at all, but Henry Burlingame playing that role. We learn later that Henry has acted out the role of John Coode while acting as an agent for the governor. It turns out, in fact, that not one of the characters in the book has ever met either one of these persons face to face. There are some characters who even doubt that they exist. The whole situation becomes even more confused when we learn that it is Baltimore who is promoting the opium trade and using infected prostitutes to weaken the populace. He intends to create a situation in which an attack by aroused Indians with support from the French will result in an easy victory for them, and he will step in as a representative of the Pope as a ruler over the Roman Catholic empire in the New World. John Coode, it would seem, has been trying to stave off this threat.

The traditional Christian view of good being invested in God and evil in Satan and the ultimate separation of the two is here challenged by the "mythic" Burlingame. Henry provides us with all we know of either Coode or Baltimore, the representations of good and evil and evil and good respectively. To imagine Barth's Divine Comedy is to envision a Satan who winks while gnawing on sinners, and a rose in Paradise made of plastic.

Barth seems to suggest that history lies in the hands of those who use it, that "history" like "soul" is an invention or an assertion. Henry says so much when he describes these complications to Ebenezer.

History, in short, is like those waterholes I have heard of in the wilds of Africa; the most various beasts may drink there side by side with equal nourishment. (p. 515)

Barth invents a history of Maryland to give a social-moral setting for his characters. The value structure which derives from this history is completely ambiguous. There are no specific rules for behavior which can be derived from this historical material. Just as men take on specific roles and act according to them, so history takes on the values of the men who create it. The "facts" of history are equally subservient to all who would use them. They provide the building blocks for the mythic structures according to which men view their worlds. In The Sot-Weed Factor, historical fact and historical fiction are fused.

The notion of relativity is supported by equal value being given to all events in the history of man.

A question like, "What were the causes of the fall of Rome?" is ultimately unanswerable in a world like Barth's. When Ebenezer finds himself bound to a post in an Indian village, waiting to die, he ponders the causes of his situation. Was it the consequences of this or that event

in the past that brings him to this situation? He cannot locate the simple cause or set of causal events.

Was he not, in short, bound to his post not merely by the sum of human history, but even by the history of the entire universe, as by a chain of numberless links no one of which was more culpable than any other? It seemed to Ebenezer that he was, and that McEvoy was not more or less to blame than was Lord Baltimore, for example, who had colonized Maryland, or the Genoese adventurer who had discovered the New World to the Old. (p. 579)

The selection of any set of "facts" for the interpretation of historical events will always be arbitrary and partial.

Henry's primary quest, as he operates within the political framework of the novel, is for the records of the Baltimore government which contain evidence for the indictment of John Coode as traitor. But no one ever learns what this evidence is because these records are kept, for reason of the shortage of paper in the colonies, on the reverse side of an old manuscript bearing the title Secret Historie of the Voiage Up the Bay of Chesapeake. On the other side of the historical document is found the material which gives some measure of structure to Henry's chaotic life. His search for history turns out to be a search for self-support. It is the waterhole from which he hopes to gain sustenance.

Barth leaves the reader with the notion that the philosophers of history are much too serious, and that their serious concerns are highly comic. The poet discusses the possibility of the same person's being captured by pirates twice in his lifetime.

He went on . . . to speak of sundry theories of history -- the retrogressive, held by Dante and Hesiod; the dramatic, held by the Hebrews and the Christian fathers; the progressive, held by Virgil; the cyclical, held by Plato and Ecclesiasticus; the undulatory, and even the vortical hypothesis entertained, according to Henry Burlingame, by a gloomy neo-Platonist of Christ's College, who believed that the cyclic periods of history were growing ever shorter and thus that at some not-unpredictable moment in the future of the universe would go rigid and explode, just as the legendary bird called Ouida (so said Burlingame) was reputed to fly in ever-diminishing circles until at the end he disappeared into his own fundament. (p. 728)

He suggests that if you are a "true and proper cyclist" you will not worry about the pirates, since if you were saved from them before you will be saved again. Not much of this makes sense, but it does quiet the nerves of the anxious listeners.

History, in The Sot-Weed Factor, is a means of moral and metaphysical support. It takes on the quality of myth as it brings together in a unified whole the dualities of good and evil, self and non-self, and fact and fiction.

7. Myth and History

Anna and Eben Cooke work out their lives in The

Sot-Weed Factor as allegorical figures representing the temptation and fall of man. With a few phonetic changes, Anna and Eben easily become Adam and Eve. While the focus is on Eben, Anna plays an important role in the plot and the mythic structure of the novel. Eben's virginity is always played off against the unconscious incestuous attraction he has for his sister. The myth of Adam and Eve and the mythical treatment of twins becomes the basic framework within which the two characters work out their histories.

As children Anna and Eben enjoyed one another to the exclusion of all other playmates. They worked diligently, under the tutorship of Henry Burlingame III, playing out the roles of historical and mythic characters. Barth describes one of these play sessions.

They might spend an autumn morning playing at Adam and Eve out in the orchard, for example, and when at dinner their father forbade them to return there, on account of the mud, Ebenezer would reply with a knowing nod, "mud's not the worst of't: I was a snake as well." And little Anna, when she had got her breath back, would declare, "It didn't frighten me, but Eben's forehead hath been sweating ever since," and pass her brother the bread. (p. 16)

Ebenezer continues playing the unfallen Adam into his adult life, assuming that maintaining his virginity is the means to preserving his Edenic innocence.

The bludgeoning of experience brings the poet to

recognize that he has been long out of the garden. When the twins face death at the hands of the pirates, Anna still longs for innocence, but Ebenezer sees into the impossibility of such a state.

She wet his hand with tears. "If I must suffer what I shall, then I amend my wish: I wish we two were the only folk on earth!" "Eve and Adam?" The poet's face burned. "So be it; but we must be God as well, and build a universe to hold our Garden," (p. 733)

The kind of paradise Anna longs for cannot exist in the world as it is presently constructed. It would demand a new universe, a new beginning in creation to provide a place for such innocence. Man would have to become God. Innocence is not an available option for man. Wane as he may the symbol of his purity, he is always a fallen creature.

Henry describes the ejection from the womb as the expulsion from paradise.

What is't you describe, my friend, if not man's lot? He is by mindless lust engendered and by mindless wrench expelled, from the Eden of the womb to the motley, mindless world. He is Chance's fool, the toy of the aimless Nature -- a mayfly flitting down the winds of Chaos! (p. 364)

His interpretation of the world is consistent with the concept of reality provided in the novel as a whole. There is no one act or set of attitudes which constitute the fall. A man cannot look to some special negative

case to explain himself, either as good or evil. Man loses the lifeless and irrelevant innocence of the womb to participate in the processes of the world.

Ebenezer, on the other hand, holds to an interpretation of the fall which is much narrower, though consistent with his essentialist morality. His interpretation is not a means of explaining man's experience as much as it is a means for supporting his own notion of his own innocence.

What knowledge is it, Timmy, that is root and stem of all? What vile experience sows the seeds of death in men? I'faith, how did it slip your mind, that are so big with seed yourself and have broadcast in the furrows of two hemispheres? 'Twas carnal knowledge, Tim boy, experience of the flesh, that caused man's fall! If I am Adam, I am Eveless, and Adam Eveless is immortal and unfallen. In fine, sir, my estate is lost, but I am not, and there's an' end on't! (p. 424)

Since Ebenezer has chosen virginity as his essential moral virtue he would see losing that virginity as the ultimate evil. As a consequence he develops a theological interpretation which supports his own virtue. The egocentricity of his position is obvious.

Innocence, or the insistence upon maintaining one's innocence, is the central part of the fall of man. Henry insisted from the beginning that this innocence would lead to Ebenezer's destruction.

I mean 'tis Adam's story thou'rt re-enacting
 Ye set great store upon your innocence, and by
 reason of't have lost your earthly paradise.
 (p. 423)

After all the suffering that has taken place because
 of him, Ebenezer sees the truth of Henry's position.

That is the crime I stand indicted for
 the crime of innocence, whereof the knowledged
 must bear the burthen. There's the true Original
 Sin our souls are born in: not that Adam learned
 but that he had to learn -- in short, that he was
 innocent. (p.788)

Man is not born into the world with morality built in,
 with some innate ability to respond to a "natural law."
 He is lawless and his world is lawless. It is this
 condition which determines man's original sin. It
 is Ebenezer's pretense that such chaos does not exist,
 that he has discovered the key to a virtuous life,
 that constitutes his sin. He attempts to perpetuate
 in his life style the very feature of his existence
 which is the "original sin."

Another mythic tradition which works itself out
 in the developing relationship between Anna and Eben
 is the ancient concern for the mystery of twin births.
 In an astounding chapter on the topic, Barth introduces
 Henry as a Geminologist, who delivers a long lecture to
 Ebenezer on the historical and philosophical implications
 of twin births, especially male and female twins. The
 main thrust of his exposition is in tune with Barth's

concern for demolishing dichotomies which categorize our thinking. Henry treats the union of polarities and their separation as being essential to the understanding of the ancient myths regarding twins and the myth of the fall.

In every land and time folk have maintained that what we see as two are the fallen halves of some ancient one -- that night and day, Heaven and Earth, or man and woman were long since severed by their sinful natures, and that not till Kingdom Come will the fallen twain be a blessed one. (p. 522)

Henry had earlier seen the separation from the womb as the fall, and here extends that notion to the separation of ideological categories and the sexes. Anna and Eben represent that cosmic separation of the one. Their sexual attraction is necessary and incestuous, just as innocence is necessarily longed for and, since it is the heart of original sin, the producer of evil.

Henry is that force that longs for the union of polarities. He sees Anna and Eben as the symbolic representation of the separated world. He says to them, "I crave the Whole -- the tennon in the mortise, the jointure of polarities, the seamless universe -- whereof you twain are token," in coito" (p. 526)! Burlingame uses this symbolic sexual union as the symbol for the "seamless universe," and he becomes god-like in his

sexual attraction to both of them alike. Henry's ambiguous sexuality is directly related to his role of synthesizer of opposites. He reflects some of the mythological functions of the Bodhisattva.

Mythological images often imply that holiness is hermaphroditic, for if holiness is wholeness the complete human being is at once male and female -- the man who has developed his feminine aspect, and the woman her masculine. In Buddhist iconography, therefore, the Bodhisattva is very frequently a hermaphrodite.⁸

These sexual attractions -- Ebenezer's for Anna, and Henry's for the two of them -- which represent the highest symbolic relationship with the universe are both under condemnation by the conventions of the society for which Barth writes.

Barth has built the fictional histories around some ancient myths of great power. In a very contemporary view of the world, he turns these myths to reflect our present distaste for dualism and categorization. Without yielding to any kind of dichotomy, Barth seems to accept with equanimity the relativity of human experience.

8 Watts, The Two Hands of God, p. 183.

8. Tales Within the Tale

Like Cervantes, Barth is a masterful story-teller. Each new character is introduced as a person with a tale to tell, each one bearing some relation to the experiences of Ebenezer Cooke. It is interesting to note that just as Cervantes included one story which did not deal with characters directly encountered in the narrative of the novel and which was central in the thematic development of Don Quixote, so Barth included material unrelated to the development of the plot which illuminates much of the thematic material of The Sot-Weed Factor.

The first of the literary intrusions is the narrative of an opium-induced dream. Ebenezer has arrived for the first time at Malden, the tobacco plantation which he was supposed to manage. Because of legal difficulties and Ebenezer's bad judgment, the plantation has been taken over by men who are attempting to destroy Maryland by widening the opium trade and spreading venereal disease through hired prostitutes. To quiet Ebenezer, who is being forced to marry Susan Warren, who is, unknown to the poet, Joan Toast ravaged by hard times and syphilis, he is given a strange pill which turns out to be opium. He

is catapulted into a strange and exotic vision.

He finds himself before twin mountain peaks seeking Parnassus. As he looks up the mountainsides, he sees human forms desperately trying to scale the tops.

There are barriers and temptations along the way which give the scene a purgatorial atmosphere.

Here and there, for example, were groups of women who, whether in the manner of Circe or of Calypso, invited the climbers from their objective; beds and couches, set beside tables of food and wine, lulled the weary men who lay in them to a slumber deep as death; treadmills there were in abundance, and false signposts that promised the summit but led in fact (as could be clearly observed from the valley) to precipices, deserts, jungles, jails, and lunatic asylums. (p. 479)

By some miraculous means Ebenezer is carried immediately to the top of one of the peaks, where he confronts an aged man (presumably God) paring his toenails. The traveler asks which mountain he is on. He wishes to know if the mountain is Parnassus. The old man answers, "Ye have me there. . . . Sometimes I think they're both the same. What doth it matter?" (p. 480).

Ebenezer is taken with the view of all the bodies struggling to gain the peak.

"'Sbody, but aren't they silly-looking!" he exclaimed. "And how ill-mannered, pushing and breaking wind on one another!"

"They've little else to do," the old man observed.

"But there's naught here to climb for: you've said that yourself!"

"Aye, nor aught anywhere else, either. They'd as well climb mountains as sit still and die."

"I'm going to jump!" Ebenezer declared suddenly. "I've no wish to see these things a moment more!"

"No reason why ye oughtn't, nor any why ye ought."

The Laureate made no further move to jump, but sat on the edge of the peak and sighed, "'Tis all most frightfully empty, is't not?"

"Empty indeed," the old man said, "but there's naught o' good or bad in that. Why sigh?"

"Why not?" asked Ebenezer.

"But why?" repeated the old man. (p. 481)

The world of The Sot-Weed Factor is just such a place.

✓ At the top of whatever peak man tries to climb is an old man paring his toenails. There is no ultimate Truth or understanding. Standing at the top, viewing the meaninglessness of the activity below, Ebenezer finds that there are not grounds for jumping or for not jumping. It is an amazing vision. It is altogether empty and nihilistic and, at the same time, completely comic. It denies every accepted civilized value and becomes the stimulation for Ebenezer's poem "The Sot-Weed Factor," in which he describes the meanness of the state of Maryland.

The allegorical dream or vision is really central in the developing concept of reality in Barth's novel. The world is a valueless and meaningless creation. There are no ultimate justifications for behavior other than the ego-supporting devices of philosophy and religion. In this cosmic setting man makes wondrous pretense, and

in so doing evokes Barth's comic response.

The other literary intrusion is a story told by a young woman who turns out to be Ebenezer's half-sister. While the story provides a name which identifies the teller as the daughter of Andrew Cooke, it is about material unrelated to the plot and is told in an entirely different fashion. It is given a title, "The Tale of the Invulnerable Castle," and it begins, "once on a time" It is the story of a Monsieur Edouard who came to Maryland to carve out a place for himself in the New World. He begins, with the fear of the white man who has stolen the Indians' land, to build himself a castle in the wilds of Maryland. He takes every precaution he can think of to build an edifice safe from savages. After each new safety measure is completed, he is convinced that he can live in peace, unharmed by the Indians surrounding him.

Is it not a pleasant thing to be altogether secure from the onslaughts of the salvage? Is it not gratifying to know that one's home is in sooth a castle, proof against the most furious of assaults? (p. 721)

But each time, his servant shows him a new inadequacy in the defense of the castle. In his utter terror of savagery, he comes to the point at which he boards up all the windows and, finally, all but one door. The castle which was to be the finest expression of his personality

becomes his prison. At last the edifice is destroyed by fire from within. The quest for certainty and the fear of one's world that characterizes Monsieur Edouard's efforts in his castle-building are also characteristic of Ebenezer's attempted journey through life in which he longs for safety and certainty, and fears the process of life in which he finds himself.

Both of these allegorical statements are essential parts of the comic element of the novel, but they also reveal the basic philosophical notions which inhere in the work. That there are no invulnerable castles is a direct inference from the fact that there is nothing at the top of the purgatorial mountain.

Barth has given us a novel which has attacked the dualisms of our traditions. He has avoided the serious solution-oriented⁹ acceptance of dualistic thought patterns which characterized Madame Bovary and The Idiot and picked up the Cervantean comic sense, developing the perspectivism of Don Quixote into a non-dualistic and relativistic concept of reality in The Sot-Weed Factor.

9 I refer to Flaubert and Dostoevsky as "solution-oriented" in that they choose to "resolve" the philosophical problems growing out of the subjective-objective dualism by giving prior value to one or the other of the two categories. Cervantes and Barth seem to enjoy probing around in the totality of experience without feeling it necessary to resolve contradictions in any other way than by accepting them.

CONCLUSION

In the context of this paper Cervantes acts as the initiator of the discussion. He recognizes the problem of the nature of reality as the difficult relation between the knower and the known. He proposes that between his knower, Don Quixote, and his known, Dulcinea, the imagination, or creative capacities of man, operates to control the way one organizes his experiences. The ontological status of his Dulcinea is left undefined and fluid. There are moments when she exists in some concrete form and others when she is treated as a completely mythic structure. Cervantes was playing with his concepts, and raised the problem of the nature of the knower-known dualism to see where it might lead him in understanding the world.

The two nineteenth-century writers, Flaubert and Dostoevsky, are not as playful. They make decisive choices within the traditional dualism, and are not so concerned with the subtleties of the problem as a whole as they are in deciding on solutions to it.

Barth looks on the statement of moral, epistemological, and theological problems in dualistic terms as unsatisfactory and obsolete. He solves the problem, proposed here by Cervantes, by destroying it. He follows his philosophical

contemporaries¹ in denying the knower and known as separate entities, treating the old duality in terms of a single process of knowing. When this old dualism goes down, others fall with it: the self and others, man and nature, good and evil.

The novelist as metaphysician creates a model of the world, and uses that model as a setting for examining human experience. If the metaphysician is successful he helps us to see specific experiences in a new light. We are enlightened by his work. The novelist provides us with a similar kind of illumination. His successes provide us with understanding of our world which aid us in seeing beyond the boundaries of thought which we inherit from our culture. The analysis of these four novels reveals the strong influence of dualistic thought, a tendency which seems inherent in the Western intellectual tradition.

While this study was not intended as an historical survey, it does shed some light on the history of ideas. The Renaissance was an age of discovery and imbalance. Cervantes and his contemporaries were still sorting out their reactions to the adventures of Cortez and Pizarro and the upsetting news

¹The pragmatists, for example: "We imply no basic differentiation of subject vs. object, any more than of soul vs. body, of mind vs. matter, or of self vs. not-self." John Dewey and Arthur Bently, Knowing and the Known (Boston, 1949), p. 120. In the tradition of the British analytic philosophers: "So questions about the relations between a person and his mind, like those about the relations between a person's body and his mind are improper questions. They are improper in much the same way as is the question, 'What transactions go on between the House of Commons and the British Constitution?'" Ryle, p. 167-168.

that neither the Earth nor Rome maintained its central location in the scheme of things. Don Quixote is an expression of that dislocation by a man who was unthreatened by the changes going on about him. Cervantes, like Don Quixote, is an adventurer with courage and a sense of humor. Insofar as the Renaissance was Christian, it was dualistic, and while Cervantes set out to re-examine the nature of reality from a new vantage point, he was still controlled by the dualism which had deep roots in European Christianity. It is the vitality and freshness with which Cervantes explores this dualistic thought structure which makes his work philosophically exciting.

The openness of Cervantes disappears in the nineteenth century, when the political evolution of the middle class, the growth of large industrial cities, and the growing importance of science led to the creation of ideologies to support or attack some of the radical changes taking place in the lives of men. Flaubert and Dostoevsky, while not formulating an explicit ideology, reflect this solution-oriented atmosphere of their times. They find it impossible to step outside traditional dualistic thinking and necessary to create a solution to its troubling philosophical problems. The seriousness of the ideologue is reflected in the serious treatments of the concept of reality found in Madame Bovary and The Idiot.

The Renaissance and the nineteenth century were both, in many ways, peak expressions of the spiritual and intellectual heritage of Greco-Judaic traditions, which includes a strong

dualistic bias. The notion of man's dominion over nature, the importance of individualism, and the ultimate victory of good over evil are all concepts growing out of that tradition and find eloquent expression in the two eras. The contemporary world, which is reflected in Barth's work, is, in many ways, a denial of that basic tradition especially of the dualism which is one of its essential ingredients.

Our era has been labeled "post-Christian"² and "tribal,"³ both terms reflecting the anti-dualistic emphasis of our time, the one suggesting the death of God (with the death of the entailed alienation-producing God-man relation), and the other the disintegration of separating categories in man's relation to himself, others, and his natural environment. The Sot-Weed Factor, in this sense, is post-Christian and tribal. Barth recognizes the "anomic terror" in a world where traditions have collapsed and it is necessary to create concepts of reality as "constructions in the face of chaos."⁴ But he faces this chaos with a sense of the comic which grows out of a depolarized

²"The fundamentals of modern culture are neither non-Christian nor anti-Christian; they are post-Christian. They are derived from Christianity, yet in them Christianity suffers 'not a torture death but a quiet euthanasia.' It may be that our age still is religious. But it is certainly is post-Christian." Gabriel Vahanian, The Death of God (New York, 1961), p. xii.

³"In the new electronic environment we end the Pavlovian laboratory of mechanical civilization and are primitive once more." Marshall McLuhan, War and Peace in the Global Village (New York, 1968), p. 67.

⁴Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckman, The Social Construction of Reality (Garden City, New York, 1967), p. 103.

conception of reality bearing some resemblance to elements of Oriental thought as described by Alan Watts. His description of the ancient sage is a description of Barth's Burlingame.

Therefore the most truly awakened sages are represented as coming back to participate in the life of the world out of "compassion for all sentient beings," playing the game of good against evil, success against failure, in the full knowledge that it is a game.⁵

Cervantes came close to this awareness of the gamelike quality of human existence but could not make such an explicit statement because of his basic commitment to dualistic Christianity and its traditions. Barth's view of the world, if expressed in a mythological way, would include a creator with a sense of humor, who plays the game of hide-and-seek with his creatures. The similarity between the world of The Sot-Weed Factor and the Oriental view of the world is seen in this comment by Watts.

In sum, then, the vast metaphysical schism which traditional Christianity proposes is redeemable only if there is a twinkle in the Father's eye comparable to the "fear not" gesture of Shiva in his dance of world-destroying rage.⁶

The analysis of the concepts of reality in literary works necessarily entails the consideration of the works with relation to the dualistic thought which dominates our Greco-Judaic tradition. Such a procedure produces valuable insight

⁵ Alan Watts, The Two Hands of God: The Myths of Polarity (Toronto, Canada, 1969), p. 25. My study is just a reversed model of Watts' work. He traces the development of the ancient non-dualistic myths of the Orient down to the rigidly dualistic concepts of the Christian theological tradition. I have attempted to show a variety of responses to our dualistic thought, including an expression of the current rejection of it.

⁶ Watts, The Two Hands of God, p. 169.

regarding the general point of view of specific works and presents clarifying points of relationship in the history of ideas.

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