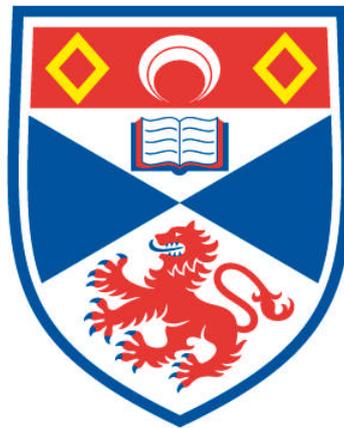


**REPRESENTATIONS OF ADULTERY AND
REGENERATION IN SELECTED NOVELS OF FORD,
LAWRENCE, WAUGH AND GREENE**

Joanna K. Bratten

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews**



2002

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Strange Bedfellows:
Adultery and Regeneration in the novels of
Ford, Lawrence, Waugh and Greene

by
JK Bratten

February 2002
University of St Andrews

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Introductory Notes

The main texts dealt with in this thesis are, in order, *The Good Soldier and Parade's End* (Ford Madox Ford), *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (D.H. Lawrence), *A Handful of Dust* and *Brideshead Revisited* (Evelyn Waugh) and *The Heart of the Matter* and *The End of the Affair* (Graham Greene). Other texts will be examined and cited, but these are those that are central. All editions of these novels can be found in the bibliography (page 195). In terms of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, I am referring only to the final edition of the novel, not to either of the earlier editions. The alternative ending to *A Handful of Dust* will be considered in this thesis, but it is not considered to be part of the novel as it stands.

Unless otherwise noted, all page references that appear parenthetically after quotations are taken from the editions listed in the subsection of the bibliography for 'primary sources'. Only in three cases are there more than one edition of a given piece of fiction in use: Ford Madox Ford, *The Good Soldier and Parade's End* and D.H. Lawrence, *Women in Love*. In these cases the editions being used for quoting from the texts themselves are, respectively, the 1990 Penguin edition, the 1997 Carcanet edition and the 1995 Penguin edition. The other three editions are used solely for citations from introductions and prefaces and these instances are all clearly noted.

There are many cases in which passages are cited that contain a great number of ellipses. Ellipses that are in fact in the original passage will be kept as they are: ...
Those edited into the passage will be bracketed, thus: [...]

Strange bedfellows: Adultery and regeneration

Adultery would not seem to have much in common with regeneration. Even without considering the weight of social history, our literary history alone provides over two thousand years' worth of examples of adultery being anything but regenerative. Adultery has been unequivocally regarded as a destabilising force within the family, as well as society. Adultery, especially in literature, is synonymous with destruction, whether on a personal level or extending to a social level. Helen of Troy – whose face infamously launched a thousand ships, causing war and mass destruction – established the archetype; adulterous Guinevere sustained it, causing her husband's kingdom to come crashing around his ears. The 'great' nineteenth-century novels of adultery – those of Flaubert and Tolstoy most notably – do nothing to contradict or overturn this archetype. Emma Bovary and Anna Karenina effect their own personal destruction, as well as the destruction of their domestic societies. It is the twentieth century that finally overturns this archetype; adultery, in a literary context, is no longer consistently synonymous with personal or social destruction, but in some cases is synonymous with the exact opposite: personal or social regeneration.

A number of novelists in the first part of the twentieth century approach adultery fiction in a way that effectively transforms what was perceived as a socially unacceptable and destabilising act into something positive and constructive – something regenerative. These writers – most notably, Ford Madox Ford, D.H. Lawrence, Evelyn Waugh and Graham Greene – link the subject of adultery with the theme of regeneration, and this combination creates examples of adultery literature that have come quite a long way from their earlier counterparts. While English literature may be 'eccentric', as Alison Sinclair has noted, in its lack of a great 'adultery novel', the twentieth century compensates for this by offering a number of adultery novels, or novels that deal with the subject of adultery in some aspect, which are building on the tradition that went before but taking it to a wholly new level of discourse and symbolism.¹

Adulterous love is not 'romanticised' in the twentieth-century novel, but, quite importantly, neither is it doomed to total failure. Adulterous love is not regarded as being necessarily degenerate and painful, but neither is it placed on a romantic pedestal. Marriage, since its establishment as a spiritual and civil institution, has been generally regarded as essential for a stable social order, but passionate love has always been regarded as something that can destroy that order. The Medieval

¹*The Deceived Husband*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993. I would disagree with Sinclair's assertion that English literature has no such 'adultery novel'. While the corpus of English literature may not boast a novel that correlates to the European 'bourgeois' model of the nineteenth century, there are at least two English novels that can certainly be classified unequivocally as adultery novels, *The Good Soldier* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. The latter, in particular, seems to match Sinclair's description.

literary tradition created a dichotomy between passionate love and marriage, exemplified best in the story of Tristan and Iseult, whose forbidden love was far too passionate to exist within the bonds of Christian marriage.²

While this dichotomy may not be entirely dissolved, two of the novels that will be examined here go as far as to demonstrate how marriage and passion may not be essentially irreconcilable, and how, in Denis de Rougemont's terms, it might be possible after all to 'marry Iseult'.³ Christopher Tietjens, at the end of Ford's *Parade's End* tetralogy, is going to be able to marry his mistress, Valentine. Oliver Mellors, at the end of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, plans to marry Connie. These novels present a restructuring of the social fabric in post-war conditions, where the old fabric will no longer do: the breeding of bastards and marrying of mistresses are seen to make way for a new and, ironically, more wholesome social order. Marriage does not replace adultery as the central focus, not even in these two optimistic novels, but in all of the novels examined here adultery is treated in a way that none of the writers of earlier periods would have done, or would have been able to do. Rather than over-romanticising adultery at the same time as soundly condemning it as the ultimate social evil, as happened in the chivalric tradition of the Middle Ages, these novelists will use adultery as a means of demonstrating how personal, social or spiritual regeneration can be attained. Why this radical treatment of adultery appears at this specific period in history – just before, between and after the two World Wars – will be considered at the end of this brief introductory chapter.

Adultery as degeneration

The anxiety that surrounds adultery in most literature in the western world can be traced back to the anxiety caused by Paris's abduction of Helen and the resultant war between Greece and Troy. This incident threatened 'all existing bonds that held together states, armies, families, lovers, friends'.⁴ The consensus that the adulterous woman, for all her passion, beauty and artistic appeal, is an unmitigated social threat is one that has been maintained and nurtured over thousands of years. The Book of Proverbs warns a young man against the charms of the adulterous woman and describes a seduction, painting a very clear picture of the archetypal adulteress, certain characteristics of which

² It can be argued that Shakespeare is responsible to some extent for dissolving the love-marriage dichotomy when he presents marriage not as emotionally sterile but as an emotionally rich field for interpersonal relations; love becomes both personally enriching and socially stabilising when people enter into the marital commitment. Passion still is seen as being at odds with marriage, but an emerging concept of romantic marital love is being developed here.

³ *Love in the Western World*, trans. Montgomery Belgion, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983. Chapter title: 'Marrying Iseult'.

⁴ Tony Tanner, *Adultery in the Novel*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979, p 24.

would be built upon by writers in later years and maintained even in the twentieth century; the woman is described as wearing 'harlot's attire', and as being 'talkative and wandering, not bearing to be quiet, not able to abide still at home, now abroad, now in the streets, now lying in wait near corners.' (7:27).

This portrayal of the adulterous woman helps to establish the notion that women who stray from their rightful place, 'not able to abide at home', are naturally promiscuous, and therefore dangerous. It also sets up the image of the woman as the guilty party, an image that would only become more familiar and established in the novels of the nineteenth century. 'Talking and wandering, not bearing to be quiet' becomes a euphemism for promiscuity and licentiousness in women; think of Chaucer's Wife of Bath, whose sexual appetite is as notable as her garrulousness. A silent woman is a chaste woman. This equation persists through the Renaissance, as Jonson's *Epicoene* demonstrates. The supposedly silent woman, Epicoene, is juxtaposed with the talkative collegiate women, who not only talk, but also think, and 'wander', unescorted by men, through London. Epicoene's presumed virtues are silence and chastity, while the collegiates' known vices are outspokenness and promiscuity. The woman from the book of Proverbs paves the way for the assumption that a woman who is unable to stay 'at home' is by her nature dissolute.⁵ This assumption has, of course, asserted itself repeatedly in literary discussions of not just adultery, but also the nature of female sexuality.

It takes the twentieth century and its considerable social upheaval (not to mention a developing change of attitude regarding the 'role of women' and a revolutionary reform of divorce legislation) to address the fact that male infidelity is as worthy of judgement as female infidelity.⁶ Male infidelity becomes a feature of adultery literature in the twentieth century, while in past fiction the focus was almost exclusively on the adulterous woman. Adultery is as much a mainstay of twentieth-century literature as it was of literature of previous centuries more obviously concerned with the moral repercussions of adultery. Indeed, as de Rougemont has queried, 'without adultery, what would happen to imaginative writing?'⁷ Adultery as a literary subject has not gone away in twentieth century because of a more permissive society or because of changing attitudes towards marriage and the family. The most palpable change in attitude in the twentieth century is not, as is

⁵In the cases of a number of fictional adulteresses it is precisely the women's essential restlessness that causes them to be dissatisfied with being 'at home' and leads them into adultery (*Madame Bovary*, *Anna Karenina* for example). This restlessness and dissatisfaction would have been equated with or mistaken for licentiousness.

⁶The Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 established that women could be divorced for adultery, but they could only divorce their husbands if they had proof of incest, bigamy, cruelty or desertion; marital infidelity on the part of the male spouse was not in itself considered grounds for a woman to divorce her husband. The Marriage Act of 1923 finally permitted women to divorce their husbands solely on the grounds of adultery, which will become relevant in discussing Waugh's *A Handful of Dust*.

⁷*Love in the Western World*, p 16.

often assumed, that adultery is no longer an issue but that it is no longer seen as the greatest social threat – the threats posed by two World Wars were sufficient to overthrow this notion.

An age of crisis

Thomas Malory's fifteenth-century account of the Arthurian legends – with Guinevere's adultery with Lancelot triggering the destruction of the idyllic dream of Camelot – was written at a time of crisis and profound social change. Like the first half of the twentieth century, it was a period in which 'traditional' ideals, values and beliefs were under threat and were starting to be replaced with new ideas. Catherine Belsey has noted that 'Malory's elegiac text was addressed to a world in crisis, and specifically to a society in which aristocratic values were rapidly becoming outmoded. [...] Chivalry would never return [...].'⁸ Malory's account of destructive adulterous love resonated with the general sense of loss of chivalric ideals; Guinevere and Lancelot's betrayal of King Arthur could be seen as concurrent with the decline of 'aristocratic values' in the society of the fifteenth century. A similar period of decline and loss recurs in the early twentieth century, but in this case it is not the loss of 'chivalric' values but the loss of Victorian values.

One can find certain similarities between the age of chivalry and the age of Victoria: a sense of security and national identity, a solid belief in religious values and the Church (exchange the Roman Catholic Church for the Church of England) and a flourishing aristocracy. The 'golden' age of Victoria and the noble ideals and sentiments attached to that age would be completely obliterated by the First World War. But even before Victoria took the throne there were some writers in England who sensed an impending period of social disintegration. Jane Austen, it has been argued, sensed it as early as 1814 in *Mansfield Park*. Tony Tanner, in his introduction to his edition of the novel, writes that:

[Austen] was aware of an England that was passing away. She knew about the passion which turns to lechery, the activity which becomes destructive, the energy which results in the collapse of a world. And she appreciated the value of 'the quiet thing', and knew, too, the incredible moral strength required to achieve and maintain it.⁹

Tanner borrows the phrase 'the quiet thing' from Ford's *A Man Could Stand Up*, and linking Austen's love of an England that was passing away with the anxiety felt by Tietjens in *Parade's End* is appropriate. Although her treatment of adultery in *Mansfield Park* is almost desultory, what Austen is doing in 1814 is similar to what Ford and the other novelists of the inter-war period will do: using adultery as a metaphor for England's need for some form of regeneration. In this case,

⁸*Love Stories in Western Culture*, Oxford and Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1994, p 116. Cf. Robert Merrill, *Sir Thomas Malory and the Cultural Crisis of the Late Middle Ages*, New York: Peter Lang, 1987, which provided the basis for Belsey's thesis here.

⁹*Mansfield Park*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1966, p 36.

adultery is seen to be symptomatic of England's sickness. Austen is craving 'the quiet thing', a release from the slow cycle of destruction that is circling onwards into the next century.

The language used by Tanner in this excerpt is reminiscent of the passing of that other golden age, the age of King Arthur and of Camelot. The passing of the society that comprised the original Camelot was brought on, as represented clearly by Malory, directly by Guinevere's unfaithfulness; the nineteenth century would have understood and appreciated the significance of this. Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* (1859) picks up on the progressive development of the Arthurian legends where Malory left off and Tennyson's nineteenth-century sensibilities heavily emphasise the enormity of the social destruction generated by Guinevere's adultery with Lancelot. This would have appealed to a Victorian readership, for whom marriage and the family were seen to be the centre of their ordered society, and the strength behind England's greatness. A loss of faith in these long-held values (family, empire, aristocracy, church) was certainly present in some facets of society as early as when Tennyson was writing, but not until the First World War did this loss of faith make itself so notably apparent, in society as well as in literature. An obvious repercussion of this loss of faith in the old values was the search for replacements. This quest for new values is at the heart of the anxiety of early twentieth-century literature.

Between 1914 and 1945 Britain underwent an unparalleled amount of change, as did its fiction. A consistent feature in much literature from this period is a sense of crisis, a sense of anxiety. Anne Wright, in her work on selected literature of this period, elucidates the meaning of crisis in this particular social and historical context:

Crisis is expressed as the fracturing or dismantling of personal relations, of social institutions, of civilisation. The dimensions of crisis are in fact questioned by each text, and actually vary: the site and the scope of the breakdown may be individual, national, cultural or cosmic, extending from sexual intercourse to the extinction of the species. Crisis is the distant or imminent threat of cataclysmic disruption of the familiar: total devastation [...].¹⁰

This definition of crisis locates the precise points of concern for the writers of this period; the phrase 'cataclysmic disruption of the familiar' is particularly significant. What this generation of writers had to fear more than anything was the loss of a solid, familiar basis of life, which had been built up and maintained in the years of Victoria's reign. The loss of this basis, or the fear of losing it, accounts not only for the changes in literary subject-matter at this time, but also for the experimentation in style and the innovations in the form of literature itself. Modernism, we can argue, is born out of the need to replace the familiarity of dying forms with something new and dynamic; familiarity, after all, breeds contempt.

¹⁰ *Literature of Crisis, 1910-22*, London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984, p 3.

Many examples exist of literature in this period being deeply concerned with preventing an impending apocalypse, displaying a sense of anxiety about the inevitability of such a thing – *The Waste Land* is perhaps the most enduring example. Yeats's 'The Second Coming' (1921) is notable in its similarities to *The Waste Land*, and in its achievement in capturing the profound sense of dislocation that was endemic in those years after the First World War: 'Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold [...]'. Anticipating Lawrence's apocalyptic writings, Yeats's poem uses mythical and biblical language to explore the sense of crisis, closing with a reference to the birth of Christ – suggesting a new and different Christ and a new and different post-apocalyptic world.

The concerns pressing in on the generation of Yeats and Eliot (and of Ford, Lawrence, Waugh and Greene) were patently different from those that were addressed in the writings of the nineteenth-century 'bourgeois' novelists. The repercussions of war – economically, psychologically, religiously – provided the twentieth-century novelist with a whole new array of issues to explore. Sexuality, of course – and all connected issues such as marriage and family – was a subject of much anxiety. Discussion of marriage remained central in much of the fiction of this time, but war altered the way that marriage was treated, not only in fiction but also in real life. Adultery was no longer the monstrous threat to familial, social and national stability as it had been; bombs and gasses and, later, financial ruin posed more obvious threats.

The divorce rate multiplied many times over in the years between the First and Second World Wars. This was both symptomatic of and responsible for the changing attitudes towards marriage and sex. Like the proverbial question of the chicken and the egg, it is impossible to draw a line under *the* cause of the so-called 'breakdown of marriage'. The number of wartime adulteries (caused not only because of a shift in sexual morality and innovations in contraception, but also because of the overwhelming physical shock of war itself) caused an escalation in the number of divorce petitions made in the years immediately following the First World War, and the increased amount of petitions made way for new divorce legislation.¹¹ Evelyn Waugh, who directly responds to Eliot's treatment of the social problems of his time in his use of a line from *The Waste Land* as the title for his 1934 novel, *A Handful of Dust*, paints a thoroughly bleak picture of the way the solidity of marriage was disintegrating – along with so many other seemingly-solid things, such as nobility, religion, civilisation in general – in the 1930s. The 'waste land' that Waugh's novel

¹¹ 1937 saw the passing of The Matrimonial Causes Act, which made attaining divorces a great deal easier, particularly for women who wanted to divorce their husbands for reasons other than infidelity. For more on this refer to Lawrence Stone, *The Road to Divorce: England 1530-1987*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990. Waugh's *A Handful of Dust* can be read as a direct commentary on this legal discussion, as can be A.P. Herbert's *Holy Deadlock*, which also appeared in 1934.

portrays correlates to a very sharp and specific anxiety of 1934, concerning the proposal for new divorce laws and the repercussions they would have on the family, and by default, on society as a whole. Waugh's conclusion is that the whole of Britain seems to be sliding down the slippery slope towards barbarism, as adultery was becoming less remarkable and marriage becoming more trivial, and it is not until his writing of *Brideshead Revisited* at the end of the 1940s, a novel in which adultery arguably takes on a regenerative function, that he is able to conclude with a sense of peace and optimism.

The movement from a sense of hopelessness to a feeling of peace is very significant of this period. Eliot's groundbreaking poem of 1922 is often seen as having set the tone for a whole generation of writers. It is arguable that *The Waste Land* did not so much set the tone as best capture the tone of the increasing anxiety of that era. Either way, *The Waste Land* provides a backdrop to the years during which Ford, Lawrence, Waugh and Greene were writing, expressing the sense of crisis that was pervasive in Britain from before the First World War through to the end of the Second. Eliot's choices of epigraphs are often curious, but the choice for *The Waste Land* seems to be obviously appropriate. Taking his quotation from Petronius's *Satyricon*, Eliot sets up his poem with an image of exhaustion and despair: 'I have seen with my own eyes the Sibyl of Cumae hanging in a jar, and when the boys said to her: *What do you want*; she answered, *I want to die*.'¹² One can posit that the poem's ultimate tone is not one of despair, but one of hope, as Eliot repeats the 'shantih' of the Upanishads, which loosely translates to the 'peace that passes all understanding' of the Christian tradition. The way in which the poem begins with a sense of despair, even with its first line, 'April is the cruellest month', and culminates in a tone of optimism and peace, traces a pattern that had been seen in literature of the period already, and that would be seen more clearly in the years to follow. This cyclical pattern – moving from death, destruction, hopelessness and despair through a series of changes and pressures, finally to reach a place of hope and regeneration – is what can be found in much of the fiction of this period.

Adultery as regeneration

The England that Eliot presents in *The Waste Land* is an England greatly in need of regeneration. The novels that are to be examined here are responding to the same sense of crisis to which Eliot's poem reacts, exploring the fracturing of personal relations, the breakdown of civilisation as a whole and the loss of the 'old' values. Furthermore, these novelists are doing something unique with their melding of the subject of adultery with this sense of urgent need for change, salvation or regeneration. While the adultery literature of earlier generations certainly used adultery as a means

¹² 'Nam Sibyllam quidem Cumis ego ipse oculis meis vidi in ampulla pendere, et cum illi pueri dicerent: *Σίβυλλα τί θέλεις*; respondebat illa: *ἀποθανεῖν θέλω*.'

of social commentary, the fiction of the twentieth century brings this tradition to an altogether more innovative level; it does not just use adultery as social commentary, but – in a few select cases – presents adultery as a means towards social regeneration.

Ford's *Parade's End* (1924-8) and Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1922) are the most obvious examples of the fusion of the subject of adultery with the theme of regeneration. These two novels use adultery not simply as a *means towards* but as a *metaphor for* social regeneration. The adulterous unions in both novels totally overturn the archetype established by those early *femme fatales*, Helen of Troy or Guinevere. There is nothing destructive or dangerous in these adulterous women (Valentine Wannop and Connie Chatterley), but rather both women are given healthy, nurturing – ultimately maternal – properties. There is no suggestion of destructiveness in the passion of the adulterous lovers in these novels. The actual act of sexual transgression in both narratives does not bring about personal or social destruction, but rather brings about personal, and interpersonal, renewal, which suggests a solution for social renewal, or regeneration.

Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* (1945) and Greene's *The End of the Affair* (1952) approach the issue from a somewhat different angle, addressing spiritual regeneration rather than social regeneration. *Brideshead Revisited* seems to suggest that social regeneration is only going to be possible if spiritual regeneration is achieved whilst *The End of the Affair* seems curiously unconcerned with social issues of any sort, despite its wartime setting. In both of these novels the adulterous parties are brought to salvation by means of their adulterous relationships. Both relationships are forced to end, but it is clear that had the relationships not occurred as they did the ultimate regeneration of the characters involved would also not have occurred. Julia Flyte and Charles Ryder's relationship leads them both to a new level of love – in this case a love for each other; this love then leads them both to a more perfect love, a love of God. While they renounce their love of each other, in their very renunciation they are regenerated, in a spiritual sense. Similarly, Sarah Miles and Maurice Bendrix only achieve their spiritual regeneration once their affair is ended. Sarah's acceptance of God in exchange for Bendrix is initially impossible for Bendrix to comprehend, and even at the end of the novel his ultimate acceptance of Sarah's God is not firmly established. What is clearly indicated, however, is that because of their adulterous relationship Sarah is able to attain salvation (perhaps, Greene controversially suggests, even sainthood) and Bendrix is at least able to acknowledge the presence of God in his life, changing it forever. Waugh and Greene are not as overt as Ford and Lawrence in their use of adultery as a means towards regeneration but the fusion of themes is indisputably present in their work.

This book aims to trace the relationship between adultery and regeneration in other novels than those already mentioned. Ford's *The Good Soldier* (1915), Waugh's *A Handful of Dust* (1934) and Greene's *The Heart of the Matter* (1948) discuss adultery at the same time as exploring the

subject of social or personal regeneration. All three novels use adultery as a means of probing the depth of crisis that Ford, Waugh and Greene sensed – whether socially or spiritually – while they were writing, yet they are starkly different in their modes of narrative. Ford’s examination is expressionistic, Waugh’s is satiric and Greene’s is realistic. All three novels, despite dissimilarities, ultimately pave the way for the later novels that readdress adultery and regeneration in more optimistic tones.

In *A Propos of “Lady Chatterley’s Lover”*, D.H. Lawrence describes a ‘serious young man’ who says to him ‘I can’t believe in the regeneration of England by sex, you know.’ ‘Of course you can’t’, replies Lawrence, who goes on to lament: ‘Poor England, she will have to regenerate the sex in her young people, before they do any regenerating of her. It isn’t England that needs regenerating, it is her young.’ (314-5). Lawrence’s project for regeneration is not as simplistic as the ‘serious young man’ would have it, as he will go on to explain: ‘If England is to be regenerated – to use the phrase of the young man, who seemed to think there was need of *regeneration* – the very word is his – then it will be by the arising of a new blood-contact, a new touch, and a new marriage.’ (328). While the ‘serious young man’ may very well have come on his own to use the word ‘regeneration’ for what Lawrence was proposing in his novel, it sums up Lawrence’s project precisely. Ideas like resurrection and rebirth – synonymous with regeneration – are inherent within the narrative structure of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, just as they are within *Parade’s End* and, perhaps to a lesser extent, the other novels examined here.

Lawrence uses the word ‘new’ three times in the passage in which he details the things that will bring about a regeneration of England: ‘new blood-contact, a new touch, and a new marriage.’ All of these ‘new’ things are proposed to replace older, worn out models. Just as Tietjens and Valentine in *Parade’s End* find that the old values and traditions are no longer valid in the post-war world in which they find themselves at the end of the tetralogy, so too does Lawrence recognise that regeneration is not going to be found in the ideals and values upheld in the golden age of Victoria. This evaluation, or re-evaluation, of tradition and the old values of a pre-war generation is evident in all of the novels examined here, but, to the delight of the researcher, they do not all draw the same conclusions. Waugh, regarded a great social conservative, desires in part to see the old, aristocratic England remain intact, yet at the same time realises that it cannot, acknowledging that conservatism should not imply maintaining the *status quo* but often finding a better alternative – one alternative might be a reversion to an earlier model of a more integrated, less mechanised and more spiritually aware society. Waugh’s innate conservatism might seem starkly different from Lawrence’s more radical scheme for social regeneration through sex, but perhaps the two views are not so far removed from one another after all. In an increasingly mechanised and sterile world, all four of these men are leading us back to that which these two views demonstrate how very different novelists during the

first part of the twentieth century were able to explore the same themes and ideas and reach similar conclusions, albeit with diverse means and methods.

Sad Stories?

Ford's paradigmatic narratives of adultery and regeneration

O Father O'Ford you've a masterful way with you.
 Maid, wife and widow are wild to make hay with you.
 Blond and brunette turn-about run away with you.
 You've such a way with you, Father O'Ford.
 That instant they see the sunshine from your eyes
 Their hearts flitter flutter, they think and they sigh:
 We kiss the ground before thee, we madly adore thee
 And crave and implore thee to take us, O Lord!
 James Joyce, 'Father O'Ford', *Poems and Shorter Writings*

This is the saddest story I have ever heard.
The Good Soldier

Introduction

Ford Madox Ford might have had, as James Joyce reckoned, a certain way with the ladies; indeed, this way of his may have been responsible for his unconventional marital, or extra-marital, relationships. And, indeed, it may have been ultimately responsible for a certain amount of sadness in his personal life. Ford's life-story contributes much to the 'sad stories' that comprise the bulk of what are widely regarded as Ford's most important fictional contributions, most notably, *The Good Soldier* (1915) and the Tietjens tetralogy, *Parade's End* (1924-1928).¹³ Nevertheless, the principal question this chapter aims to answer is not 'How closely are Ford's novels fashioned on his life?' but rather 'Are Ford's adultery narratives unequivocally "sad stories" or does he offer a final positive vision?' Certainly *The Good Soldier* is a sad story; maybe it is even the saddest story, as Ford's narrator claims. It is possible to argue, however, that with *Parade's End*, and particularly with the final novel of the tetralogy, *The Last Post*, Ford ultimately creates a

¹³ These two works are those that are most often cited by literary critics and historians as being Ford's most important contributions to twentieth-century canonical literature. Out of the sixty-odd books that Ford was responsible for, it is nearly unanimous among literary scholars that none of the others come close to the perfection of style and form as *The Good Soldier* and *Parade's End*. While I might disagree with this generalised approach to Ford's fiction, and might object to the disregard shown to Ford's lesser-known works, these concerns are not going to be raised in this study.

harmonious vision of life—a vision of life regenerated, or resurrected, from the rubble of the First World War.¹⁴ It is possible, too, to argue that *Parade's End* offers a vision of renewal, following the destruction, pain and chaos depicted in *The Good Soldier*. In this way, the latter group of novels is the completion of the earlier novel. *Parade's End* has not only a stylistic and formulaic debt to *The Good Soldier*, but also a thematic debt.

These two major works (for the sake of convenience *Parade's End* will be referred to in the singular) are classified as 'paradigmatic' in a sense specific to this study. Ford does not take his place in the first chapter simply for chronological reasons, but because he sets a standard for the other three novelists who will follow. The aim here is to demonstrate how Ford's novels, fusing the theme of adultery with that of social, or personal, regeneration, establish a model for these other writers, who will build on the themes and patterns established here by Ford.

¹⁴ Graham Greene, as editor of the Bodley Head edition of *Parade's End*, would disagree with my assertion that *The Last Post* is an important, even indispensable, component of the tetralogy, or, as he would have it, the trilogy. Greene's edition of 1963 was the first to exclude *The Last Post*, in accordance with Ford's wishes. Greene's reasons for the exclusion of *The Last Post*, and mine for arguing its indispensability to the series of novels, will be considered at length later on.

The Sentimental Soldier

The Good Soldier and *Parade's End* succeed because the embattled mental conditions there presented epitomised certain national neuroses of the time. It was no accident that *The Good Soldier* coincided with a period of acute pre-war crisis for a particular class, nor that the Tietjens cycle, likewise, depicted an abnormally dangerous national emergency. In both instances, Ford's eccentric, highly subjective vision overlapped more widely held structures of feelings and experience.

Robert Green, *Ford Madox Ford: Prose and Politics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, p 56.

The above quotation states succinctly what I intend to highlight about *The Good Soldier*. Ford's depiction of adultery, however 'eccentric' and 'subjective' his approach, acts as a metaphor for the disintegration and anxiety then present in British society. This tightly spun web of events, among a small and closely-knit group of people, is a microcosm of what was happening in the world around Ford when he was writing, and indeed, what was happening to Ford himself. Further, the various angles from which Ford looks in on adultery in *The Good Soldier*, albeit all through the viewpoint of the so-called unreliable Dowell, show the different ways it can operate within a fictional framework: sentimentally, perfunctorily, passionately, destructively. Throughout Ashburnham's career as a soldier, landowner and adulterer, the question of his 'goodness' is always being reconsidered, by Dowell, by Leonora, by Nancy, and even by Florence. The effect is that of making the reader question the very notion of objective, absolute goodness. Max Saunders notes that Ford set out to strike a very difficult balance in this novel, saying 'he achieves a rare objectivity by immersing himself in nebulous, distorting subjectivity, and thus dramatizes the *problem* of objectivity'.¹⁵ Ford's subjective vision in this novel, then, far from weakening its pertinence to the society around it, causes it to be significant to the generation of 1915, with its questioning of absolute standards and the importance of the religion and beliefs of its parents, its feeling of disconnectedness and uncertainty, and its anxiety for the future. This anxiety and lack of certainty is touched upon early in

¹⁵ *Ford Madox Ford: A Dual Life*, Volume I, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, p 412.

Dowell's narration of the story, when he voices his confusion and loss of hope at the end of the first chapter:

I don't know. And there is nothing to guide us. And if everything is so nebulous about a matter so elementary as the morals of sex, what is there to guide us in the more subtle morality of all other personal contacts, associations, and activities? Or are we meant to act on impulse alone? It is all a darkness.

(18)

The 'darkness' to which Dowell refers is not only the obscurity of definition between 'good' and 'bad', in the general moral sense, but also the inability to see that there is a pattern to life, that life is ordered by something higher than 'impulse'. Ford, a Roman Catholic convert lapsed even further than Greene, expresses this anxiety in a more fearful way than Greene will, as Greene took both personal and artistic pleasure in highlighting the ambiguous borders between 'good' and 'bad', exploring with almost enthusiastic inquisitiveness the large grey areas in human morality and the unanswerable questions. While Greene was content, to an extent, to let the unanswerable questions remain unanswered—regarding much of what happens in life as being part of some great metaphysical paradox—Ford's narrator in *The Good Soldier* (not necessarily speaking in an 'authorial' voice) is anxious to find out the answers to such questions, and his misery is in discovering that there are none.

Mirroring in many ways Lawrence's work during this same period, Ford uses sex in *The Good Soldier* to highlight a sense of fragmentation and confusion. As with Lawrence's *Women in Love* (1917), the violent and destructive passions that are at work within the world of *The Good Soldier* (aptly sub-titled 'A Tale of Passion') are indicative of a greater force of destruction, the War. And as with *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928), Ford too will use a different set of sexual situations in *Parade's End* to indicate a revitalisation of his hero and heroine. These parallels between Ford's work and Lawrence's will become more apparent as the study continues. Both are building upon the archetypal cycle of destruction, death, resurrection and regeneration that was becoming so prevalent

in the works of writers during the wartime years, moving from despair to hope, as in *The Waste Land*. *The Good Soldier* represents, in this cycle, the phase of destruction and death.

The background and history of *The Good Soldier* deserve a moment's consideration. Contrary to popular opinion, Teddy Ashburnham is not based on Ford himself, nor was Ford overtly trying to inject any of his own aspirations or anxieties into Ashburnham's character. Any residual similarities between Ford and his questionable hero, for indeed there are many, may be considered accidental rather than intentional. Graham Greene, in his introduction to the Bodley Head edition of the novel, probes the question of Ford's personal investment:

I think the impression which will be left most strongly on the reader is the sense of Ford's involvement. A novelist is not a vegetable absorbing nourishment mechanically from soil and air: material is not easily or painlessly gained, and one cannot help wondering what agonies of frustration and error lay behind *The Saddest Story*.¹⁶

Ford's personal involvement with this novel is unquestionable. What *is* questionable, however, is any assumption that Ford should be read as 'the good soldier'.

As with most novelists, there can be found autobiographical links in all of Ford's work. A great number of Ford's personal experiences and acquaintances contribute to his stylistic undertaking with *The Good Soldier*, but they are processed to produce an impressionistic work—a work that suggests rather than tells. Ford uses his experiences as an artist might use paint: he waters them down, mixes them up, and applies them in varied shades and intensities, to suit his immediate purpose. Ford's style has been likened to pointillism, because of his use of small details to make up a larger impression. The deterioration of Ashburnham is a gradual process, mapped out by Dowell throughout the novel in an impressionistic way; it does not abide by the constraints of chronological narrative but works more loosely and in fragments, with the intention of telling the story as it reached him, 'from this distance of time [...] from the lips of Leonora or from those of Edward

¹⁶ *The Good Soldier*, London: The Bodley Head, 1962, p 12. An ironic aside here is that this attitude Greene is taking towards Ford's work is an attitude that he attempted to quash in regard to his own work, saying emphatically that his work was his work and his private life just that, and that the latter should not be read into the former.

himself' (19). Dowell's own impressionist view of life is crucial to the capricious nature of his narrative; he states that 'the whole world for me is like spots of colour in an immense canvas. Perhaps if it weren't so I should have something to catch hold of now.' (20). If Ford's novel, or the vision of his narrator, can be compared to a pointillist painting, perhaps it may be helpful to examine some of these points, or 'spots of colour', as they are set down, and see how each point works towards creating the overall impression that this chapter sets out to define. Trying to interpret *The Good Soldier* is rather like an elaborate game of connect-the-dots. The aim here is to show that, once all the dots are connected, Ford's work is meant to be indicative of the anxieties prevalent in England, and their corrosive effects.

Of all the 'spots of colour' that make up the whole of *The Good Soldier* adultery is a significant one, and indeed will be the primary focus here. Ashburnham's proclivity for infidelity belongs, in a way, to a tradition of philanderers. Don Juan, Don Giovanni, call him what you will, Teddy Ashburnham is a gentleman and a libertine, therefore conforming to the Don Juan model — but only barely, as Ford gives his philandering nobleman a layer of sentimentality and innocence that, when seen through the eyes of Dowell, renders him almost totally blameless.

This curious combination of heartlessness, gullibility and sentimentality can also be loosely applied to England at the time that Ford was writing. With international political tensions growing ever tauter, England had to move forward with some amount of callousness, yet both socially as well as politically it was moving anxiously, distrustful of severing itself from the past era of Victorian confidence, looking back at its own past with sentimentality. The characteristics with which Ford endows Ashburnham are in this way somewhat relevant to pre-war England, and by equating Ashburnham with a sentimental and noble-minded England, it is clear to see how the ruin of the man portends the ruin of the nation.

So how do Ashburnham's adulteries begin? What is the origin of his eventual ruin? His marriage to Leonora, as rendered by Dowell, does not read like a romance, but is instead more true to real life, and is a good example of the sort of marriage often made at this time and among this

class. Happy love, as de Rougemont claimed, has no history, certainly not in *The Good Soldier*. Neither Dowell's marriage to Florence, or Ashburnham's to Leonora, is 'romantic'. Both are deeply flawed, problematic, and, in different ways, unequal. Ford could be making a comment about his generation's expectations of marriage, or, more likely, about his generation's misguided notions about love, sex and, ultimately, romance.¹⁷ A male version of Emma Bovary, Ashburnham seems to use adulterous affairs to try and find a perfect romance, like the ones he would read about in books. As Dowell reports,

Edward was a great reader—he would pass hours lost in novels of a sentimental type—novels in which typewriter girls married Marquises and governesses Earls. And in his books, as a rule, the course of true love ran as smooth as buttered honey. And he was fond of poetry, of a certain type—and he could even read a perfectly sad love story. I have seen his eyes filled with tears at reading of a hopeless parting. And he loved, with a sentimental yearning, all children, puppies, and the feeble generally...

(31-2)

This might be somewhat hyperbolic, knowing the unreliability of Dowell as a narrator, but the fact that Ford allows Dowell to paint such a clear, almost comic, picture of Ashburnham's sentimentality suggests that these 'facts' are important. Unlike the prototypical Don Juan, Ashburnham's affairs are not presented as being conquests for the sake of power and pleasure, but are presented as being feeble attempts at romance. The comparison of Ashburnham to Emma Bovary is not insignificant: like Bovary, Ashburnham reads romantic and sentimental books, searches for what they seem to describe and ultimately ends his own life.

Ashburnham's death is not described as violently and grotesquely as Emma Bovary's, but the situations that both end up creating for themselves far surpass the average affairs recounted in the novels that they would read. Ashburnham's affairs leave him disappointed, according to Dowell, as they fall short of his 'intense, optimistic belief that the woman he was making love to at

¹⁷ Romance, here, refers to the whole tradition of literary romance as it developed over the centuries and, specifically, how it has culminated in the twentieth-century notion of love-and marriage, the view so criticised by de Rougemont.

the moment was the one he was destined, at last, to be eternally constant to....' (32). Perhaps Ashburnham does not find in adultery all the platitudes of marriage as Emma Bovary did, but he does find his romantic and sentimental ideals absolutely shattered.

The impression we receive of Ashburnham, of course, is meant to be a questionable one. We are given the first spot of colour, as it were, of this impression with the very title of the novel 'The Good Soldier'. The first half of the novel had already been serialised in 1914 in *Blast* under the title of *The Saddest Story*. But when the novel came to be published in its entirety the following year, the original title was rejected by Ford's publishers, who considered 1915 a bad year in which to publish a novel claiming to be 'the saddest story'. Ford alleges that he suggested the alternative title in jest, having just joined up himself at that point, and was self-confessedly horrified when the novel actually appeared as *The Good Soldier*.¹⁸ John A. Meixner comments on this change of titles, holding the view that the current title is wholly inappropriate. I would venture to aver otherwise, disagreeing with Meixner and perhaps with Ford himself. One statement from Meixner provides sufficient grounds for disagreement: 'For as a guide to Ford's intention "The Saddest Story" is far more appropriate than its present one —the most obvious defect of which is its misleading indication that the book is about war.'¹⁹ Perhaps Meixner overlooked the possibility that the destruction and sadness in *The Good Soldier* might mirror the changes and anxieties of the years leading up to the First World War. As this chapter should establish, there is a relationship between this novel and the War. For this reason the title is apt and ironic. Equally apt is the fact that the title contributes to the overall impressionism of the work, by suggesting something that cannot be firmly established: goodness. Ashburnham's ostensible goodness remains in question even at the very end, just as Dowell's reliability remains in question.

¹⁸ Ford describes the incident with his publishers in his dedicatory letter to Stella Bowen that was used as a preface in an American edition, and which is included in the standard Penguin edition. Ford stated that he 'never ceased to regret it [calling the book *The Good Soldier*] but, since the War, I have received so much evidence that the book has been read under that name that I hesitate to make a change for fear of causing confusion' (8).

¹⁹*Ford Madox Ford's Novels*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1962, pp 151-2.

The adultery in the story is only hinted at, in the beginning; by the end of the novel a whole series of adulteries are uncovered, laying open the whole disease at the heart of the story, and at the heart of this period in history. It takes approximately fifty-one pages before the reader is made absolutely certain of the fact that Florence and Ashburnham had been lovers, although this is pretty clearly suggested after eighteen pages when Dowell says of Ashburnham: 'he was just exactly the sort of chap that you could have trusted your wife with. And I trusted mine and it was madness.' (18). But Dowell's vacillation between negative and positive impressions of Ashburnham causes the reader's own impression to become blurred. However, an adjective to bear in mind with reference to Ashburnham's character is 'sentimental'. It is to this word that Dowell's narrative continuously returns, despite any contradictory digressions. Even after describing some of Ashburnham's early misdemeanours and his reckless descent into bankruptcy Dowell tells his reader 'I trust I have not, in talking of his liabilities, given the impression that poor Edward was a promiscuous libertine. He was not; he was a sentimentalist.' (58). Like Greene's honourable but adulterous officer, Scobie, in *The Heart of the Matter*, whose greatest weakness is his pity, Ashburnham's proclivity for affairs is rooted more in sentimentality than in passion. Scobie's suicide is his final act of pity; Ashburnham's suicide may likewise be seen as an act motivated by sentimentality.

Dowell suggests that Ashburnham's affairs gradually led him upwards, from his first offence, the kissing of a weeping chambermaid in a train compartment. He suggests as well that this progression was rather logical, as the affairs 'began with a servant, went on to a courtesan and then to a quite nice woman [...] And after this lady came Maisie Maidan, and after poor Maisie only one more affair and then —the real passion of his life.' (58). It is a notable yet unsurprising fact that Dowell does not name Florence in this catalogue and refers to her adultery with Ashburnham simply as the one coming after the Maisie affair, and before the final one, with Nancy Rufford. This is, after all, a story about Ashburnham, and Florence, even though she was the narrator's wife, is merely a cog in the works. More notable is the suggestion that all of Ashburnham's affairs were

instigated by his one loss of control, in a fit of pity and sentimentality, in a railway carriage. Dowell supposes that had the chambermaid succumbed to his sentimental advances, Ashburnham would have set her up in a little house in Portsmouth or Winchester and been faithful to her for a few years (58).

Ashburnham's naivety is shown in his first real affair, with the mistress of a Grand Duke, on whom he spent extortionate amounts of money in Monte Carlo and for whose sake he went bankrupt, causing Leonora to take control of the family finances. From this woman he expected love and devotion, believing himself to be in love with her, but all he ended up with was an empty wallet and a shattered ideal. Only the true sentimentalists expect love and devotion from a courtesan. Where most men might pay their money, enjoy the goods and leave satisfied, Ashburnham's innocence is betrayed by his belief that 'La Dolciquita' had 'surrendered to him her virtue' and that it was 'his duty to provide for her, and to cherish her and even to love her—for life' (148). His foolishness is displayed by his desire to 'retire with her to an island and point out to her the damnation of her point of view and how salvation can only be found in true love and the feudal system' (149). But while these impressions—for indeed they are only the impressions of the narrator—may point out Ashburnham's naivety and his folly, they also serve to underpin the notion that he is, essentially, a good man.

Dowell's impression of Ashburnham whisking La Dolciquita off to an island where he would reform her and convince her of the benefits of the feudal system (benefits with which a well-kept courtesan, perhaps more than an officer and a gentleman, would already be familiar) is one of many comic impressions provided in his account of the saddest story he has ever heard. John Meixner, for all his maintaining that the novel has nothing to do with war, believes that these comic interjections in an otherwise horrific tale of destruction mirror the disorder of the period during which the book was written. He writes that Ford's use of comic irony

provides the novel's ultimate commentary on the nature of human life in the twentieth-century world. Indeed, in its juxtaposition of these two modes

[comic and tragic], *The Good Soldier* epitomizes in a classic way the altered tragic vision of our modern sensibility.²⁰

Surely this altered vision is the result of the anxieties that preceded, and followed, the First World War. It is fair to argue that the sensibility of 1918 is markedly different from that of 1914, but even when the book was in the early stages of being published in 1915, there was awareness that ideas of tragedy and ‘sadness’ were taking on whole new meanings. Ford’s combination of the absurd with the catastrophic, the trivial with the momentous, and ambiguity with clarity all serve to mirror in a purely stylistic way the kinds of contradictions that were becoming more and more clear in, what Meixner calls, ‘the modern sensibility’, in a world bracing itself for disaster.

Just as 1914 was bracing itself for the disaster of the War, Dowell’s narrative describes a similar situation, when it gives an intimation of the disaster to come. The end of the third chapter reads as follows:

And then Florence said: ‘And so the whole round table is begun.’ Again Edward Ashburnham gurgled slightly in his throat; but Leonora shivered a little, as if a goose had walked over her grave. And I was passing her the nickel-silver basket of rolls. Avanti! ...

(37)

The allusion to The Round Table is accidental. How, after all, did Camelot come to ruin but through the adultery of Guinevere with Sir Lancelot.²¹ The ruin, or the impending disaster, that is anticipated at this point in *The Good Soldier* can be interpreted in a variety of ways. One reader might see the adultery and death of Florence as being the central disaster; another might see the horrific triangle of Ashburnham, Nancy and Leonora as the disaster —resulting in Ashburnham’s suicide and Nancy’s madness. What seems to be the heart of the disaster, and the cause of all the disasters which occur through the course of the novel, is the ‘extraordinary want of communicativeness’ (37) that Dowell describes —a malady that would be targeted by Lawrence a few years later as being the cause of the sterility of modern-day Britain. The friendship between the

²⁰ Ibid. p 153.

²¹ Significant allusions to Camelot will appear later in Waugh’s *A Handful of Dust*, of course, in which the rooms of the Last’s stately home are all named after figures from the Arthurian legends.

Dowells and the Ashburnhams took everything for granted, primarily the fact that they were all 'good people'. Never did the disasters that were brewing below the surface of things show themselves, nor was Dowell, at least, capable of perceiving them.

Graham Greene claims that the subject of *The Good Soldier* is 'the English "gentleman" [...] the "black and merciless things" which lie behind that façade'.²² Repeatedly, in the novel, Ford indicates the inability of his characters to interact fully, to see the reality of each other. As Dowell claims in the first paragraph of the novel, he had never sounded the depths of an English heart, he had 'known the shallows' (11). He claims he knows 'nothing—nothing in the world—of the hearts of men' (14) and reports that during the whole affair at Nauheim, Edward and Leonora did not speak a single private word to one another. 'What', Dowell asks, 'is one to think of humanity?' (15). There is no end to this frustration, nor any solution. Even at the very end, when Dowell is called to England, when things were at their worst, Ashburnham, Leonora and Nancy all give the impression of a 'pleasant country house-party' (221). Frank MacShane concludes similarly when he writes of the novel as a social document:

The Good Soldier offers no solution. It merely presents a situation in which people have lost the ability to communicate with one another [...]. In so far as it depicts the inability of human beings to deal with actual human relationships, *The Good Soldier* is the Edwardian novel *par excellence*. Anticipating Yeats' 'The Second Coming' and Eliot's *The Waste Land* by about ten years, Ford presented the essential conundrum of pre-War English civilisation. The result is essentially one of stasis: it is 'the saddest story' because of its insoluble frustration. Given life as it was during the few years preceding the outbreak of the World War, there simply was no viable solution. It took a world-wide holocaust to reassert live moral values [...].²³

If the events of the novel are to be likened to the events of the early 1900s, it could be said that the 'holocaust' that reasserts 'live morals' within *The Good Soldier* is a personal holocaust for Dowell. While Leonora knows, all along, the affairs of her husband, the affair with Florence, the fact the

²² Introduction to *The Good Soldier*, London: The Bodley Head, 1962, p 10.

²³ MacShane, p 115.

Florence actually killed herself rather than dying from her 'heart', the tragic business with Nancy – while all along she knows these things, Dowell knows nothing until the very last. His holocaust comes after everything is over, when he is left alone with Nancy and her belief in an Omnipotent Deity. The comic aspect of the situation cannot be lost on the reader. Here once again, Ford is juxtaposing the comic mode against the tragic. There is a sad irony in Nancy's madness, based on the coincidence of the fact that Dowell ends up rather where he started —'I am the attendant, not the husband, of a beautiful girl, who pays no attention to me.' (212). Far from being romantic the situation is 'tiring, tiring, tiring' and the calmness with which Dowell reacts to the incidents he describes is an indication of the depth of his exhaustion.

The calmness of the narrative, and its aura of restraint, has been noted by many critics. Yet the violence within the novel —the suicides, the love that is like hatred, the madness— portrayed as it is with such calmness, is startling. Robert Green writes of how the violence of this novel, and others written during the same period, might be meant to be purgative, if not constructive.

Closely connected to the frenetic experimentation of these novels is the widespread violence of the *content* of the Georgian novels. Husbands and wives are estranged, suicides seem almost commonplace, and class is divided against class [...] Perhaps it is only in periods of deep social convulsion that violence can be viewed as both contingent and unremarkable [...] Ford and Forster both foretold the macabre democratisation of death, its unspeakable ordinariness, in Europe between 1914 and 1918.²⁴

The period of social convulsion during which Ford was writing may have used violence to try to come to terms with an increasingly violent and unkind world. So too, Ford may have been intending to use the calm and calculated violence of *The Good Soldier* to present a way of dealing with a 'problematic reality', of wrestling with the problem of 'things not being what they appear to be', of seeing the truth behind 'contradictory versions of the same reality'.²⁵

Still, at the end of the novel there is no reprieve; no solution is offered.

²⁴Ford Madox Ford: *Prose and Politics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1981, p 57.

²⁵ Ibid. p 62.

Dowell's 'record of fatigue' comes to a close with the same lack of certainty with which it began, with the same distrust of peace and happiness, and with the same frustration with the unanswered 'why?':

Is there any terrestrial paradise where, amidst the whispering of the olive-leaves, people can be with whom they like and have what they like and take their ease in shadows and in coolness? Or are all men's lives like the lives of us good people —like the lives of the Ashburnhams, of the Dowells, of the Ruffords— broken, tumultuous, agonized, and unromantic lives, periods punctuated by screams, by imbecilities, by deaths, by agonies? Who the devil knows?
(213)

The longing for a haven of peace, such as Ford has described above (in language clearly describing his beloved Provence) was not uncommon during the years when he was writing. We know the history of the War, and we know it is 'agonized and unromantic', yet the violent purging that MacShane calls the 'holocaust' offers more answers than those given in the end of *The Good Soldier*. The vision of *The Good Soldier* seems, ultimately, to be one of despair and longing. In the years that followed, Ford was to go to war himself, and in the aftermath was able to begin to construct an alternative vision, one that provides an answer to questions like 'Who the devil knows?' and one which literally provides a terrestrial paradise, whispering olive-trees and all. *The Good Soldier* uses the adulteries of Ashburnham, and of Florence, as a metaphor for decay and deterioration, showing the badness, as it were, inside the seemingly good apples. It is up to *Parade's End* to take the opposite approach, as Lawrence would do at around the same time, using adultery as a metaphor for regeneration, making possible a life where people 'can be with whom they like and [...] take their ease in shadows and in coolness'.

Standing up on a hill: a tale of reconstruction

Sweet day, so cool, so calm, so bright,
The bridall of the earth and skie:
The dew shall weep thy fall tonight;
For thou must die.

Sweet rose, whose hue angrie and brave
Bids the rash gazer wipe his eye:
They root is ever in its grave,
And thou must die.

Sweet spring, full of sweet dayes and roses,
A box where sweets compacted lie;
Thy musick shows ye have your closes,
And all must die.

Only a sweet and vertuous soul,
Like season'd timber, never gives;
But though the whole world turn to coal,
Then chiefly lives.

George Herbert, 'Vertue' from *The Temple*, 1633.

Allusions to the poet George Herbert in the novels that make up *Parade's End* are significant. Not only does his poem 'Vertue' appear in Christopher Tietjens's ongoing interior monologue in *A Man Can Stand Up* (1926), but also Tietjens and Valentine Wannop both allude to him at several points throughout the novels, and to his parsonage at Bemerton, near Salisbury. Herbert's poem, in its final stanza particularly, sums up the character of Tietjens, while Herbert himself represents a model of English civilisation, a civilisation perhaps completely lost after the War, but one that Tietjens and Valentine are striving to regain in *The Last Post* (1928). The idea of 'virtue' is one that is explored at length throughout the tetralogy: Tietjens questions his own virtue, and all the while his virtue is questioned repeatedly by all those around him, particularly as regards his socially unacceptable relationship with Valentine Wannop, and the rumours that surrounded them. Silvia Tietjens may be seen as the antithesis of the virtue praised by Herbert and embodied by Tietjens; with her adulteries, lies and scheming, she almost totally overthrows everything good that Tietjens has ever worked for.

In *A Man Could Stand Up*, Tietjens's thoughts repeatedly return to Herbert, despite the twists and turns of his inner narrative. At a crucial moment in battle, and a crucial moment in the novel, Tietjens tries to remember the name of Herbert's parish, and his fragmented thoughts sum up many of the themes explored in the series of novels, and form a significant image of what is to be the basis of his own regeneration in *The Last Post*:

But what chance had quiet fields, Anglican sainthood, accuracy of thought, heavy-leaved, timbered hedge-rows, slowly creeping plough-lands moving up the slopes? ...Still, the land remains....

The land remains... It remains! ... At the same moment the dawn was wetly revealing; over there in George Herbert's parish... What was it called? ... What the devil was its name? Oh, Hell! ... Between Salisbury and Wilton... The tiny church... But he refused to consider the plough-lands, the heavy groves, the slow high-road above the church that the dawn was at that moment wetly revealing —until he could remember that name.... He refused to consider that, probably even today, that land ran to... produced the stock of ... Anglican sainthood. The quiet thing!

But until he could remember the name he would consider nothing....

He said:

“Are those damned Mills bombs coming?”

(566)

The significance of this is in the collision of civilisation with the most extreme and deadly barbarism: of the idea of Anglican sainthood, the images of English countryside and the deep peacefulness of the land, set against the jarring reality of an impending German bombing. The madness of the War set against the highest ideal of all: the quiet thing.

The fact that the dew can settle on English hedge-rows while German bombs blow Englishmen to pieces is on one hand troubling to Tietjens, yet, on the other, comforting. ‘The land remains’, after all. In the middle of war Tietjens can only try to remember to name of Herbert's parish, and as Gerald Hammond suggests,²⁶ remembering the name of ‘Bemerton’ is the key to

²⁶ Afterword to *Parade's End*, Manchester: Carcanet, 1997, p 842.

Tietjens's recovery, it gives him foresight, as well as renews in him the importance of memory, and history:

The name *Bemerton* suddenly came onto his tongue. Yes, Bemerton, Bemerton, Bemerton was George Herbert's parsonage. Bemerton, outside Salisbury.... The cradle of our race as far as our race was worth thinking about. He imagined himself standing up on a little hill, a lean contemplative parson, looking at the land sloping down to a Salisbury spire. A large, clumsily bound seventeenth-century testament, Greek, beneath his elbow... Imagine standing up on a hill! It was the unthinkable thing there!

The sergeant was lamenting, a little wearily, that the Huns were coming.
(567)

Standing up on a hill—it is an idea that is repeated throughout *A Man Could Stand Up*, when Tietjens's daydreams become vocalised and are repeated by another sergeant, 'a man could stand up on a bleedin' 'ill' (570); this idea, emphasised by its eponymous application, comes to represent all that seems impossible in the midst of war. Standing on hills is given the same air of wistfulness as Dowell's desire to 'take ease in shadows and in coolness'. Not only does this desire for peace—standing on hills, taking ease in the shadows, longing for 'the quiet thing'—link *Parade's End* to *The Good Soldier*, but it also emphatically places *Parade's End* as a novel of regeneration, for unlike what happens in *The Good Soldier*, at the end of this saga of lies, violence, adultery and pain, peace is achieved. The England that George Herbert, that Anglican saint, represents is not entirely lost, even though 'the whole world turn to coal'.

Reconstructionary tales

Ford's other post-war writings provide some context in examining his writing of *Parade's End* (1924-8). Two books, one of reminiscences and another an impressionistic narrative set in Provence, set up his agenda of trying to create some order in the wake of the War. *It was the*

Nightingale (1933) is a collection of Ford's reminiscences about the reconstruction of English writing after the war, not focused as much on the sort of spiritual regeneration that we see happening to Christopher Tietjens at the end of *Parade's End*, but concerned all the same with trying to rebuild, artistically, after the great disaster. The other book, *No Enemy* (1929) is much more pertinent to *Parade's End*, as it reiterates the theme of *The Last Post*, and provides a pseudo-philosophical basis for what Ford seems to be promoting in that controversial fourth book of the tetralogy.²⁷ In *No Enemy* Ford's poet-hero Gringoire returns from the War and moves to Provence where he has a cottage and where he farms the land and cooks —Ford described it, in a letter to Hugh Walpole, as a 'perfect paean to the English countryside in the middle of war reminiscences'.²⁸ The book is built around Gringoire telling his story to a young writer. The beginning of *No Enemy* could as easily work as a beginning to *The Last Post*, as Ford writes:

This book, then, is the story of Gringoire just after Armageddon. For it struck the writer that you hear of the men that went, and you hear of what they did when they were there. But you never hear of how It left them. You hear of how things were destroyed, but seldom of the painful processes of Reconstruction... Before the war Gringoire was an ordinary poet, such as you might see in Soho or in various foreign underground haunts by the baker's dozen, eating nasty meats, drinking nasty wines, usually in nasty company. How the war changed his heart is here recorded. This is therefore a Reconstructionary Tale.²⁹

Tietjens may not have been a poet, as was Gringoire; all the same, he too undergoes a significant change of heart. This change is traced throughout the first three books of the tetralogy, but begins to come to fruition only with *The Last Post*, a novel obviously influenced by the same ideas that are put forth more overtly in *No Enemy*.

²⁷ *No Enemy* could have been published under the more obvious title *On Earth Peace*, as referred to in a letter from Ford to Isidor Schneider, editor of The Macaulay Company, dated 14 September 1929 (*Letters of Ford Madox Ford*, ed. Richard M. Ludwig, Princeton: Princeton University Press, p 189). The title *No Enemy* is more subtle, taken from the motto (as specified by Ford in the same letter) 'Here shall he see no enemy,/ But winter and rough weather.' Curiously, the book was never published in England; Ford suspected that this was because the English 'knew I was too damn in earnest to want to read me' (*Letters*, p 191).

²⁸ Ford to Walpole, 2 December 1929, *Letters*, p 191.

²⁹ *No Enemy*, New York: Ecco Press, 1984, pp 9-18.

No Enemy presents a philosophy of life that is meant to cure the war-scarred spirit of England. This philosophy can be summed up, and simplified, in Gringoire's statement: 'After the war, we will take a cottage in the country and grow things and have a great view.' (66). Gringoire's post-war existence is bound up in the planting and harvesting and cooking of food. Good food, Gringoire believes, will go far in preventing further wars. This is a slightly eccentric approach to the problem of attaining world peace, but all the same, the ideology propounded in *No Enemy* is entrenched in the perfectly sensible belief that humankind needs to re-examine its roots, return to its home, literally as well as figuratively. Gringoire places repeated emphasis on the importance of the physical structure of the home, and how the war threatened the very houses of France, and elsewhere. Describing the world at war, Gringoire says that 'there were no nooks, no little, sweet corners; there were no assured homes, countries, provinces, kingdoms, or races. All the earth held its breath and waited' (22). Towards the end of Gringoire's experience at the front, he claims to have come to a

conscious proposition... definite and formulated — that first, and before everything else, we must have in the world assured nooks and houses that never cowered or trembled —houses of which one could never by any possibility think that they would cower and tremble.

(175)

The image of the 'little homes that seemed now to cower among the stubble fields' (174) is a haunting image throughout the book, and one that resonates with Dowell's wish for a place where people could 'take ease in shadows and in coolness', and Tietjens's desire to stand up on hill. Gringoire's fixation with planting and growing things has much to do with the idea of regeneration, and can be equated with the importance placed on Valentine's pregnancy at the end of *The Last Post*. The regenerative symbolism of planting, growing, fertility, and birth is obvious; in *No Enemy* the emphasis placed on growth, and the cultivation and protection of the home, is the foundation for

Ford's philosophy of post-war regeneration.³⁰ Much of Ford's post-war writing does in fact writing stem from this ideology that is at the heart of *No Enemy*, an ideology that may indeed have had its earliest expression in *The Good Soldier*. This set of ideas, of course, is deeply rooted in Ford's own experiences during and after the War. These experiences, as they form the basis of the ideals that inspired his important post-war fiction, including *Parade's End*, deserve some exploration.

The most significant factor is Ford's first-hand understanding of the War, its effects on him and how it changed the way he thought about England, and about relationships. In her introduction to the edited collection of letters between Ford and Stella Bowen —the Australian artist who was to be Ford's third 'Mrs'— Sondra J. Strang summarises the effect that the War had on Ford, personally and artistically, saying that Ford had

come through World War I considerably damaged both physically and psychologically. In 1919, as a writer facing a different literary world from the one he had known before the War, he felt himself to be an 'extinct volcano'. [...] He found in Stella Bowen and the cottage in Sussex the kind of 'sanctuary' he wrote about in *No Enemy* [...].³¹

Frank MacShane writes that the War had a hardening effect on Ford —as it did on Tietjens as well— and that he had to 'discover within himself the ideals and traditions for which he was suffering, and [...] act in a positive and decisive way. Hence the decision to break from Violet [Hunt] and move to the country.'³² The break from his relationship with Violet Hunt and his move to the cottage in Sussex with Stella Bowen gave Ford the opportunity to take the time to 'discover within

³⁰ There are similarities between Ford's prescription for the regeneration of post-war England and Lawrence's, as expressed fully in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. While Lawrence uses a more overt sexuality to emphasise the point he was making about returning to nature and to the simple things of life, Ford uses somewhat tamer imagery and references to establish his vision of peace. The fact that both *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and *The Last Post* end with pregnant mothers is not an insignificant similarity; this point will be addressed at length in the conclusion to this study.

³¹ Introduction to *The Correspondence of Ford Madox Ford and Stella Bowen*, eds. Sondra J. Strang and Karen Cochran, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993, p xi.

³² MacShane, p 137.

himself' the ideals that are ultimately expressed in *Parade's End* and most of his other post-war writings.

But for all his need to retreat into living out 'the quiet thing', Ford was not as emotionally scarred by the War as were others, despite his shellshock and the damage done to his health from poisonous gas. Unlike Lawrence's, Ford's letters and writing from 1914-1918 do not betray the same sense of violent bitterness and anger. Lawrence's reaction was visceral, fierce and full of a misanthropic despair, hating mankind for what it was doing; Ford's initial reaction was markedly different, as he claimed the War came as something as a relief to him, stating that despite everything he was 'very happy' while at the front with his regiment, and that upon being told he was to join up he felt as if the 'peace of God had descended' upon him. 'Being shelled is fairly dull, after the first once or twice', Ford writes in one letter in 1916, and in another, to Conrad, he writes that 'except for worries, I am really very happy'.³³ Ford's enthusiasm in being part of his regiment is apparent in all of his letters during this period, although his lack of ability as a soldier has already been noted. Much of his enthusiasm, and his view of the War as being a relief, may have something to do with his unpleasant relations with Violet Hunt at that time; her violent mood swings and manipulative behaviour made going into military service, with all its discipline and order, a comparatively attractive prospect. Being away from Hunt, as he was to discover later when he left her completely to be with Stella Bowen, was artistically, and personally, liberating for Ford.

But, nevertheless, the War did take its toll on Ford, and towards the end of the ordeal he acknowledged how the experience may have had a negative impact on him that he did not yet realise. In between amusing anecdotes of military life, Ford reveals to Conrad in 1916 that the War has had an alarming effect on him, sounding rather like Lawrence as he writes that 'it is horrible—it arouses in me a rage unexpressed and not easily comprehensible'.³⁴ And in 1917 he writes to his friend C.F.G. Masterman: 'I suppose that, really, the Somme was a pretty severe ordeal, though I

³³First two letters to Lucy Masterman, 31 July 1915 and 28 July 1916, *Letters* pp 61 and 66. Second to Joseph Conrad, 7 September 1916, p 75.

³⁴To Joseph Conrad, 19 December 1916, *Letters*, p 80.

wasn't conscious of it at the time... I wonder what the effect of it will be on us all, after the War — and on national life and the like.'³⁵ In the same letter Ford refers to the War as 'Armageddon', a term applied to the War by Lawrence many times, and a term that would figure largely in Ford's post-war writings, from reminiscences to *Parade's End*. Ford's façade of jollity, even under fire, may have been his own way of coping with the terrible things he was experiencing, and, to be sure, he had a better sense of humour than did Lawrence, and was, to a point, able to remain a sense of balance and sanity throughout his time at the front, shellshock notwithstanding. All the same, however, Ford was deeply scarred by the experience, and the advent of Stella Bowen, and the new life that he began with her, was just the balm that he needed. 'The early part of their correspondence', writes Strang,

reflects Ford's growing confidence, along with his capacity for happiness and for reorganizing his life as an artist. It is a 'tale of reconstruction' [...]. The letters transmit the excitement with which he and Bowen threw themselves into the work of renovating and furnishing their cottage and planting a garden [...].

The trajectory of *Parade's End* traces the withdrawal of the lovers from the larger world to a place of refuge and a new beginning, and experience that is documented in the Ford-Bowen letters and that supports which I take to be Ford's fundamentally changed view of life after the pessimism of the *The Good Soldier* and the trauma of the Great War.³⁶

The connection between Stella Bowen and the character of Valentine Wannop has been regarded a fairly obvious one, and one which Bowen herself acknowledged, saying half-jokingly to Ford in a letter that she may as well not join him in America, because if the Americans did not like Valentine, how could they like her.³⁷ There are many other comments of this kind, and it cannot be ignored that the life taken up by Tietjens and Valentine at the end of *Parade's End* is almost identical to that of Ford and Bowen just after the War.

³⁵ To C.F.G. Masterman, 5 January 1917, *Letters* pp 81-2.

³⁶ Introduction to *Correspondence*, p xii.

³⁷ Letter from Stella Bowen to Ford Madox Ford, 8 February 1927, *Correspondence*, p 315.

The need for reconstruction must have been evident to Ford even before the War was over. He anticipated the anxiety that the War would cause in *The Good Soldier* and, even while saying that he was ‘very happy’ at the front, Ford was certainly affected by the same anxieties that were pressing in on most Britons at this time. The impact of the First World War on Britain is arguably greater than that of the Second. By 1939 Europe, and much of the rest of the world, had been through one massive war, financial depressions and remarkable social, cultural and political changes; the Second World War impacted on a more thoroughly jaded world than did the First. Pre-war Britain was still holding onto Victorian ideals, from Imperial pride to moral codes, and war seemed to go against everything that it had been working towards for so long. As Meixner writes,

The appalling impact of the Great War lay in the circumstance that the European, and particularly the British, spirit was psychologically unprepared for its violence [...]. Since Napoleon, Europe had known only small wars, which were often fought with a certain decorum. The military life, with its occasions for feats of personal bravery and its colourful rituals and uniforms, was honoured, particularly as a check against a softening, unheroic commercial civilization. The mind of 1914 was not ready for barbed wire, concentrated artillery bombardments, trench fighting, poison gas, and the enormous wastage of materials and men... to a Europe conceiving itself as civilised, the revelation of its own barbarity was soul-shattering; the old values, the old inspiring words, seemed meaningless, had played mankind false.³⁸

This idea of being betrayed by ‘the old values’ is a constant theme in *Parade’s End*, and Ford explores, through the characters of Tietjens, Valentine and Sylvia, the ways that people can rebuild their lives after encountering ‘soul-shattering’ barbarity. As the old values have betrayed Tietjens and Valentine, it is up to them to build on new values, and—in a way—to overturn the preconceptions surrounding these ‘values’. The adulterous relationship between Tietjens and Valentine, far from negating their virtue, proves to substantiate it.

³⁸ Meixner, p 192.

Season'd Timber

Tietjens can be likened to the season'd timber that Herbert writes of, that 'sweet and vertuous soul' that never gives. There is aptness in this analogy not only because of the fact that Tietjens actually works with season'd timber by the end of *The Last Post*, making furniture, but, more obviously, because he does actually become seasoned, as a character, throughout the course of the novels. And while most of the world may have turned to coal, he still stands alive at the end, along with Valentine—but not without struggle. To extend the wood analogy a bit further, if there were to be a worm that tried to eat away at the timber, it would surely be Sylvia Tietjens, whose adulteries and cruel machinations did more to eat away at her husband than did all the battles of the War. Her character is as important to the development of Tietjens's character as is Valentine Wannop's. It is possible to argue that Sylvia's betrayal of Tietjens, and her desire to destroy him, is in fact what makes him able to come through his period of 'seasoning' and begin a new life, with Valentine. Therefore she is as necessary for Tietjens's regeneration as Valentine is. The dynamics set up here by Ford are notably curious ones.

Sylvia is a problematic and complex character. She is a very difficult character to read, much less to pin down. 'Who is Sylvia?', we may well ask, and

Is she kind as she is fair?

For beauty lives with kindness.³⁹

In the case of Sylvia Tietjens, her beauty is evident, if not intense—we are meant to marvel at her beauty, as Tietjens himself does, and to ask if there is any kindness within her. Of all the adulterous women examined in this study, it is Sylvia who is the only one who could be interpreted as being downright wicked. The only comparison might be with Brenda Last in Waugh's *A Handful of Dust*, whose betrayal of her husband, hardly as conscious and cold-blooded as Sylvia's, leads to his

³⁹ *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, IV,ii, 38, 51-2.

ultimate demise. Like Brenda, Sylvia is the only other woman studied here who has a child at the outset. Their callousness, when combined with the fact that they are maternal figures, is all the more noticeable.

A number of scholars (Meixner, MacShane, Strang and others) claim that writing the character of Sylvia Tietjens was Ford's way of finally purging himself of Violet Hunt. Marie Secors draws direct parallels between Sylvia and Hunt:

This diary reveals many details of the resemblance between them [...] Reading Hunt's 1917 diary is like being thrust through the dark side of a mirror; it is like re-entering the *Parade's End* novels from the point of view of Sylvia Tietjens.⁴⁰

It all seems rather obvious: Stella Bowen as Ford's post-war saviour is the model for Valentine Wannop, and Violet Hunt, as the manipulative 'wife', provides a basis for the character of Sylvia. But Ford has added much to Sylvia's character, and to her situation with Tietjens, that has little or nothing to do with Violet Hunt. Most significant is Sylvia's use of Tietjens, who married her even after she was regarded as 'damaged goods' and who raised a child that might not have been his own. Sylvia's infidelities began even before she was married to Tietjens, and her affairs during their marriage work to undermine, if only slightly at first, her husband's honour and respectability. Yet far more dangerous than Sylvia's sexual infidelity is her twisted fidelity to Tietjens, manifested through her jealousy. She is able to discredit him financially, by her dubious connection with an influential person in the financial world; and socially, by her jealous assumptions about Tietjens and Valentine Wannop, and her telling of lies. She even jeopardises his position in the army, during the War itself, by haranguing Tietjens's commanding officer. In *The Good Soldier* Ford writes of Leonora's love for Ashburnham, that it is a love that is like hatred: 'a passion that was yet like an agony of hatred' (126). The phrase is just as applicable to Sylvia Tietjens, for when she realises that she no longer has a hold on to Tietjens, she desires him all the more, but lashes out to destroy him, as it is the only way she can possess him.

⁴⁰ *The Return of the Good Soldier*, pp 11-12.

Sylvia, being a Catholic, will not give Tietjens a divorce during the first three novels.⁴¹ While there were adequate grounds for Tietjens to divorce Sylvia, as she was undisputedly unfaithful at various stages of their relationship, he, being a gentleman, would not even consider a divorce with himself as the plaintiff. Again, there is a parallel here between the Tietjenses and the Lasts, in Waugh's *A Handful of Dust*. Tony Last, like Tietjens the 'last' of the dying race of English Tory gentlemen, will initially not consider divorcing Brenda, despite the fact that she has left him for another man, which leads to the ridiculous scheme of the 'hotel bill' divorce. It was common practice during the 1920s and early 1930s for the cuckolded husband who wanted to divorce his wife without ruining her reputation to fake an adulterous liaison, hire detectives to give evidence and go to court and play the part of the defendant. It was very ironically referred to as 'behaving like a gentleman'. While this sub-plot is absent from *Parade's End*, the idea of behaving in a gentlemanly fashion is still very much present. Tietjens struggles for the duration of the first three novels with the conflict between his duty as a gentleman and his desire to be with Valentine. It is not until the War is over, and the values with which Tietjens had identified himself for so long have been finally shattered, that he is able to stop struggling and simply *be*. And when Sylvia finally relinquishes her hold on him, in *The Last Post*, he is able to enter into a wholly new life with Valentine, who is already carrying his child.

The novels may seem to present a case of one adultery negating another. Sylvia's adulteries get Tietjens into all kinds of bother, but his adultery with Valentine gets him out of it. Is it merely a case of two negatives equalling a positive? I think this is far too simplistic a way of looking at the situation. Ford uses adultery in two ways in *Parade's End*: the first presents a destructive sexual passion, while the other presents a constructive, revitalising relationship.

⁴¹ This resonates with Ford's own experience. His wife Elsie was a Catholic, and refused him a divorce, which of course led to his German-marriage scandal with Violet Hunt, as well as to his change of name from Hueffer to Ford.

In *Some Do Not...* (1924) he presents the reader with the fact that Sylvia is an unfaithful wife, even to the point that Tietjens doubts his paternity of their son. Throughout this first novel there are suggestions of Tietjens's involvement with Mrs Duchemin, or Edith Ethel, as well as with Valentine Wannop. Scandalous rumours abound, threatening to destroy both Tietjens and Valentine. Yet is very much a case of the pots calling the kettles black. Tietjens's friend Macmaster, who ends up using one of Tietjens's mathematical discoveries to attain a knighthood for himself, is actually the one who is having an affair with Mrs Duchemin, and it is Tietjens and Valentine whose relationship is, at that point, totally innocent. Before Tietjens leaves for the front for the final time in *Some Do Not...*, he asks Valentine to come to him that night and be his 'mistress'. Of course it does not happen, as Tietjens and Valentine, unlike Sylvia, MacMaster and Mrs Duchemin, are those who 'do not'. But Ford teases the reader with the question of whether Tietjens and Valentine 'do' or 'do not' maintain a pure relationship, setting the strength of rumour against the reader's faith in the 'last English gentleman' that Tietjens is meant to be.

It is not until the final book of the tetralogy that Tietjens himself commits adultery, and this is where the indispensability of *The Last Post* comes in. Tietjens's regenerating relationship with Valentine, adulterous as it may be, acts as an antidote to Sylvia's destructive passion for him. Sylvia and the War conspire to destroy Tietjens, where Valentine and an agrarian lifestyle work to rebuild him. If Ford were to have left off at the end of *A Man Could Stand Up*, as he apparently wished he had, it would be unclear whether Tietjens would be destroyed by Sylvia, and —despite the fact that they are celebrating the Armistice— likewise destroyed by the War. The fourth book of the tetralogy neatly finishes the Good Friday to Easter Sunday cycle —to borrow an idea of Lawrence's— that began with *The Good Soldier*. But the question of whether the last novel *belongs* with the first three novels is still very much open.

Greene argues against the inclusion of *The Last Post* in his preface to the Bodley Head edition of *Parade's End*:

I think it could be argued that *Last Post* [sic] was more than a mistake—it was a disaster, a disaster which has delayed a full critical appreciation of *Parade's End*. The sentimentality which sometimes lurks in the shadow of Christopher Tietjens, the last Tory, emerged there unashamed. Everything was cleared up—all the valuable ambiguities concerning the parenthood of Christopher's son, his father's possible suicide, his father's possible relationship to Valentine, Christopher's mistress—all, all are brought into the idyllic sunshine of Christopher's successful escape in the life of a Kentish small-holder. Even Sylvia—surely the most possessed evil character in the modern novel—groped in *Last Post* towards goodness, granted Christopher his divorce, took back—however grudgingly—her lies. It is as though Lady Macbeth dropped her dagger beside the sleeping Duncan.⁴²

This response to *The Last Post* may be typical of Greene. Greene's own novels, and especially those that will be looked at later in this study, are utterly devoid of the sentimentality that is indeed present in the fourth book of *Parade's End*. Greene's works are full of 'valuable ambiguities' and largely without a conclusive sense of optimism. Greene naturally gravitated more towards the earlier work of Ford, particularly *The Good Soldier*, which, despite Dowell's desire to find answers to the unanswerable question, has more than a healthy share of ambiguities and can be construed as an attack on sentimentalism. And it is natural that the fractured and pessimistic nature of the first three novels of *Parade's End* would resonate more fully with Greene's own artistic and spiritual sensibilities.

Greene's rejection of *The Last Post* can easily be read as being a subjective dismissal, and therefore easily dismissed itself. But he did back up his own position on the matter with Ford's own words, which makes the reader wonder if *The Last Post* should indeed be considered as a 'mistake', or a 'disaster'. Ford wrote to his agent in 1930 in reference to a new edition of *Parade's End* being published by Duckworth's, and one of the points made in the letter is this:

I strongly wish to omit *The Last Post* from the edition. I do not like the book and have never liked it and always intended the series to end with *A Man*

⁴²Greene, preface to *Parade's End*, London: The Bodley Head, 1965, pp 5-6.

Could Stand Up. Please consult Duckworth's about this. I am ready to be guided by them but should much prefer the above course.⁴³

This statement is surprising, coming as it does after a barrage of letters from Ford to various friends and acquaintances referring to *No Enemy* and its recent American publication in the most glowing terms. It is unclear why Ford would have 'never liked' *The Last Post* yet continuously praised *No Enemy*, which is so similar to *The Last Post* in theme and content.

Meixner too has criticised the practice of concluding *Parade's End* with *The Last Post*, arguing that the style and structure of the novel differ too sharply from the previous three, and concluding that the ending of this fourth novel is 'in short, a sentimental indulgence'.⁴⁴ Here again is the charge of sentimentalism—that great vice practised so assiduously by Edward Ashburnham. And perhaps there is some significance in this charge, significance that Ford may have noted himself, and which made him regard the book as being a less satisfactory conclusion to *Parade's End* than *A Man Could Stand Up*. If Tietjens has been betrayed by the 'old values', and by all the institutions had represented, working for the government, and for the military—in essence, working for England—then surely sentimentality would have been one of these 'old values', the emblem of a good soldier (such as Tietjens is, more so than Ashburnham). All good soldiers are sentimentalists, Dowell states dogmatically at one point in *The Good Soldier*; to see Tietjens returning to this old, dead value in the post-war, post-Victorian world that he is to live in after *A Man Could Stand Up* would mean a failure on his part to overcome those obstacles that dogged him throughout the first three novels. Ford possibly realised that he had written the last offering of *Parade's End* in an inappropriately sentimental vein, translated this material into *No Enemy*, and finally withdrew *The Last Post* from the series, opting instead

⁴³ Ford to Eric Pinker, 17 August 1930, *Letters* p 197.

⁴⁴ Meixner, p 221.

for the fractured and distinctly modern, unsentimental ending provided by *A Man Could Stand Up*.

This ending, as Greene puts it ‘is not the carefully arranged *finale* of *Last Post*’, but it was, rather,

a better book, a thousand times, which ends in the confusion of Armistice Night 1918 —the two lovers united, it is true, *but with no absolute certainties* ... [it is] the true conclusion of a story of unhappy marriage, of Sylvia’s tortuous intrigues which had begun, before the so-called Great War had closed in... [italics mine].⁴⁵

It seems hasty of Greene to determine that *Parade’s End* is a ‘story of unhappy marriage’. It does of course detail the disintegration of an unhappy marriage, but more importantly it details the construction of a happy relationship, one that would eventually become a happy marriage. To end the novel ‘with no absolute certainties’ is to come no farther than the ending of *The Good Soldier* where ‘it is all a darkness’. Stories of unhappy marriage do not frequently segue into stories of happy marriage; that is to say, or reiterate, happy love has no history. Even in the case of *The Last Post*, as with *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* some years to come, the happy marriage has not actually occurred yet. The ending of *The Last Post* is not the tidy ending that Greene would make it out to be, but it does provide direction and a sense of optimism.

It is impossible to say what Ford himself was thinking when he asked Duckworth’s to leave *The Last Post* out of their edition, a request that they did not honour, incidentally, which was why Greene’s Bodley Head edition of 1965 was the first return to the ‘author’s intention’. But as the criticisms of *The Last Post* by readers and critics seem to hinge on it

⁴⁵ Greene, preface to *Parade’s End*, pp 6-7

being 'sentimental', they conclude that it offers a dissatisfying ending to an otherwise 'modernist' novel. Gerald Hammond writes that

Had Ford left well enough alone, then the Tietjens trilogy would have been a recognisably modernist tale, delivering its comic ending in, at best, only a half-hearted way, for the frenzied ending of *A Man Could Stand Up* is at least as much of a *danse macabre* as it is a signifier of matrimony [...].⁴⁶

Had Ford 'left well enough alone', there would have been no real sense of closure provided at the end of his cycle of war novels; this might have resonated with the popular feeling at the time, but it would have left unfinished the greater cycle of work that he started with *The Good Soldier*. The sentimental, adulterous soldier created in that novel of 1915 is finally perfected in the sentimental, adulterous soldier-turned-smallholder of this novel of 1928.

Even if Ford's intentions were to keep the fourth book separate from the other three, it cannot change the fact that *The Last Post* provides a satisfactory and appropriate conclusion to the actions and situations developed in the previous three novels. Many critics have been able to see this fluidity of movement, from the beginning of *Some Do Not...* through to the end of *The Last Post*, even those who have criticised the unmodern 'sentimentalism' of the fourth novel. Hammond writes that the ending of *The Last Post* does in fact provide an appropriately comic closure to the series of novels, considering the massive scope of *Parade's End* and likening it to other English epics:

Ford sweeps up in his novel's ending *Paradise Lost*, where the linking of human hands bridges all of the action in Eden; but because *Parade's End* is a comedy, Ford's Adam and Eve are left in Paradise, the England of George Herbert which, in their strange, quaint ways, Tietjens and Valentine still embody, and which Ford still hankers after as surely as any Georgian poet.⁴⁷

This return to the England of George Herbert, or to a pre-lapsarian Eden, is the very quality that makes *The Last Post* such a fitting conclusion, and yet is the same quality that some critics take

⁴⁶ Afterword in *Parade's End*, Carcanet, p 840.

⁴⁷Ibid. p 842.

issue with. Criticisms made by John Meixner, for instance, can be set down here as evidence as to why *The Last Post* is in fact indispensable to *Parade's End*, if it is to be read as mapping out a cycle of regeneration. The change of tone, of theme and even of style and structure all work to make *The Last Post* thematically conclusive. Perhaps this is unfashionable, in terms of literary Modernism, but it seems to 'fit' nevertheless. Meixner is perhaps missing the point of *The Last Post* (be it an intentional point or not) when he makes the following criticism:

In *The Last Post* the tension between fact and wish is swept away, and two are made one. The whole mood of the first three books is inverted, as all cruel dislocations resolve into order. Christopher's son is self-evidently his own. Christopher's father did not commit suicide. And Sylvia, the devil, on discovering that Valentine carries Christopher's child within her, abruptly relinquishes her persecution and agrees to free her husband. Through the enormous sky and black night, the earth wheels tranquilly, the animal creatures of the world in awe sensing its rush. The great night is eternity and Infinite, and in it we see 'The Spirit of God walking on the firmament.' Thus, all is fundamentally well. Ford's verdict at the end is the familiar: 'God's in his heaven: All's right with the world.'⁴⁸

What fails to be made clear by Meixner and other critics is how this is inappropriate. They establish that is not in keeping with the realism that Ford had worked with in the first three novels of *Parade's End*, but not that it is thematically inappropriate. Even to consider the style and tone of *The Last Post* as being unfashionable is a bit far-fetched, as Lawrence was doing a similar thing, very fashionably, at the same time as Ford was writing. Just as Lawrence does not neatly tie up the problems being explored in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, so neither does Ford. The problems of the world, raised by the War, are not promptly solved in *The Last Post*—indeed very close to the end Valentine cries out 'how are we ever to live?' (835)—but a solution is presented.

The solution is represented by two things, *The Last Post* being a heavily symbolic novel. The first symbol is that of the land—a recurring symbol from *A Man Could Stand Up*. The second is that of family, symbolised most clearly in the pregnant Valentine. But in addition to the child of

⁴⁸ Meixner, p 220-1.

Valentine and Tietjens, there is also the reinforcement of the importance of marriage. The novel ends with Mark Tietjens's death, and his dying words to Valentine are about her lover, his brother, Tietjens: 'Never let thy barnie weep for thy sharp tongue to thy goodman... A good man!' (836). This clasping of hands at the end of the novel, as Mark is dying, is what rejuvenates Valentine. She needed to hear his last words, she says. The importance of the family to this scheme of regeneration is unquestionable. Returning to the land, as if to George Herbert's Bemerton, and becoming a family in love, even if not in law —these are the values that are promoted, sentimentally perhaps, but earnestly. Indeed, Ford knew that his English readers would be put off by the earnestness of *No Enemy*. Presumably he believed the same of *The Last Post* and that this may have been part of his reason for reducing the tetralogy to a trilogy.

But Ford could not possibly be more earnest than Lawrence, and the theme of regeneration sounds clearly through *The Last Post*, reinforced by the image of a pregnant Valentine —unmarried and adulterous as she may be— offering hope for post-war England. The fact that the child is illegitimate and that Tietjens and Valentine are not a bona fide married couple is significant, because it underpins the idea that the 'old values' have betrayed Tietjens. As MacShane puts it,

Tietjens is forced to abrogate the legal ways of man to gain his ends. He has to set up a household with Valentine in an illegal fashion, he virtually leads the life of a peasant, and the hope that is promised for the future of England comes from Chrissy, his illegitimate son. This does not mean that Ford was preaching anarchy: it is only to suggest that [...] mankind may have to turn its back on old habits and customs if it is to restore decency to the world.⁴⁹

The social gaffes committed by the last English Tory gentleman in *The Last Post* are in fact necessary for his release from the painful life with Sylvia, before the War. The War provided the first obstacle for Tietjens, while Sylvia was the second, and greater, obstacle. Hammond comments that 'much of the most enjoyable detail of *No More Parades* and *A Man Could Stand Up* derives from seeing Tietjens and his fellow soldiers fighting the War on two fronts, Sylvia and Private O

⁴⁹ MacShane, p 184.

Nine Morgan's wife being as deadly to their husbands' chances as any German shell'.⁵⁰ But while being obstacles, both the War and Sylvia at the same time lead Tietjens to his regeneration. A man cannot stand up until he has been knocked down, which both the war and Sylvia succeed in doing to Tietjens, repeatedly. Tietjens's physical adultery with Valentine is discussed throughout the first three novels but ironically never happens, and when it has happened it is not discussed, it is simply inferred from Valentine's condition in *The Last Post*. Their physical act of adultery, with its physical repercussions, is essential to Tietjens's release from Sylvia, and to the resolution of the tetralogy. Max Saunders notes that 'This version of the "Child in the House" turns out to be the only thing which can resolve the tetralogy, because it is only the idea of the mother and child which can pacify Sylvia, and effect a truce in her war with Christopher.'⁵¹ In this way Ford manages to link the structural resolution with a thematic resolution. As controversial as *The Last Post* may have been, and still may be, for editors, it seems apparent nonetheless that it provides the only acceptable conclusion to a series of novels tracing the horrors of the War, and the effects of the century's changes on a representative man.

Conclusion

There is a clear cycle being followed by the five novels examined in this chapter. Beginning with the 'saddest story' in 1915, following the War through, and ending with a 'tale of reconstruction' in 1928, Ford's novels of this period not only reflect the anxieties prevalent in the society of his day, but also reflect current innovations in fiction. The theme, or combination of themes, taken up by Ford in these novels is not entirely untypical. Lawrence was writing along the same lines at this time, and literature in general was expressing dissatisfaction with the old ways of doing things. Far from concluding that Ford is being in any way didactic in these selected novels, I hope it is clear

⁵⁰ Afterword to *Parade's End*, p 838.

⁵¹ Saunders, volume II, pp 249-50.

that, however heavy his themes may be, Ford is still very much a painter of verbal impressions. While *The Good Soldier* is more ambiguous and impressionistic than *Parade's End*, the latter group of novels maintains the sense of suggestion rather than explication. Ford provides a solution at the end of *The Last Post*, describing, not prescribing, a situation that offers hope for the future. And even in his description of Valentine and Tietjens's Kentish paradise, he leaves the final conclusions to be drawn by the reader. Ford was responding to the change in the social and moral climate, knowing that the dogmas and prescribed theories that satisfied the Victorian sensibility would not work on the modern mind. Ford often referred to his writing as being like a 'ray of light', and a stable centre in a 'whirlpool of conflicting ideologies'. By structuring *Parade's End* as moving from the anxiety and despair that characterises *The Good Soldier* and the War, towards a vision of regeneration and holistic life, Ford's work can be seen to illuminate a common concern of his generation. He provides an antidote for the painful experience that was the First World War, and anticipates further upheaval, yet at the same time tries to offer a suggestion of hope. By questioning the worth of the 'old values', using adulterous relationships to mirror the changing attitudes and the problems of the post-Victorian and post-war generation, Ford neatly opens the way for the other writers discussed here, and sets up a foundation on which these later novelists will build.

‘The Democracy of Touch’: D.H. Lawrence and the process of ‘phallic regeneration’

Something echoed inside Connie. ‘Give me the resurrection of the body! the democracy of touch!’

Lady Chatterley’s Lover

If England is to be regenerated [...] then it will be by the arising of a new blood-contact, a new touch, and a new marriage. It will be a phallic rather than a sexual regeneration. For the phallus is only the great old symbol of godly vitality in a man, and of immediate contact.

Lawrence, ‘A Propos of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*’

Introduction

Some years ago a radio advertisement for Aer Lingus asked ‘Isn’t it so much nicer when you can cut out all the boring bits?’ The advertisement attempted to illustrate this assertion by comparing the famous philosophical first lines of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* (‘Ours is essentially a tragic age...’) with some of the novel’s more infamous purple passages. Yet it is precisely the ‘boring bits’ of Lawrence’s final and most thoroughly scrutinised novel that reveal its central theme. These philosophical passages that surround the sexually explicit narrative describing Lady Chatterley’s sensual exploration in the gamekeeper’s hut are keys to understanding the novel, by indicating the function of its sexual aspect. It is true that the sex stands in the foreground of the novel, as the reader’s initial observation, but this, the most noticeable aspect of the novel, is in the service of Lawrence’s deeper project of regeneration, for which the sexual relationship between the lady and her gamekeeper provides an apt and puissant metaphor. By examining the ‘boring bits’ and extracting from them Lawrence’s philosophical intentions for this novel, the ‘exciting bits’ can be read as more than mere explicit sexual description, written to startle and shock a reading public unprepared for such frankness. Read alongside the descriptions of Wragby, its wood, the Tevershall

mines, and Lawrencean treatises on thought, literature, industry and nature, the sexual narrative fits coherently into Lawrence's final philosophical project.

Lady Chatterley's Lover certainly makes no pretence of being free from philosophical or didactic aims. Few readers can ignore the overt 'preachiness' of the novel, one critic going so far as to call it a 'novel of conduct, an apologue, a *Pilgrim's Progress* for the twentieth century, intended to show what the good life is and how we may go about living it'.⁵² Yet the sermonising in Lawrence's novel is a far cry from the moral or social treatises found in the adultery novels of the nineteenth century. For all that the novel is noted for its sexual explicitness and for the apparent centrality of the adultery, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is rarely approached critically as novel of adultery. In the massive body of critical work written about *Lady Chatterley's Lover* there are very few critics who approach the novel directly in these terms. Critical work pays as little attention as Lawrence himself did to the fact that the burgeoning relationship between Lady Chatterley and Oliver Mellors is adulterous. Sex, not adultery, has always been foregrounded in any examination of the novel; that the sex is adulterous would seem to be almost immaterial to the workings of the novel. Lawrence employs few of the techniques used in the nineteenth-century novel of adultery, not only because he is writing in a new century with new notions about marriage and sexuality, and in a world dramatically altered by the First World War, but because he is not consciously writing about adultery at all. But it is significant, all the same, that the relationship that Lawrence is using in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* to comment on post-war England's need for regeneration is in fact an adulterous one. This fact corroborates the suggestion that England's regeneration relies somehow on an overturning of traditional notions.

As this thesis aims to prove, and as has already been established in the previous chapter, Lawrence is not alone in combining the development of an adulterous relationship in a novel with commentary on England's need for regeneration. But *Lady Chatterley's Lover* differs from *The*

⁵²Wayne Burns, 'Lady Chatterley's Lover: A Pilgrim's Progress for Our Time', *Punch*, no 26, 1966, p 19.

Good Soldier —as it will also differ from several novels of Waugh and Greene— in that the novel's central affair, and Connie's personal regeneration, mirrors the regeneration that England itself needs to undergo; conversely, the affairs recounted in *The Good Soldier* are illustrative of England's disintegration. Like the relationship between Tietjens and Valentine Wannop in *Parade's End*, the relationship between Mellors and Connie is shown to be healthy, fertile and vibrant —juxtaposed of course with the sterile marriages of Tietjens and Sylvia, Connie and Clifford.⁵³

Any instances where Lawrence might seem to employ the trappings of the archetypal novel of adultery do not seem to be intentional. For the most part, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* disregards the typical pattern —boredom, quest for fulfilment, exploration, dejection, humiliation and death— and develops according to its own pattern —of epiphany, connection and regeneration.⁵⁴ I would concur with Tony Tanner, who regards Lawrence, with *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, as having departed entirely from the nineteenth-century paradigm. Tanner writes that, in complete opposition to the nineteenth-century norm:

The sexual activity is totally visible and audible and takes over the foreground of the novel [...] in this novel it is society itself that is receding into silence and non-Being, and the significance of the adultery is drowned in the very experience of physicality.⁵⁵

I disagree with Tanner's suggestion that the sexual activity within *Lady Chatterley's Lover* 'takes over the foreground of the novel' and, while I can accept the assertion that *Lady Chatterley's Lover* has departed from the typical adultery novel of the previous century, there remain some points of contention here. Most important being the fact that the significance of the adultery is *not* drowned in the very experience of physicality. The explicit physicality of the narrative cannot be disputed,

⁵³ Tietjens's marriage to Sylvia has produced a child, but of course throughout much of *Parade's End* there is some question as to whether Tietjens is the father. The question of children and fertility will be given more attention in the thesis's conclusion.

⁵⁴ Michael Squires, in his notes to the 1994 Penguin edition of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* divides the novel into three sections: negation, regeneration, resolution and escape. This division implies that the regeneration is achieved before the end of the novel, an implication that I dispute.

⁵⁵ *Adultery in the Novel*, Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979, p 13.

and in this way Lawrence is writing a thoroughly different kind of adultery novel from his predecessors; yet the adultery remains significant, in that it suggests that regeneration is not attainable through the traditional, tried-and-true preconceptions about men, women, sexuality and marriage.

What is 'phallic consciousness'?

The theme realised by conflating the adultery narrative with Lawrence's running commentary on industry and England is quite clearly regeneration—regeneration on several counts: sexual and sensual regeneration, personal regeneration, spiritual regeneration and, ultimately, national regeneration. The regeneration of the man and the woman through sexual relation, realised in the relationship between Connie Chatterley and Oliver Mellors, presents a microcosm for the broader regeneration of post-war, industrial England, a regeneration that Lawrence regards as necessary for the nation's survival. While sexual relation is the catalyst for the regeneration of Connie and Mellors, the catalyst that Lawrence believes will propel England into a phase of regeneration is what he calls 'phallic consciousness', alluded to in his essay 'Apropos of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*'. Sexual relations and phallic consciousness are not entirely distinct from one another. Indeed, within Lawrence's idea of phallic consciousness there is an emphasis on a deep understanding of relationship, especially sexual relationship. But phallic consciousness is not limited to sexual consciousness. In order to establish how Lawrence is using adultery to lead towards this 'phallic regeneration', it is necessary to determine what precisely is implied by Lawrence's use of the word 'phallicism', as it pertains to 'phallic consciousness', 'phallic life', 'phallic regeneration'.

First of all it is valuable to note the difference, in Lawrence's mind, between the words 'sexual' and 'phallic'. This was obviously a distinction he regarded as crucial in 1928 when *Lady Chatterley's Lover* was in the process of being printed in Florence, and appears to be a distinction he

very much wanted others to understand. From 13 to 15 March 1928 Lawrence wrote letters to various friends, elucidating what he believed to be the difference between sex and phallicism:

I believe the world is going crazy for lack of the real phallic feeling and consciousness—which is more than mere sex. Sex can be any sort of cerebral reaction, mere cerebration transferred to the sexual centres. But the phallic reality is another reality.⁵⁶

And in another letter:

You know I believe in the phallic reality, and the phallic consciousness: as distinct from our irritable cerebral consciousness of today. That's why I do the book—and it's not just *sex*. Sex alas is one of the worst phenomena of today: all cerebral reaction, the whole thing worked from mental processes and itch, and not a bit of the real phallic insouciance and spontaneity. But in my novel there is.⁵⁷

And another:

The way to gentle re-union is phallic, and through tenderness, don't you think?—between men and women, and men and men, altogether. Phallic consciousness is so much deeper than what we call sex. I don't call my novel a sex novel: It's a phallic novel.⁵⁸

These letters exhibit Lawrence's frustration with people's inability to understand this distinction, and their subsequent inability to understand his novel. Venting his spleen to his publisher in England, he wrote emphatically against the idea of 'sex':

It's not my fault if people turn into withered sticks, with never a kick in them. I believe in the phallic consciousness, as against the irritable cerebral consciousness we're afflicted with: and anybody who calls my novel a dirty sexual novel is a liar. It's not even a sexual novel: it's phallic. Sex is a thing

⁵⁶DHL to Christine Hughes, 13 March 1928, *The Letters of D.H. Lawrence*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979-93, 4334.

⁵⁷DHL to George Conway, 15 March 1928, *Ibid.* 4338.

⁵⁸DHL to Dr. Trigrant Burrow, 15 March 1928, *Ibid.* 4339.

that exists in the head, its reactions are cerebral, and its processes mental. Whereas the phallic reality is warm and spontaneous [...].⁵⁹

These differences to which Lawrence makes repeated reference parallel his earlier thoughts about ‘mental-consciousness’ and ‘blood-consciousness’, another distinction that he strenuously expounded in his novels, essays, articles and letters. Mental-consciousness, Lawrence believed, was what was slowly killing off the vibrancy of the human race, draining life from the modern man: ‘the tragedy of this our life, and of your life,’ he wrote to Bertrand Russell in 1915,

is that the mental and nerve consciousness exerts a tyranny over the blood-consciousness, and that your will has gone completely over to the mental consciousness, and is engaged in the destruction of your blood-being or blood-consciousness [...].⁶⁰

By setting the mind against the body in this way, Lawrence creates a dichotomy that can only be eradicated if the mental-consciousness is subsumed into the other, absolutely. The life of the blood, the flame-like life, the life of inner quickenings—to employ Lawrencean language—cannot be entered into until the mental life is integrated into the life of the body. It is only through blood-consciousness, understanding of the ‘phallic reality’, that the world can be healed, restored:

I do believe the phallic reality is good and healing, in a world going insane. I believe the phallic consciousness makes us gentle and really human [...].⁶¹

Lawrence repeatedly acknowledges the need for this healing:

I sincerely believe in restoring the other, the phallic consciousness, into our lives, because it is the source of all real beauty, and all real gentleness. And

⁵⁹DHL to Curtis Brown, 15 March 1928, Ibid. 4341.

⁶⁰DHL to Bertrand Russell, 8 December 1915, Ibid. 1094.

⁶¹DHL to Alice Corbin Henderson, 13 March 1928, Ibid. 4335.

those are the two things, tenderness and beauty, which will save us from horrors.⁶²

Lawrence makes yet another distinction, which may help further clarify what he is implying when he speaks of ‘phallic consciousness’. This is the distinction between ‘mental feelings’ and ‘real feelings’, which he writes about in his essay ‘A Propos of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*’. ‘How different they are, mental feelings and real feelings’, Lawrence writes. What are the differences? He catalogues the real feelings, which come from the life of the body:

The body’s life is the life of sensations and emotions. The body feels real hunger, real thirst, real joy in the sun or the snow, real pleasure in the smell of roses or the look of a lilac bush; real anger, real sorrow, real love, real tenderness, real warmth, real passion, real hate, real grief. All the emotions belong to the body, and are only recognised by the mind.⁶³

This life of the body, summed up succinctly here and illustrated voluminously in all of Lawrence’s fiction, is what is implied by Lawrence’s term ‘phallic consciousness’: it is an understanding of life through the senses, through the body, rather than through ‘mentalised’ abstraction or reflection.

It is profitable to read Lawrence’s philosophy of ‘phallic consciousness’ in the context of post-war England, and in the context of his own shifts in thought between 1913 and 1928, when he finally completed *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*. Lawrence regarded phallic consciousness as an essential source of much-needed healing because he saw England, and its men and women, as sterile and lifeless after the War. With *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, Lawrence follows the pattern that Eliot traces in *The Waste Land*, and completes his own phoenix-like project, moving from destruction to regeneration, from death to resurrection, using Connie Chatterley’s adultery as a metaphor along the way. This project begins during the War, with the writing of *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*, and it culminates with *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*. In order to understand the final phase of regeneration –

⁶²DHL to Harriet Monroe, 15 March 1928, Ibid. 4343.

⁶³ ‘A Propos of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*’, *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* edited by Michael Squires, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1994, p 311.

—the resurrection— the earlier phases of destruction and death have to be understood. For this reason it is necessary to look first to the earlier novels, and trace Lawrence's developing philosophy of regeneration, as well as his treatment of sexual relationships, marriage in particular, before looking at the culmination of this project in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.

Destruction

If we have our fill of destruction, then we shall turn again to creation. We shall need to live again, and live hard, for once our great civilised form is broken, and we are at last born into the open sky, we shall have a whole new universe to grow up into, and to find relations with. The future will open its delicate, dawning æons in front of us, unfathomable.

Lawrence, 'The Crown', 1915.

Between the beginning and the end of the First World War Lawrence's attitude towards the War's effects on England and his reaction to the reality of war itself went through a number of changes. It took Lawrence nearly the duration of the War to come to terms with its initial repercussions. It is apparent from the novel that he was working on during the most intense years of the War that his predominant reaction to the disintegration engendered by the conflict was anger. In most of Lawrence's work written between 1914 and 1918 there is a prevailing sense of yearning for annihilation, which is regarded as necessary, however painful. *Women in Love* (written 1913-17, published 1920) provides strong evidence for this point, as Lawrence himself claimed that 'the bitterness of the war may be taken for granted in the characters [in the novel]'.⁶⁴ Philip Callow describes Lawrence's approach to writing *Women in Love* in terms of a destructive phase:

There was the second part of *The Rainbow* waiting, which [Lawrence] was beginning to envisage as a clean act of passionate destruction to be set against

⁶⁴Foreword, *Women in Love*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, p 485.

the unclean horror of war, a great river of dissolution swirling through to a new, unimagined health. He wanted to compose a hymn to death, 'beautiful destructive death', to sing the virtual death of civilisation, and in the same creative act to plant the seeds of resurrection.⁶⁵

A letter from Lawrence to Catherine Carswell confirms this diagnosis: 'the book [*Women in Love*] frightens me. It is so end-of-the-world. But it is, it must be, the beginning of a new world too.'⁶⁶ Lawrence wrote to another friend that 'War is a great and necessary disintegrating autumnal process. Love is the great creative process, like Spring, the making an integral unity out of many disintegrated factors.'⁶⁷ Here, at least, he seems to be able to strike a balance in his reaction to the destruction of the War, regarding it as being prerequisite for regeneration, or creation; but Lawrence was not always so balanced in his attitude. To Cynthia Asquith he wrote that 'the war finished me: it was the spear through the side of all sorrows and hopes'.⁶⁸ And he wrote similarly to his friend Koteliansky: 'I feel so bitter against the war altogether, I could wring the neck of humanity for it.'⁶⁹ To Lady Ottoline Morrell Lawrence writes of the War's disturbingly violent effect on himself and his attitude towards other people:

Sometimes I wish I could let go, and be really wicked—kill and murder—but kill chiefly. I do want to kill. But I want to select whom I shall kill. Then I shall enjoy it. The war is no good. It is this black desire I have become conscious of.⁷⁰

In Lawrence's severe phases of despair he was unable to see any resolution apart from total destruction. Scott Sanders regards this as having been Lawrence's centrally formative attitude when he wrote *Women in Love*: 'Lawrence himself seems at times during the War to feel that the only

⁶⁵Philip Callow, *Son and Lover: The Young Lawrence*, London: Bodley Head, 1975, p 277.

⁶⁶Letter of 7 November 1916, *Letters*, 1306.

⁶⁷DHL to Lady Cynthia Asquith, 2 November 1915, *Ibid.* 1034.

⁶⁸Letter of 31 January 1915, *Ibid.* 851.

⁶⁹Letter of 5 February 1915, *Ibid.* 858.

⁷⁰Letter of 8 April 1915, *Ibid.* 896.

hope for the renewal of the world was a holocaust, a violent collapse of industrial civilisation.’⁷¹ Lawrence’s lack of hope, his horror of destruction and the desire for mass-obliteration fostered in him a disgust for other people: ‘when I see people in the distance [...] I want to crouch in the bushes and shoot them silently with invisible arrows of death.’⁷²

If Lawrence did write *Women in Love* in this phase of despair, in the spirit of pessimism and anger, he wrote *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* while recalling the phases of hope through which he passed during the War. In these phases Lawrence is keenly aware of the balance between destruction and creation, and is hopeful that the aftermath of the War’s destruction will bring a ‘new heaven and a new earth, a cleaner, eternal moon above, and a clean world below’.⁷³ In this phase Lawrence is able to look forward to resurrection, waxing biblical in the expression of his optimism:

Except a seed die, it bringeth not forth. Only wait. Our death must be accomplished first, then we will rise up. Only wait, and be ready. We shall have to sound the resurrection soon [...] let us die from this life, from this year of life, and rise up when the winter is drawing over, after the time in the tomb. But we are never dead.⁷⁴

But despite this hope and optimism about the resurrection that necessarily follows death, Lawrence is never of the opinion that all is well and good in England and with English civilisation. He acknowledges always a need for renewal, regeneration and re-creation. Apart from the War itself, modern civilisation has become something Lawrence regards as dead, or, worse, deadly.⁷⁵

Lawrence’s main criticism of civilisation, and of England, was its focus on ‘mental life’ — on industry, on business, on rationalism— to the neglect of the life of the body. Lawrence was just

⁷¹Scott R Sanders, ‘Lady Chatterley’s Loving and the Annihilation Impulse’, *D.H. Lawrence’s ‘Lady’: A New Look at Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, eds. Michael Squires and Dennis Jackson, Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1985, p 2.

⁷²DHL to Koteliansky, September 1916, *Letters*, 1279.

⁷³DHL to Lady Ottoline Morrell, 9 September 1915, *Ibid.* 983.

⁷⁴DHL to Bertrand Russell, 29 May 1915, *Ibid.* 928.

⁷⁵This is a particularly intriguing dynamic in the work of Evelyn Waugh as well. Like Lawrence, Waugh will condemn post-war society, ‘modernity’ and its proponents, albeit for different reasons from Lawrence’s.

as dissatisfied with socialism as with capitalism, with materialism as with moralism. What he desired most, from 1913 onwards, was escape: escape from materialistic society, from the mental life. It was during this time that he concocted various schemes to form communities of like-minded people, who could live together, work together, and, unhindered by civilisation's emphasis on the mental life, realise the full and true life of the natural body. His community was to be called 'Rananim' —a derivation from a Hebrew word in a song taught to the Lawrences by Koteliansky—and went through various forms in Lawrence's mind. It was to be in England, or in Italy, or in Florida; it would be comprised of only the Lawrences and the Murrys,⁷⁶ or it would be comprised of everyone in their circle, Bertrand Russell, Philip Heseltine and many others.⁷⁷ Lawrence's plans were fantastic, and this capricious idealism provided Lawrence with an outlet for his depression and anger. Philip Callow records that Bertrand Russell found all of Lawrence's thinking to be of a 'dreamlike quality'; Lawrence, Russell said, 'never let himself bump into reality'.⁷⁸ Lawrence was something of a utopian at the best of times, and during the years of the War, depressed by the violence and misery surrounding him, his utopian and escapist inclinations became more and more pronounced.

Of course the community never realised itself, causing Lawrence to become increasingly disenchanted with the world around him, and to become disillusioned even with his friends. Lawrence's vocabulary at this time consisted of a great many 'musts' and 'shalls' in prophetic fashion, a Jeremiad foretelling doom —doom if change were not implemented, if revolution and regeneration did not occur. In one of these Rananim phases he wrote to Russell that

A vision of a better life must include a revolution of society. And one must fulfil one's vision as much as possible. And that drama shall be between the individual men and women, not between nations and classes. And the great

⁷⁶John Middleton Murry and Katherine Mansfield.

⁷⁷Better known as the composer Peter Warlock.

⁷⁸Russell, quoted in Callow, *Son and Lover: The Young Lawrence*, London: The Bodley Head, 1975, p 260.

living experience for every man is his adventure into the woman. And the ultimate passion of every man is to be within himself the whole of mankind [...]. The man embraces in the woman all that is not himself, and from that one resultant, from that embrace, comes every new action.⁷⁹

While Lawrence's utopia was never actualised, these ideas brought on by the frustrations of the War, and by frustrations with his own marriage to Frieda, realised themselves in his novels from this period. Lawrence treads the thin line between death and resurrection in his wartime novels, and begins to explore the relation between man and woman as a metaphor for the kind of living relation he saw lacking in the world and in other people, a metaphor that is perfected in the adulterous relationship between Connie and Mellors. But like the phoenix, an image employed frequently by Lawrence from this time forward, Lawrence's lovers must go through a phase of destruction before they can be resurrected.

The destructive aspect of Lawrence's novels is embodied in the fight for mastery between the mind and the body, or between the man and the woman —this mirroring the destructive workings of the War, which Lawrence regarded as a struggle for mastery on a broader level: between classes and nations. In the fight for mastery, whether between men and women or nation and nation, Lawrence finds that separation occurs, a separation that works against the phallic realisation of true relationship. Sanders comments that 'the quest for mastery is founded, according to Lawrence, upon the *illusion of separation*: the illusion that mind can be divorced from body, self from other, humanity from nature'.⁸⁰ It is interesting to note that during the War, while Lawrence was writing with this theme of destructive separateness in his mind, he himself desired escape and was avoiding connection with the world and with other people. In a way, by writing about this battle for mastery that leads to separation and a loss of connection, Lawrence was able to purge himself of what he regarded as an evil. Towards the end of his life, Lawrence would write in *Apocalypse* that

⁷⁹DHL to Bertrand Russell, 24 February 1915, in *Letters*, 876.

⁸⁰Sanders, in Squires and Jackson, p 3.

we are unnaturally resisting our connection with the cosmos, with the world, with mankind, with the nation, with the family [...] *We cannot bear connection.* That is our malady. We *must* break away, and be isolate. We call that being free, being individual. Beyond a certain point, which we have reached, it is suicide.⁸¹

The struggle for domination and separateness is seen very clearly in *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*, and is finally overcome in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, when man and woman are finally able to come together in pure, true relation, and when the socially unacceptable quality of their relationship no longer matters.

Finished in 1915, *The Rainbow* is regarded even by Lawrence's most negative critics as being the most 'lyric' of his novels, as well as being a clear forerunner to *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in terms of its preoccupation with regeneration through phallic life, though Lawrence's later-developed language of phallicism does not appear in this novel.⁸² It is not so much the phallicism in *The Rainbow* to which I want to draw attention here, but to the novel's preoccupation with violence, dissonance and disintegration as seen in the relationships between its central characters — preoccupations which are to become more marked still in *Women in Love*.

After Tom Brangwen's proposal to Lydia, near the beginning of the novel, Lawrence describes Tom's sense of separateness from the woman he is going to marry, and the accompanying sense of violent discord in nature:

He could not bear to be near her, and know the utter foreignness between them, know how entirely they were strangers to each other. He went out into the wind. Big holes were blown into the sky, the moonlight blew about. Sometimes a high

⁸¹*Apocalypse and the Writings on Revelation*, ed. Mara Kalnins, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980, p 148.

⁸²Even Kate Millett, whose critical reaction to Lawrence's work is notably acerbic, regards *The Rainbow* as the 'first of Lawrence's important fictions', and states, rightly, that 'it also contains the key to his later sexual attitudes; here is the explanation, and perhaps even the root of his final absorption in "phallic consciousness"' (Millett, p 257). Curiously, Millett also states that *The Rainbow* is quite distinct from *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in its focus on the power of feminine sexuality, while the latter novel is only concerned with promoting the superiority of the male and the power of the phallus.

moon, liquid brilliant, scudded across a hollow space and took cover under electric, brown-iridescent cloud-edges. Then there was a blot of cloud, and shadow. Then somewhere in the night a radiance again, like a vapour. And all the sky was teeming and tearing along, a vast disorder of flying shapes and darkness and ragged fumes of light and a great brown circling halo, then the terror of a moon running liquid-brilliant into the open for a moment, hurting the eyes before she plunged under cover again.

(49)

Lawrence frequently uses natural description as an image for what is going on within a person, or within a relationship. Here Tom's fear of feeling 'foreignness' between himself and Lydia is indicative of a deeper violence of feeling between them, and this violence is mirrored in the description of the night sky. Lawrence uses natural disruptions to indicate human disruption — hardly an innovative choice (think of *Julius Caesar*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear*) but used with great effectiveness. As with the marriage of Tom and Lydia, the marriage of Anna and Will exemplifies the struggle for mastery that Lawrence addresses in *Apocalypse*. As with Tom towards Lydia, Anna Brangwen's initial fears are of her husband's separateness from her, and ultimately of her inevitable separateness from life and nature:

When he was oblivious of her she went mad with fear. For she had become so vulnerable, so exposed. She was in touch so intimately. All things about her had become intimate, she had known them near and lovely, like presences hovering upon her. What if they should all go hard and separate again, standing back from her terrible and distinct, and she, having known them, should be at their mercy?

(169)

Although sex becomes a way for Anna to retain relation and unity with Will, soon even this most intimate of unions becomes a violent struggle, each working against the other in an attempt to retain an individual sense of self and, by domination, to assimilate the one into the other.

As the weeks and months went by she realised that he was a dark opposite to her, that they were opposites not complements. He did not alter, he remained separately himself, and he seemed to expect her to be part of himself, the extension of his will... Because she dreaded him and held him in horror, he became wicked, he wanted to destroy. And then the fight between them was cruel. She began to tremble. He wanted to impose himself on her. And he began to shudder. She wanted to desert him, to leave him a prey to the open, with the unclean dogs of the darkness setting on to devour him. He must beat her, and make her stay with him. Whereas she fought to keep herself free of him. They went their ways now shadowed and stained with blood, feeling the world far off, unable to give help. Till she began to get tired. After a certain point, she became impassive, detached utterly from him. He was always ready to burst out murderously against her. Her soul got up and left him, she went her way. Nevertheless in her apparent blitheness, that made his soul black with opposition, she trembled as if she bled.

(169-70)

The marriage falls apart, comes together, and falls apart again, as Anna and Will are strenuously seeking a way of knowing and possessing the other fully while still fully possessing themselves. The brutality of Lawrence's descriptions of both the relationship between Anna and Will and that of Tom and Lydia may stem from his own disillusionment with marriage, in his stormy relationship with Frieda. This kind of sexual disconnection is precisely what Lawrence will be writing against in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. In this earlier novel, however, the conflagrating violence of the thoughts and feelings expressed in these two marriages is eventually transformed, in the end, into a peace that comes from resignation. But this, even in its peaceful conclusion, does not come close to presenting a truly regenerative type of love, which is what *Lady Chatterley's Lover* will do so emphatically.

Ursula Brangwen, the 'heroine' of both *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*, completes the cycle of violence, submission and resignation in the novel. Her violent love, or love-and-hate, affair

with Anton Skrebensky leaves her alone and pregnant, which results in a miscarriage.⁸³ Out of this violence and death ultimately come Ursula's revival of hope and a realisation of a future happiness and wholeness. Like the flood of Genesis, the old life, for Ursula, had to be obliterated before a new life can begin. Lawrence ends *The Rainbow* on a positive note, overriding its earlier tones of violence and anger, and overturning all the struggles for individualism and mastery—or perhaps using the violence and anger and struggle to engender peace and unity. The closing lines of the novel are a clear forerunner to the regeneration that is realised in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*:

And the rainbow stood upon the earth. She knew that the sordid people who crept hard-scaled and separate on the face of the world's corruption were living still, that the rainbow was arched in their blood and would quiver to life in their spirit, that they would cast off their horny covering of disintegration, that new, clean, naked bodies would issue to a new germination, to a new growth, rising to the light and the wind and the clean rain of heaven. She saw in the rainbow the earth's new architecture, the old, brittle corruption of houses and factories swept away, the world built-up in a living fabric of Truth, fitting to the over-arching heaven.

(496)

Although Lawrence ends this potentially destructive novel with an anticipation of rebirth and reintegration, he does not pick up where he left off when he writes its sequel, *Women in Love*. More violent and less conclusive, the novel creates relationships which do not, as do the relationships in *The Rainbow*, progress from a phase of violence, to a phase of separation and finally to a phase of resignation and harmony. The relationships in *Women in Love* are fully lethal, and end brutally, destroying lives. Even Ursula and Birkin, married and together at the end of the novel, are unable to maintain perfect amity, their final lines in the novel being of disagreement. In his introduction to *Women in Love*, Mark Kinkead-Weekes helpfully elucidates the factors he regards as

⁸³ Lawrence's use of children as symbols of regenerative love is applicable here, as the loss of Ursula's child with Skrebensky indicates the sterility and imperfection of their love. Conversely, Connie's pregnancy with Mellors's child is fully indicative of the potency and regenerative qualities of their relationship.

being behind the violent energy in *Women in Love*, reminding us that ‘the most important point about *Women in Love* it is that is a war novel’.⁸⁴

Uncovered in the depths of all the characters is violence, threatening to destroy the self and others, and this is because the novel was written at a time when all over Europe people had thrown themselves —at first with enthusiasm— into the First World War, and in that most terrible year of Verdun and the Somme, 1916, when slaughter had reached an appalling peak that had never been known before [...].⁸⁵

Lawrence was writing the finishing touches to *The Rainbow* when Britain entered the War, and it was really *Women in Love* that received the full attention of his war-scarred mind. The changes between 1913 and 1916 were so drastic that it is not surprising that the tone of the latter novel is so different from that of *The Rainbow*, which, despite its interludes of violence, maintains a sense of balance and concludes optimistically. *Women in Love* is wholly preoccupied with disintegration and—as the letters cited earlier prove— Lawrence’s disgust for humanity: ‘I feel so bitter against the war altogether, I could wring the neck of humanity for it.’ *Women in Love* effectively engages in figurative neck-wringing, allowing Lawrence a means of releasing this pent-up disgust and anger.

Another factor that Kinkead-Weekes points to as responsible for the overtly pessimistic tone of *Women in Love* is the post-publication suppression of *The Rainbow*, which was banned for its explicit sexual content, particularly for its account of a brief lesbian affair between Ursula and her schoolmistress. This violent rejection of his work caused Lawrence’s latent misanthropy to become blatant:

The fate of *The Rainbow* seemed only another symptom of the destructiveness Lawrence now saw everywhere. He thought of calling the new novel ‘*Dies Irae*’ [...] though he significantly decided not to, there is something apocalyptic about it. Its world is coming apart; and that creates more difficulty, since the art,

⁸⁴Mark Kinkead-Weekes, introduction to *Women in Love*, eds. David Farmer, Lindeth Vasey and John Worthen, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1995, p xv.

⁸⁵Ibid. pp xv-xvi.

in language and form, must be such as can render and explore violence, disintegration, deadly excess. This poses [...] a crucial question for the critic: is this a destructively violent and excessive work, or is it a diagnosis of violence and excess, enabling its author and its readers to come through the experience with better understanding of themselves?⁸⁶

The answer to this question is 'both'. *Women in Love* is a personal reaction to forces and events affecting Lawrence himself, a novel written, as it were, from the gut —visceral in its expression of anger and grief. At the same time, however, it is a novel conscious of its reader, conscious of what it is expressing and how it is being expressed, although not a work of didacticism in the later manner of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. It seems that Lawrence realised, even during the end-of-the-world year of 1916, that only through disintegration and death can there be regeneration and resurrection.

At times Lawrence is able to stand back from himself and allow his own weaknesses, personified in Birkin, to be scrutinised. At once reflective and reflexive, Lawrence criticises himself almost unknowingly for his violence and anger. A particularly powerful example of this is in a passage from the middle of the novel, when Lawrence is able to use Ursula's reaction to Birkin to demonstrate the horror of his destructive violence. Birkin is throwing rocks at the reflection of the moon in the water, watched by Ursula, who he does not see. Knowing from *The Rainbow* that the moon, in this cycle of fictional representation, stands for the power of woman, makes the scene one of attempted destruction of the feminine. Ursula realises that she is the object of Birkin's destructive rage and her reaction to his madness moves from one of ridicule to horror.

And he was not satisfied. Like a madness, he must go on. He got large stones, and threw them, one after the other, at the white-burning centre of the moon, till there was nothing but a rocking of hollow noise, and a pond surged up, no moon any more, only a few broken flakes tangled and glittering broadcast in the darkness, without aim or meaning, a darkened confusion, like a black and white

⁸⁶Ibid. p xvi.

kaleidoscope tossed at random. The hollow night was rocking and crashing with noise... Birkin stood and listened and was satisfied.

Ursula was dazed, her mind was all gone. She felt she had fallen to the ground and was spilled out, like water on the earth. . .

‘You won’t throw any more stones, will you?’

‘I wanted to see if I could make it be quite gone off the pond’, he said.

‘Yes, it was horrible, really. Why should you hate the moon? It hasn’t done you any harm, has it?’

‘Was it hate?’ he said.

(247-8)

The hate that Birkin struggles with throughout the novel often manifests itself in hatred for women, for Ursula, and for the inadequacies that he perceives in all of his relationships with other people, from Ursula to Gerald Crich. In Gerald and Gudrun’s marriage there is no unity, only jealousy and, ultimately, death; in Birkin and Ursula’s marriage there is no unity, but constant disappointment. The world, it seems in this novel, is a colossal letdown. Lawrence sees no hope in love, no hope in friendship. Birkin, like Lawrence, craves two kinds of love: love between man and woman, and love between man and man. Ursula believes that Birkin’s idealised view of human love is impossible, and Lawrence, too, although sympathising with Birkin’s obstinacy, seems to conclude that this perfection of human relationship is a futile endeavour. Closing the novel, Ursula tells Birkin:

‘You can’t have two kinds of love. Why should you!’

‘It seems as if I can’t’, he said, ‘Yet I wanted it.’

‘You can’t have it, because it’s false, impossible,’ she said.

‘I don’t believe that,’ he answered. (481)

While Birkin *is* given the last word, there is no sense of closure or resolution, and certainly no union between Ursula and Birkin. The ambiguity and sense of disconnection with which the novel closes, necessitates some attempt on Lawrence's part to put things right, which he will not be able to do until *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.

The Rainbow and *Women in Love* are prerequisites for *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, just as war is a prerequisite for peace. In his last novel Lawrence is finally able to conclude the struggle for mastery and the violent search for individuality with a return to unity and peace, by embracing the 'phallic reality'. It is arguable that Lawrence could not have written *Lady Chatterley's Lover* until he was well removed from the years of war, and from the bitterness that he was feeling so intensely during that period. Lawrence himself, always fond of religious symbolism, had to go through his Good Friday before he could write his Easter Sunday. By the end of the War, Lawrence was able to be on his way towards a full realisation of resurrection. An essay he published after the War was over foreshadows the spirit of regeneration through nature that becomes fully expressed in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*:

We may not choose the world. We have hardly any choice for ourselves. We follow with our eyes the bloody and horrid line of the march of this extreme winter, as it passes away. But we cannot hold back the spring. We cannot make the birds silent, prevent the bubbling of the wood-pigeons. We cannot stay the fine world of silver-fecund creation from gathering itself and taking place upon us. Whether we will or no, the daphne tree will soon be giving off perfume, the lambs dancing on two feet, the celandines will twinkle all over the ground, there will be new heaven and new earth.⁸⁷

The new heaven and the new earth will come to fruition, Lawrence believes, only through a radical change in the way that men and women relate with one another. In order for this change to occur, all the old ideas and habits have to be overturned, and a new order has to be established. The

⁸⁷'Whistling of Birds', *Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine and Other Essays*, ed. Michael Herbert, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, pp 21-2.

adulterous relationship of Connie and Mellors effectively overturns a whole social tradition, and in doing so makes way for a new heaven and new earth.

Resurrection

Since the War, the world has been without a Lord. What is the Lord within us, has been walled up in the tomb. But three days have fully passed, and it is time to roll away the stone. It is time for the Lord in us to arise...

Rise then, men of the Risen Lord, and push back the stone. Who rises with the Risen Lord rises himself as a lord. Come, stand on the spokes of fire, as the wheel begins to revolve. Face inward to the flame of Whole God, that plays upon the zenith. And be lords with the Lord, with bright, and brighter, and brightest, and most-bright faces.

Lawrence, 'Resurrection', 1925.

Of course if there is any point whatsoever in the resurrection it was the resurrection of the body.

Lawrence, writing to Maria Chambers, 1928.

Much of the misunderstanding that surrounds interpretations of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* stems from the insistence of many critics that the novel is primarily about sex and male-domination. In order to establish that the novel does not have a sexist agenda, and to establish that the novel's most significant theme is of adultery leading to regeneration, tracing the cycle of death to resurrection, it is important to examine two ways of reading the novel. First, I will address the popular feminist reading of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and pinpoint the instances in which the propagators of this type of reading have failed to understand Lawrence's philosophical project and have misunderstood his vocabulary. Second, I will present an alternative reading, which establishes the sexual aspect of the novel—the adultery between Connie and Mellors—as a metaphor for national regeneration.

The feminist fallacy

Kate Millett's essay on D.H. Lawrence in her 1970 book *Sexual Politics*, charges *Lady Chatterley's Lover* with being a 'quasi-religious tract recounting the salvation of one modern woman [...] through the offices of the author's personal cult, "the mystery of the phallus"'.⁸⁸ This assertion has been the object of assent and dissent alike in the past thirty years, and has been repudiated numerous times in journals, essays and articles.⁸⁹ Millett validly recognises the didactic design of the novel, but as Balbert, Widdowson, Bradshaw and others have argued, she does not recognise the breadth of the design. Millett goes on to claim that:

In *Lady Chatterley* [sic], as throughout his final period, Lawrence uses the words 'sexual' and 'phallic' interchangeably, so that the celebration of sexual passion for which the book is so renowned is largely a celebration of the penis of Oliver Mellors, gamekeeper and social prophet [...] This is far less a matter of 'the resurrection of the body', 'natural love', or other slogans under which it has been advertised, than the transformation of masculine ascendancy into a mystical religion, international, possibly institutionalised. This is sexual politics in its most overwhelming form [...].⁹⁰

A great deal in this passage alone invites response and further questioning. Balbert responds to Millett's essay and questions the grounds of her approach to Lawrence's novel; he sums up his criticism of Millett's position by stating that she

displays little patience for moderation in her argument and scant concern for crucial, subtle nuances in Lawrence's fiction; she is avowedly and unabashedly on an ideological hunt for male demons, as she concludes that Lawrence's work

⁸⁸ London: Virago, 1977, p 238.

⁸⁹Notably by Peter Balbert, who devoted much of his book *D.H. Lawrence and the Phallic Imagination* (Macmillan, 1989) to refuting Millett's position, and by David Bradshaw in an (unpublished) essay on *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and national regeneration.

⁹⁰Millett, p 238.

is reactionary and unwholesome for its ‘absorption in “phallic consciousness”’
and a ‘doctrinaire male-supremacist ethic’.⁹¹

This criticism of Millett’s central arguments does hit several nails on their heads: Millett’s argument does not allow for literary subtleties such as metaphor —as she reads the novel too literally; neither does Millett allow for alternate interpretations of the novel, as she is neatly grafting *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* into a preconceived and well-planned argument. The one contention with Millett’s essay that Balbert and Bradshaw fail to make is one of importance to this particular study, namely, Millett’s misreading of ‘phallic’ and ‘sexual’. This misreading, or misunderstanding, is evinced by her assertion that Lawrence uses the words ‘sexual’ and ‘phallic’ interchangeably, and is a misunderstanding stemming perhaps from her inability to read the novel metaphorically, and her insistence on its unequivocal patriarchal and male-supremacist ethic.

It has already been seen that Lawrence made quite clear the distinction between his use of the terms ‘sexual’ and ‘phallic’, finding the one a result of mechanised, sterilised modernism, and the other the source of life and true relation. Millett either is ignorant of these distinctions, or is wilfully ignoring them, or simply does not believe that they are accurate or adequate. If the latter is the case, and Millett does not regard Lawrence’s distinctions as having any ground or validity, it is because she is stuck in a literal reading of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, thereby making it impossible for her to see past what she regards as thorough male-domination and discover what Lawrence means by differentiating ‘sex’ and ‘phallicism’.

Approaching *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* in so literal a manner can provide reason for one to assert that Lawrence’s fine distinctions between sexual and phallic, expressed so ably in letters and essays, simply fall to pieces when applied to his novel. Such a literal reading could very well conclude that Lawrence’s subject is not, as he would like to think, phallic regeneration, but sexual domination and manipulation: ‘sexual politics in its most overwhelming form’. Millett cites

⁹¹*D.H. Lawrence and the Phallic Imagination*, Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1989, p 5.

passage after passage that seem to her examples of lessons in male-dominated sex, or lessons in female subjugation and subservience—in bed as well as out of it. For example, this account of a sexual encounter between Mellors and Connie, when read out of context, does appear to be advocating feminine subservience:

And he had to come into her at once, to enter the peace on earth of that sort, quiescent body. It was the moment of pure peace for him, the entry into the body of a woman. She lay still, in a kind of sleep. The activity, the orgasm was all his, all his; she could strive for herself no more.

(116)

But Millett's reading of this passage ignores its context, and ignores the action surrounding this particular episode. Immediately after this, the first sexual encounter between Connie and Mellors, Lawrence has Mellors reflect weakly on the power Connie had just wielded over him, an unknown woman drawing out a bitterly isolated man: 'She had connected him up again, when he had wanted to be alone.' (118). If lack of connection and separation are the effects of the malady that is killing the modern world, as expressed in *Apocalypse*, it is the woman's quiet drawing-out that is to bring Mellors into a state of healthy connection. Lawrence does not make Connie's sexual passivity a mark of subjugation in this passage, but a mark of unconscious power: Connie does not realise what she has done to Mellors, does not realise the power of her own femininity, of, as Lawrence will put it, her womb. Connie regenerates Mellors as much as he regenerates her; it is a reciprocal regeneration. By ignoring Lawrence's explanations, Millett erroneously equates his emphasis on the phallic life with a notional superiority of male genitalia, and the innate dominance of man.

Referring for a moment back to *The Rainbow*, Millett claims that this particular novel 'celebrates the pastoral life in terms of fertility—never the phallic fertility of the later period, but the power of the womb'.⁹² Again this is a misreading, or incomplete reading, on Millett's part, for *The Rainbow* is as much about phallicism as is *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, albeit manifested through

⁹²Millett, p 257.

different imagery.⁹³ For Lawrence, phallic consciousness, or phallic life, is as much centred in the womb as it is in the penis; in Lawrence's idea of phallicism, there is little disparity between man and woman: each is equally necessary for phallic life to be possible. Millett is unwilling, and perhaps unable, to acknowledge this fact because of her fixation with the literal descriptions of the sexual act in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, and with what she regards as being an immoderate emphasis on the penis. Millett suggests that Lawrence paid homage to the power of the womb in *The Rainbow*, but reversed his position later in life when he wrote *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, concluding that male sexuality ultimately triumphs over the female. She claims that in Lawrence's later work he presents 'the male alone as the life force',⁹⁴ departing from his earlier fascination with the power of the female, the *ewige Weiblich*, the power of the mother:⁹⁵ 'the early sections of *The Rainbow* show a curious absorption in the myth of the eternal feminine, the earth mother, and constitute a veritable hymn to the feminine mystique'.⁹⁶

This is a perfectly reasonable statement but Millett is unreasonable in suggesting that this 'hymn to the feminine mystique' has become any less audible in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Millett overlooks Lawrence's incessant writing about the womb in this novel: the womb's potency, the sexual power of the woman, and the strength of motherhood. These themes resound throughout the novel as powerfully as do the themes of male sexual power; Lawrence defines his distinctions between sex and phallicism, and mental consciousness and blood—or phallic—consciousness, as clearly in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* as he does in his letters and non-fictional writings. Millett's misunderstanding of Lawrence's distinctions has little excuse, as they are reiterated throughout the pages of his novel. As Lawrence's letters have demonstrated, and as I hope the remainder of this study will reaffirm, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is not simply a celebration of sexual passion, or of

⁹³Even at the novel's inception its phallicism was apparent; Robert Lynd, a reviewer in the *Daily News* wrote of *The Rainbow* 'it seems to me largely a monotonous wilderness of phallicism'. 5 October 1915, p 6.

⁹⁴Millett, p 258.

⁹⁵This fascination of course is initiated most noticeably in *Sons and Lovers*; although with this novel Lawrence purged himself, to an extent, of the anxiety surrounding the role of his mother in his development, it was a theme repeated in most of his succeeding work, including *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.

⁹⁶Millett, p 258.

Oliver Mellors's penis, as Millett's arguments would have it. The celebration is of the phallic life, which has as much to do with reintegration, natural awareness and female fertility as it has to do with sexual passion and male sexuality. The theme of 'resurrection' —natural, spiritual and, especially, physical resurrection— best sums up what it is that the novel is celebrating.

The metaphorical alternative

I want to leave this consideration of the feminist reading of the novel, and turn to a more metaphorical reading of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. It is useful to look at the process by which Connie Chatterley is regenerated through her adultery with Mellors, and how Lawrence is using her regeneration, as well as that of Mellors for that matter, as a metaphor for post-war England. To begin an analysis of the novel in these terms it is most helpful to consider its opening passage, which immediately keys the reader into Lawrence's project:

Ours is essentially a tragic age, so we refuse to take it tragically. The cataclysm has happened, we are among the ruins, we start to build up to new habitats, to have new little hopes. It is rather hard work: there is now no smooth road into the future: but we may go round, or scramble over the obstacles. We've got to live, no matter how many skies have fallen.

(5)

This summarises the novel, in four sentences. Connie's personal tragedy is a result of the great cataclysm, the War, and her 'ruins', including her ruined husband, are the result of the greater ruin of England. Connie's work is to regenerate and to be regenerated, brought back to life. She tries various ways of doing this, her husband rejects these ways, and her marriage, as well as all the traditional notions that accompany it, becomes an obstacle to regeneration. In the end, it is a new way of life that Connie, as well as England, has to embrace. And this embrace can only happen with that return to natural relation and connection, which Lawrence calls phallic consciousness. Connie

and Mellors, both separate and broken, become unified and embrace life, representing an England that will welcome regeneration; Clifford Chatterley, also broken, rejects life, representing an England that refuses regeneration and goes its own way, fighting life at every corner. This is an over-simplified summation of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, but demonstrates how the progression from brokenness to regeneration is explicit in the first paragraph of the novel.

How does this sexual metaphor —epitomised by what Millett refers to as slogans: the 'resurrection of the body', the 'democracy of touch'— extend itself to anything outside sexual relations? Of course Lawrence *is* writing about sex; it is impossible to argue that he is unconcerned with sex, just as it difficult to argue that he is unconcerned with adultery. But why does Lawrence *use* sex and adultery in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* to suggest a formula for national regeneration? Lawrence notoriously uses everything as a metaphor for sex in most of his novels (sex is always represented by water, or fire, or trees) but in this case sex itself is being used explicitly as a metaphor for everything else. Exploring this inversion reveals more than one would initially expect.

The tragedy, referred to by Lawrence in the novel's first line, is the sterility of the modern post-war world, its absence of true feeling and connection. As early as 1915 Lawrence had already written that 'the tragedy of this our life, and of your life, is that the mental and nerve consciousness exerts a tyranny over the blood-consciousness'.⁹⁷ Brought on by industrialism, war and a new modern rationalism, later personified in Clifford Chatterley and his neo-Platonist cronies, this 'tragedy' has eaten away at Connie Chatterley and Oliver Mellors just as much as it has eaten away at England, and sapped life from her. What clearer way to demonstrate a return to connection (blood-consciousness) than through sexual relationship. And what better way to emphasise the need to overturn preconceived notions of true relation than by making the sexual relationship adulterous. At the outset, then, Connie and Mellors are pitted against Clifford Chatterley, as the woods are against Wragby and the mines, and as blood is against mind.

⁹⁷DHL to Bertrand Russell, 8 December 1915, *Letters*, 1094.

Lawrence's choice of making Clifford crippled, too significantly, from the waist down is questionable. Lawrence addresses this in 'A Propos of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*' and justifies his choice:

As to whether the 'symbolism' is intentional —I don't know [...] I recognised that the lameness of Clifford was symbolic of the paralysis, the deeper emotional or passional paralysis, of most men of his sort and class, today. I realised that it was perhaps taking an unfair advantage of Connie, to paralyse him technically. It made it so much more vulgar of her to leave him. Yet the story came as it did, by itself, so I left it alone. Whether we call it symbolism or not, it is, in the sense of its happening, inevitable.⁹⁸

Not only this, but the symbolism in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* has been criticised generally as being far too overt, but as a didactic piece of fiction employing vigorous metaphors, this directness works to the novel's benefit. F.R. Leavis would disagree with this assertion as he holds that *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is 'in certain ways too deliberate —too deliberate, at any rate, to be a wholly satisfactory work of art'.⁹⁹ But, as T.S. Eliot concluded about Lawrence's work, the prophet kills the artist: in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* Lawrence is not so much of an artist as a soothsayer, the art is secondary to the prophetic mission.¹⁰⁰ Hence the simple and weighty, almost allegorical, symbolism of the novel.

Clifford himself symbolises so many of the things that Lawrence's project of regeneration is fighting against: individualism, Platonism, disconnection, mental consciousness. Clifford is obviously a representation of sterility in the novel, but, to be fair, it can be argued that he has had his chance at resurrection —regardless of whether or not his sexual potency ever returns— and he has failed to resurrect. Clifford and Mellors are sexual opposites of one another —physical opposites, as clearly as they are spiritual opposites; it is the latter that Lawrence is using the former to emphasise.

⁹⁸'A Propos of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*', *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1994, p 333.

⁹⁹*DH Lawrence: Novelist*, Chicago, Illinois: Chicago University Press, 1955, p 74.

¹⁰⁰'The Victim and the Sacrificial Knife', *Criterion*, July 1931, issue x, pp 768-74.

Mellors has the use of his body in a way that Clifford lacks, just as Mellors has the use of his spirit, his tenderness—an important word in Lawrence’s vocabulary—that Clifford lacks.¹⁰¹ Clifford and Mellors both have ‘died’ and both have been given the chance of resurrection.

Clifford was blown to bits in 1918, but ‘his hold on life was marvellous’. He did not die, and, as Lawrence puts it,

the bits seemed to grow together again. For two years he remained in the doctor’s hands. Then he was pronounced a cure, and could return to life again, with the lower half of his body, from the hips down, paralysed forever.

(5)

But apart from this magical growing back together of the bits that were Clifford Chatterley, he is a man impervious to resurrection. He is given the opportunity to return to life, but as soon as he does he makes all the choices that Lawrence would deem wrong: he avoids true connection with other people, even his wife; he exalts in the mental life, epitomised in his writing; he grovels before the ‘bitch-goddess’ of money and success; and he eventually turns to industry as a way of wielding power over other people and society. All these choices, for which he might have made alternate ones, doom Clifford and prevent him from being able truly to resurrect, through blood-awareness, connection and tenderness. It is Clifford’s imperviousness to resurrection that makes him lose his wife to another man, a man who has let himself be resurrected.

Mellors tells Connie that he has ‘died once or twice already. Yet here I am, pegging on, and in for more trouble.’ (216). It is Mellors’s willingness to resurrect—to make connection where there was none—that makes him Lawrence’s ideal ‘natural man’. Not only does his sexual energy and potency enable Mellors to regenerate Connie, but so too does his capacity for tenderness, and his willingness to risk the initial pain of connection. Lawrence makes it clear that connection, or

¹⁰¹*Lady Chatterley’s Lover* had a number of provisional titles, one of them being *Tenderness*.

reconnection, is not something that Mellors initially desires; in fact it is something he dreads. His knowledge of the impending connection with Connie affects Mellors sexually at first:

He was aware of the old flame shooting and leaping up in his loins, that he had hoped was quiescent forever. He fought against it, turning his back to her. But it leapt, and leapt downwards, circling in his knees.

(115)

But after the first sexual encounter, he begins to feel this connection as more than simply sexual, a connection far more threatening to his solitude:

He stood back and watched her going into the dark, against the pallor of the horizon. Almost with bitterness he watched her go. She had connected him up again, when he had wanted to be alone. She had cost him that bitter privacy of a man who at last wants only to be alone.

(118)

But even then, Mellors is prepared to sacrifice the security of isolation on behalf of a greater good: that of connection and tenderness. These elements, if cultivated in himself and Connie, might help return something of them to the world, if he and Connie could battle the world's sterile, mechanical coldness. At this point Lawrence begins to intimate how this phallic regeneration, this work of tenderness, illustrated through sexual relation, might have positive repercussions on a societal level. He sets the potential regenerative relation between Mellors and Connie, and their natural world of woods and bluebells, against the mechanised world of modern industry and greed, Clifford and his 'bitch-goddess'.

And now [Mellors] had taken the woman, and brought on himself a new cycle of pain and doom. For he knew by experience what it meant. It was not the woman's fault, nor even love's fault, nor the fault of sex. The fault lay there, out there, in those evil electric lights and diabolical rattlings of engines. There, in the world of the mechanical greedy, greedy mechanism and mechanised greed, sparkling with lights and gushing hot metal and roaring with traffic, there lay the vast evil thing, ready to destroy whatever did not conform. Soon it

would destroy the wood, and the bluebells would spring no more. All vulnerable things must perish under the rolling and running of iron.

He thought with infinite tenderness of the woman... she too had some of the vulnerability of the wild hyacinths, she wasn't all tough rubber-goods-and-platinum, like the modern girl. And they would do her in! As sure as life, they would do her in, as they do in all naturally tender life... But he would protect her with his heart for a little while. For a little while, before the insentient iron world and the Mammon of mechanised greed did them both in, her as well as him.

(119)

I have quoted from the novel at length because I regard this passage as central to the dynamic between Connie's regeneration and the societal, or national, regeneration that Lawrence is working towards. Not only does it demonstrate how Connie and Mellors stand metaphorically for the goodness and purity of 'old' England and against modern disintegration, but it demonstrates as well the destructiveness that Lawrence attributes to mechanical modernised society, personified here in the mining industry, further personified in the novel by Clifford Chatterley, that emblem of disconnection. Mellors's post-coital despair stems not from sex itself, but from the knowledge that, in the context of the modern world, trying to maintain a healthy sexual relationship, in terms of *connecting*, is painful. It is not the fault of sex or love that makes relationships so painful, but the fault of the world, with its mechanised greed, which prevents people from being able to relate, truly and simply, to one another. Notable here is the juxtaposition of the modern, mechanical world in the first paragraph, with Connie and the wild hyacinths in the second. Mellors is afraid that Connie, and 'all vulnerable things', are doomed to be destroyed by the 'insentient iron world'. But what is important is that Mellors takes the chance and, although even at the end of the novel he is fearful for the future and for the future of their unborn child, allows himself to be optimistic. What Mellors hopes for is a world unlike the one in which he is living; he, like Lawrence, desires a world in which women are women, men are men, and the relationship between the sexes is uncluttered with modern anxieties.

Lawrence returns to this theme repeatedly in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, despairing over what England has become, and what men and women have become. It is connection that matters to Lawrence, not only sexual connection, but natural connection between classes, between genders, between equals. To repeat in part a passage from one of Lawrence's essays: 'we are unnaturally resisting connection with the cosmos, with the world, with mankind, with the nation, with the family ... *we cannot bear connection*. That is our malady.'¹⁰² As Connie herself becomes connected, through her new experience of the life of the body and rejection of the life of the mind, she feels more and more acutely the lack of connection around her.

Tevershall! That was Tevershall! Merrie England! Shakespeare's England! No, but the England of today, as Connie had realised since she had come to live in it. It was producing a new race of mankind, over-conscious in the money and social and political side, on the spontaneous intuitive side dead, but dead. Half-corpses, all of them: but with a terrible insistent consciousness in the other half [...]. What have the leaders of men been doing to their fellow men? They have reduced them to less than humanness, and now there can be no fellowship any more! It is just a nightmare.

(153)

The most compelling sections of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* are those in which Lawrence sets the life of the mind, in all its sterile glory, against the life of the body, in the scenes with Clifford and his 'cronies'. In these discussions, during which Connie sits wisely and silently on the perimeter, Lawrence differentiates between the mental life and the life of the body and between sex and phallicism. These discursive passages on Platonism, Bolshevism, gender and sexuality are arguably the most important to the thematic composition of the novel. When coupled with the preaching of Mellors (particularly in his culminating letter to Connie), they present the full implications of the conflict between Connie and Clifford: 'to show that Connie's struggle against Clifford is not merely

¹⁰²DHL, *Apocalypse*, p 148.

a struggle for her own personal survival but the struggle of the human being against the deadly machinery of modern society'.¹⁰³

Clifford shares with other men and women of his generation a devotion to the life of the mind. It was on these grounds, in fact, that Connie married Clifford in the first place. Connie is shown to come to despise the mental life, but Clifford and his friends are shown to be trapped by it; even Tommy Dukes, who is Lawrence's own voice in these passages, is unable to make the final break from the mental life to the life of the body. But Dukes, for all his inability to live the phallic life, is able to recognise the sterility of the mental life. It is Dukes's conversation that begins to plant the seeds of awareness in Connie, during these convocations of the cronies, an awareness of something other than the life of the mind. For this is before Connie encounters Mellors, and at this point 'Connie quite liked the life of the mind, and got a great thrill out of it.' (36). But when the conversation 'drifts to love', Dukes speaks in a way that is similar to Mellors, only unlike Mellors he is unable to live out the ideals he expounds.

“‘Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in kindred something-or-other’,’ said Tommy Dukes. ‘I’d like to know what the tie is!— The tie that binds *us* just now, is mental friction on one another: and apart from that, there’s damned little tie between us. We burst apart and say spiteful things about one another, like all the damned intellectuals in the world... It’s a curious thing, that the mental life seems to flourish with its roots in spite, ineffable and fathomless spite... No, there’s something wrong with the mental life, radically. It’s rooted in spite and envy... Real knowledge comes out of the whole corpus of the consciousness, out of your belly and your penis as much as out of your brain or mind... While you *live* your life, you are in some way an organic whole with all life. But once you start the mental life, you pluck the apple [...].’

(36-7)

¹⁰³Burns, p 19.

Mellors, later in the novel, picks up the same line as Tommy Dukes: ‘Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in kindred love,’ he says to Connie in jest, with reference to his penis. But not only is Mellors able to remember the last word of the verse, he is able to use his sexuality to connect him to another person in ‘kindred love’, in full realisation of the life of the body.

The sexual connection between Mellors and Connie is more a phallic connection than merely sexual. In these meetings of Clifford’s cronies Lawrence further explores what ‘sex’ is, to modern society. It is not eroticism or sexual passion that Lawrence is promoting as being healing, nor does he advocate ‘free’ love, or ‘free’ sex. Lawrence even criticises society’s claim on the words love and sex, as Tommy Dukes put it: ‘love’s another of those half-witted performances, today. Fellows with swaying waists fucking little jazz girls with small boy buttocks like two collar studs [...]’ (39). Others of the cronies are just as disillusioned with sex, but their disillusion takes a different tone, desiring to be rid of bodies altogether, to be rid of the encumbrance of the body. Dukes does not see either society’s invention of sex or the denial of the body as viable or healthy options for life. Instead Dukes, as Lawrence, puts a vote in for the life of the body:

Give me the resurrection of the body! ... It’ll come, in time —when we’ve shoved the cerebral stone away a bit, the money and the rest. Then we’ll get a democracy of touch, instead of a democracy of pocket.

(75)

Not cheap and easy like sex, nor cold and disembodied, the relationship between Mellors and Connie is paradigmatic in its honesty and natural purity. The irony of the relationship being is far-reaching. Lawrence is not railing against marriage, or saying that forbidden love is by its very nature stronger than marital love. He is, however, using the adulterous nature of Connie and Mellors’s relationship to demonstrate just how radical the breaking-away from social norms needs to be in order for regeneration to occur, and is showing how the standards and forms set by society are unable to provide England with the life it requires.

The two sides in the struggle for society, represented on the one side by Connie and Mellors, and on the other by Clifford, begin to strike at each other more obviously as *Lady Chatterley's Lover* progresses. This is the adulterous love-triangle blown to colossal proportions in its societal implications. As Lawrence wrote of the life of blood-consciousness and mental-consciousness, the two sides are at war with one another, and create a dichotomy that cannot be dissolved until the one side is subsumed into the other. The two sides are alien to each other, just as Connie sees that Mellors and Clifford are alien to one another: 'The two males were as hostile as fire and water. They mutually exterminated one another.' (192). After this realisation Connie begins to ally herself entirely with the life of the body, which sets her against Clifford and on the side of Mellors, sexually and spiritually. It is important to note that Connie is not merely being taken in by Mellors's unabashed sexuality; she is being attracted by his honesty and genuineness, just as he is attracted by her tenderness.

Her attraction to the life of the body makes Connie lash out at Clifford's dishonesty and self-importance, and all that Clifford allies himself with—Proust, for example: 'he bores me,' Connie says, 'all that sophistication! He doesn't have feelings, he only has streams of words about feelings. I'm tired of self-important mentalities.' (194). Connie and Clifford finally clash, about the life of the body versus the life of the mind; here Lawrence's use of the two characters as metaphors in his project is especially clear. 'I suppose a woman doesn't take a supreme pleasure in the life of the mind', Clifford tells Connie after she fails to appreciate his explanation of the theory of physical diminishings.

'Supreme pleasure?' she said, looking up at him. 'Is that sort of idiocy the supreme pleasure of the life of the mind? No thank you! Give me the body. I believe the life of the body is a greater reality than the life of the mind: when the body is really wakened to life. But so many people, like your famous wind-machine, have only got minds tacked onto their physical corpses [...]. The human body is only just coming to real life. With the Greeks it gave a lovely flicker, then Plato and Aristotle killed it, and Jesus finished it off. But now the

body is coming really to life, is really rising from the tomb. And it will be a lovely, lovely life in the lovely universe, the life of the human body.'
(234-5)

With Connie on the road to regeneration, and representative of the life of the body, she can join Mellors in his regenerative role. Mellors, in a rather bizarre interior monologue while making love to Connie, proclaims his role in the world unequivocally; even in his phrasing Lawrence could not make his meaning, or his metaphor, clearer: 'I stand for the touch of bodily awareness between human beings,' Mellors says to himself,

'and the touch of tenderness. And she is my mate. And it is a battle against the money, and the machine, and the insentient ideal monkeyishness of the world. And she will stand behind me there. Thank God I've got a woman! Thank God I have got a woman who is with me, and tender and aware of me. Thank God she's not a bully, nor a fool. Thank God she's a tender, aware woman.' And as his seed sprang in her, his soul sprang towards her too, in the creative act that is far more than procreative.
(279)

This admittedly preposterous passage might be snatched up by Millett, and other feminist critics, as being another example of Lawrence setting up a male-dominated, prejudiced society where women are subservient and the working classes wear white jackets and red fitted trousers and men like Mellors, and Lawrence, are meant to be in complete control.¹⁰⁴ But such a project would work against the goals of tenderness, as Lawrence realises. A letter he wrote during the time that *Lady Chatterley's Lover* was printed confirms this:

The hero is obsolete, and the leader of men is a back number. After all, at the back of the hero is the militant ideal: and the militant ideal, or the ideal

¹⁰⁴In reference to a comment of Mellors, in one of his rants about social welfare, Millett scorns in particular the suggestion that society would be bettered if the working men wore white jackets and tight red trousers. It seems obvious that Lawrence did not literally intend to promote a regiment of dress as a means of social regeneration, but thought that the idea of such garments, as opposed to the customary drabs of mine workers, would spark in the men bodily awareness and a realisation of their own potency.

¹⁰⁵DHL to Witter Bynner, 13 March 1928, *Letters*, 4336.

militant, seems to me also a cold egg. We're sort of sick of all forms of militarism and militantism, and *Miles* is a name no more, for a man [...] the leader-cum-follower relationship is a bore. And the new relationship will be some sort of tenderness, sensitive, between men and men, and men and women, and not the one up one down, lead on I follow, *ich dien* sort of business.¹⁰⁵

With the end of the novel, in its quiet optimism for a future for Connie and Mellors and their unborn, illegitimate child, Lawrence suggests a clear hope for a regenerated society, a regenerated England and a return to integration and connection. Adultery and conflict has led to regeneration for both Connie and Mellors, just as national conflict, and a phase of destruction, will lead to national regeneration, and the resurrection phase. But as with all of Lawrence's projects, from publishing to communities, there is a question of whether this philosophy of phallic regeneration is even remotely credible, or whether his idealism has just taken itself too far.

Ultimately, we must ask what the significance of adultery is in Lawrence's work?

Whatever Lawrence's own feelings and beliefs on the question of marriage, it is clear that in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* he is using adultery to signify a new way of life. Lawrence is not condoning marital infidelity, or even questioning the institution of marriage, but he *is* questioning the ways in which people and society deal with their relationships with others, and the ways in which society deals with sexual love. The relationship between Connie and Mellors is socially unacceptable on a number of levels—it is not only adulterous but also is between members of distinct social classes. Despite social condemnation the relationship is represented as being healthy and life-giving, in stark contrast to the sterile and mechanised world that Lawrence's novel depicts.

Conclusion

At present Lawrence is not being read enough or in the right way. He has two publics, neither of them quite satisfactory. There is the general public, who think of him as improper and scarcely read him at all, and there is a special public, who read him, but in too narrow and fanatical a way, and think of him as a sort of god, who has come to change human nature and society. His own public—a real public—he has scarcely found that yet.

E.M. Forster, 1930.¹⁰⁶

Forster's remarks, written just after Lawrence's death, remain as pertinent at the beginning of the twenty-first century as they were in 1930. While most readers and critics since the 1960s have got over any squeamishness as regards the novel's sexual explicitness, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* still seems to be misunderstood by two major factions of readers. The one, represented by Millett, reads into Lawrence's work an agenda that he himself never promoted. The other, represented by the culture of 'free love' at its height in the 1960s, reads into Lawrence's work a denunciation of boundaries, limitations, commitments and order which simply is not part of Lawrence's scheme of regeneration. At both extremes Lawrence's work, and his final novel in particular, remains underestimated, or misunderstood. Nevertheless, a great many critics in the past several decades have caught on to Lawrence's philosophical aims with the novel, obvious as they are, and expressed unequivocally in the essay 'A Propos of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*'. How long did it take for critics to realise that Lawrence was not, in fact, just writing about sex, but had a more 'serious' aim in mind? Was Lawrence's attempt to write a novel about phallic regeneration in fact successful: did his contemporaries, casual readers and critics alike, understand what *Lady Chatterley's Lover* was concerned with?

¹⁰⁶ *D.H. Lawrence: Critical Assessments*, eds. David Ellis and Ornella De Zordo, Robertsbridge: Helm Information, 1992, p 157.

It would seem, knowing how severely *Lady Chatterley's Lover* was suppressed, banned and castigated, that the reading public missed the point that Lawrence was trying to make, or, in any case, was unwilling to read through the explicit sexual language and the scandalous subject matter to get at the novel's central theme. Reviews of the novel shed some light on the matter, and indicate an overall misunderstanding on the part of Lawrence's contemporaries, with a few notable exceptions. One such exception was W.B. Yeats, who demonstrates an understanding of Lawrence's project in a letter he wrote to Olivia Shakespear about *Lady Chatterley's Lover*:

Of course Lawrence is an emphasis directed against modern abstraction. I find the whole book interesting and not merely the sexual parts. They are something he sets up as against the abstraction of an age that he thinks dead from the waist downward.¹⁰⁷

Lawrence would have appreciated these remarks by Yeats, had he been alive to read them. Yeats neatly distinguishes the sexual aspect of the novel from its philosophical aspect, yet without making them two distinct elements working towards different ends. He sees that the philosophical denunciation of modern abstraction is contingent upon the emphasis on sexuality. Few others read the novel in this manner, particularly the editors of the 'abridged' versions of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, who thought they could maintain Lawrence's central ideology without the sexually explicit passages. These abridged versions were failures, and one critic was able to voice his disappointment with the expurgated edition of the novel in terms that would have appealed to Lawrence's own sensibility:

The editor of the present volume, as I have hinted, has been a skilful surgeon. Out of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* he has carved nothing but the heart. The heart? I find I am using the language of the editor himself. Lawrence would have been more accurate.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷Letter of 23 May 1933, in *The Letters of WB Yeats*, ed. Allan Wade, London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1954, p 810.

¹⁰⁸Henry Hazlitt, *The Nation*, 7 September 1932, pp 214-15.

But Yeats and the reviewer cited above are exceptions to the norm. Most readers with both anti- and pro-Lawrence sentiments display misinterpretation of the novel's sexual themes. At one extreme the novel, and Lawrence himself, are soundly denounced:

There has been brought to our notice within the last few weeks a book which we have no hesitation in describing as the most evil outpouring that has ever besmirched the literature of our country [...]. Unfortunately for literature as for himself, Mr Lawrence has a diseased mind. He is obsessed by sex [...]. That there is no law at present under which he may be ostracised more completely and for a good stiff spell, we much regret.¹⁰⁹

Perhaps to the mild chagrin of the unsigned reviewer, Lawrence was indeed off for a 'good stiff spell' of ostracisation in just over a year, as he died in March 1930. But, as is so often the case, after his death Lawrence began to receive less negative reviews in the popular press and in literary journals. But the reception of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, even from the pro-Lawrence faction, still betrays a misunderstanding of the novel's central theme, by paying too much attention to the sensationalism of its sexual content. John Middleton Murry —who had, during the War, been very close to Lawrence but by the late twenties had drifted out of, or been shoved out of, Lawrence's circle of intimates —wrote that 'Mr Lawrence, as the whole world knows, happens to believe in Sex. He really does believe in it, and now he has reached a point where, on the surface at least, he believes in little else.'¹¹⁰ Murry does qualify his remarks by adding 'on the surface', and his review of the novel does include a consideration of what Lawrence's intentions with *Lady Chatterley's Lover* might be: Connie and Mellors's 'progress towards complete sexual fulfilment [...] contains the sole possibility of a new beginning for this worn-out world.'¹¹¹ Nevertheless, Murry's assessment of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is surprisingly fixated with Lawrence's alleged 'obsession' with sex —surprisingly for someone who had been close enough to Lawrence to realise that

¹⁰⁹'Famous Novelist's Shameful Book', unsigned review in *John Bull*, 20 October 1928, p 11.

¹¹⁰*Adelphi* June 1929, pp 367-70.

¹¹¹*Ibid.*

Lawrence's utilisation of sexual themes as a means to an ideological end was, ultimately, more important to Lawrence than the sex itself.

A reviewer and fellow-novelist who recognised a balance in Lawrence's writings about sex was Arnold Bennett, who wrote an obituary for Lawrence that attempts to explain this balance:

[Lawrence] is supposed to have been obsessed by sex. The fact is that at his best he was no more obsessed by sex than any other normal human being. But he wrote more frankly and more clearly about it than most. He tried to fish up sex from the mud into which it has been sunk for several hypocritical and timid English generations past. He had a philosophy of sex, which is more or less illustrated in all his novels. But he also had a philosophy of friendship, quite as profound and revealing as his philosophy of sex.¹¹²

Bennett's attitude is one taken up by a few later critics, who have had the years between the private publication of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, the official ban, and the lifting of the ban to reconsider Lawrence's role as a novelist-prophet. In the past thirty years more critics have responded appreciatively to Lawrence's attempts to write a work promoting societal change, using adulterous sexuality as a metaphor and a starting point. Kingsley Widmer, for one, writes that all three versions of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* 'are attempts to respond to the regenerative love affair and its relation to the larger society'.¹¹³ Another critic, like Widmer, realises that the novel is 'more than sexual: it is pastoral'.¹¹⁴ Mark Spilka notes that sexuality is not all that matters in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, relieving Lawrence of the accusation of sexual obsession and relating this to Lawrence's personal sexual impotence:

It is not sexual potency, then, which makes Mellors superior to Clifford, but his insistence on a range of sensual consciousness wide enough to make the future. Like Lawrence, he understands the sensual basis of human sympathy, its

¹¹² *Evening Standard*, 10 April 1930, p 9.

¹¹³ 'The Pertinence of Modern Pastoral: The Three Versions of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*', *Studies in the Novel*, no 5, 1973, p 299.

¹¹⁴ Michael Squires, '*Lady Chatterley's Lover*: Pure Seclusion', *The Pastoral Novel: Studies in George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, and DH Lawrence*, Charlottesville, Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 1974, p 197.

physical or creaturely foundation [...]. Thus tenderness, not wilfulness, is the novel's theme, and its emergence at this late stage in Lawrence's career may have something to do with the humbling onset of impotence.¹¹⁵

From these, and other critical remarks of a similar sort, it seems that Lawrence's project has been recognised by some critics as what he meant it to be. The stigma of 'sex' that has been attached to Lawrence's work has been, by the end of the century, erased by general changes in attitudes towards sexuality and by a better understanding, on the part of readers and critics, of the factors that shaped Lawrence's later work.

This chapter has examined the many ways in which Lawrence's last novel fuses the theme of adultery with that of social, and personal, regeneration. *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is undeniably an optimistic novel and, as will be seen in the concluding chapter of this study, it stands as one of the clearest examples of a novelist using the image of a woman's pregnancy to indicate hope for the future. The baby that Connie is carrying within her at the end of the novel, although a bastard and cast out of a secure 'home' (if Wragby can be considered to be secure or home-like), represents the whole future of a regenerated England, as the child is, in itself, the product of the personal and sexual regeneration of its parents. The sexual and personal regeneration that Mellors and Connie have experienced, through the symbolism of their unborn child extends itself to a national level, suggesting the regeneration of England. The symbolism of adultery, fertility and pregnancy in Lawrence's work mirrors, of course, what has been seen in the previous chapter in Ford's work. The similarities between Ford and Lawrence have been made apparent, and Waugh and Greene, who are to follow in this analysis, build on much of what has already been established.

¹¹⁵D.H. Lawrence: *The Man Who Lived*, eds. Robert B. Partlo, Jr. and Henry T. Moore, Carbondale: Southern Illinois Press, 1980, p 116.

Barbarians in the waste land, Orphans in the storm: Evelyn Waugh and the civil and spiritual repercussions of adultery

There is no City. Mrs Beaver has covered it with chromium plating and converted it into flats. Three guineas a week with separate bathrooms. Very suitable for base love.

A Handful of Dust

‘Oh dear,’ said Julia, ‘where can we hide in fair weather, we orphans of the storm?’

Brideshead Revisited

Introduction

From an assessment of the adultery fiction of the writers examined so far, it is apparent that the twentieth-century novelist has devised a number of different ways to approach the subject of adultery. As often as these approaches become intermixed, it remains possible to isolate three distinct methods of treating the subject. The first approach, taken most obviously by Lawrence and Ford, is the focus on the emotional effects of adultery on those involved, whether as the betrayed or the betrayers. Lawrence demonstrates how Connie Chatterley’s emotional and visceral reactions to her adultery renew and regenerate her, not only emotionally, but spiritually—in the Lawrentian sense of the word, which has as much to do with spirit as it does ‘phallicism’, full spiritual sexuality. At the same time, Lawrence demonstrates how Clifford Chatterley’s response to his wife’s infidelity causes him to move in the opposite direction, becoming as emotionally shrivelled as he is physically shrivelled. Mellors, like Connie, is emotionally awakened by the experience, discovering he is able to enter into what Lawrence called true relation. Ford, in *The Good Soldier* especially, examines the varied reactions within a group of people to the infidelities of one man—reactions ranging from despair, hurt, indifference and, finally, madness. While both novelists consider other aspects of adultery in their writings, their attentions remain fixed on this emotional plane, tracing the progress of emotional and personal regeneration, and extending this pattern of regeneration from personal to social.

The second approach is that which, as will be seen, is taken most emphatically and unwaveringly by Greene: a focus on the spiritual repercussions of adultery. While Lawrence's work does, of course, concern itself with spirituality, his sense of the word is quite a different one from Greene's. Lawrence's spirituality, which has been discussed previously, is not tied to any idea of organised religion or set of absolute moral standards. Grahame Smith has posited that Lawrence's 'doctrines are so completely his own that they have an almost entirely fictional status within the works themselves'.¹¹⁶ Greene's sense of spirituality is tied absolutely to an organised set of moral and religious principles, and, in his examinations of the effects of adultery on his characters, he rarely wavers from outlining the full spiritual repercussions. He considers the emotional effects of infidelity only insofar as he explicates the mechanics of jealousy, in *The End of the Affair*, and pity, in *The Heart of the Matter*. Nowhere does Greene discuss the social or civil repercussions of his characters' adultery, which comprise the third approach taken towards the subject of adultery.

Those novelists in the twentieth century who are concerned with the social effects of infidelity, unlike their predecessors in the nineteenth century, have to consider as well the civil repercussions —divorce in particular, in light of the changes in English divorce legislation in the twentieth century. While Lawrence and Ford, like Greene, do not seriously consider the element of divorce in their novels (it is mentioned in both *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and *Parade's End*), Waugh examines it rather closely in his satirical *A Handful of Dust* (1934), and the question of divorce, multiple divorces, in fact, makes an appearance in his idyllic portrayal of inter-war Britain, *Brideshead Revisited* (1945). *A Handful of Dust* deals almost exclusively with the social effects of a character's adultery, and the social cause-and-effect mechanism of the breakdown of the traditional family and moral structure. *Brideshead Revisited* —in many ways akin to Greene's novels— focuses at length on the spiritual and religious aspects of his subject, treating adultery not only as a social problem, but also in religious terms, as *sin*.

¹¹⁶ *The Achievement of Graham Greene*, Brighton: Harvester, 1986, pp 72-3.

As with the examination of the other three novelists in this study, it is my aim not only to discover how each writer approaches his subject in parallel ways, but also to demonstrate how each integrates the theme of regeneration into his treatments of adultery. In Waugh's case, adultery is used in both novels to illustrate England's desperate need for a spiritual regeneration. In *A Handful of Dust* the adultery Waugh depicts is the apotheosis of the decay of civilised England, and it is not only the end but also the means of this decay. Waugh juxtaposes the slick, modern world of London society with the barbaric jungles of South America, and in his juxtaposition reveals that the more destructive barbarism is in London, made up as it is of superficial adulterers and hypocrites and ageing 'Bright Young Things'.

In *Brideshead Revisited* Waugh employs the mechanics of nostalgia and memory to illustrate England's gradual decay, yet paints this disintegration in different shades and tones from those he used in *A Handful of Dust*. Despite the didacticism that creeps into the latter pages of the novel, the tone of *Brideshead Revisited* is gentler and noticeably more sentimental than those of earlier works. In this later novel, Waugh examines how the two World Wars, and the social changes which resulted from them, have eaten away at what he believed formed the basis of civilised English culture: the remnants of the Catholic aristocracy. In *Brideshead Revisited* adultery is symptomatic of this decay, yet at the same time it leads to the personal, spiritual regeneration of at least two of his characters, a regeneration that Waugh clearly thinks could halt the rapid encroachment of modern amorality, should it be universally sought after.

Both *A Handful of Dust* and *Brideshead Revisited* feature Waugh's erstwhile Bright Young People, hilariously depicted in novels such as *Vile Bodies* —but now they are all grown up. Some of them grew up gracefully, while others did not. Brenda Last, in *A Handful of Dust*, is a cold and vacuous opposite of Julie Flyte in *Brideshead Revisited*. This is not just because Brenda, unlike Julia, did not have the grace of Catholic baptism to carry her from a frivolous youth to a graceful maturity, but because Brenda was unable to find a sense of permanence with which to associate

herself—something which Julia has had all along, and rediscovers at the end of the novel, after leaving Charles. Father Rothschild, in *Vile Bodies*, comments on the need for permanence while discussing the seeming amorality and wantonness of the young people of the 1920s. ‘Don’t you think that perhaps it is all in some way historical?’ he asks, and continues:

I don’t think people ever *want* to lose their faith in either religion or anything else. I know very few young people, but it seems to me that they are all possessed with an almost fatal hunger for permanence [...]. People aren’t content just to muddle along nowadays.

(111)

This notion clearly pertains to the characters in *A Handful of Dust* and *Brideshead Revisited*. As Waugh grew older, he tended to inject more religion into his fiction; *A Handful of Dust* got only a drop, but *Brideshead Revisited* received a full dose.

But in both novels all the characters are in pursuit of some sense of permanence, in a variety of ways—which is why they fall in and out of marriage, travel to distant jungles, or convert to Catholicism. In many ways, *Brideshead Revisited* is the culmination of Waugh’s Bright Young People saga: *A Handful of Dust* representing one of the saga’s penultimate stages. A. A. De Vitis comments on this idea in his treatment of Waugh’s Catholic fiction:

What the religious theme amounts to, finally, in Waugh’s work is this: it is his answer to the ills of the waste land that he had so admirably defined in his early novels. In his own Roman Catholicism he found a measure of hope. In his novels he has sought to define this hope. For Waugh and for his heroes it is a light constantly burning before a tabernacle. It is the permanence that all his Bright Young People sought for.¹¹⁷

Waugh’s later work—*Brideshead Revisited*—effectively provides the regenerative resolution that *A Handful of Dust* fails to provide. Like Ford’s *The Good Soldier* and *Parade’s End*, and

¹¹⁷*Roman Holiday: The Catholic Novels of Evelyn Waugh*, New York: AMS Press, 1971, p 84.

Lawrence's *Women in Love* and *Lady Chatterley*, the one provides the completion of the other. *A Handful of Dust* locates the problem, through a satirical exploration of the social fabric of the 1930s, and *Brideshead Revisited* makes an attempt at solving it, offering a post-war vision of hope, with the light 'constantly burning before a tabernacle'.

***A Handful of Dust* and the civil repercussions of adultery**

In every age this idea of permanence must in a great number of cases have proved an illusion, but the force of social convention and religious feeling was strong enough to isolate these cases. The reason why marriage is a problem today is that the balance of the evidence has turned. We can see the marriages of our friends and relations going down like ninepins all around us, and the idea of permanence becomes faint, while all the legal and social machinery of marriage remains as strong as ever.

Waugh, 'Let the Marriage Ceremony Mean Something', *The Daily Mail*, 8 October 1929.

As Waugh suggests, the search for permanence, in any generation, often results in marriage. In Waugh's own case, as with so many of his characters, this did not work out according to plan the first time around. Indeed, Waugh's idea of permanence proved to be illusory, just as it did for Tony Last and Charles Ryder. Waugh wrote the article from which the above passage is taken only a few months after his first wife, Evelyn Gardner (called She-Evelyn by their friends), left him for John Heygate. Waugh was in the middle of writing *Vile Bodies* (published in 1930) when his marriage fell swiftly and surprisingly apart; when he recommenced writing, after his initial period of shock and recovery, Waugh's bitterness towards his former wife and her lover—and about marriage in general—is apparent in the novel. Traces of this remain in *A Handful of Dust*, but by 1934 Waugh had managed to exorcise most of his bitterness towards the affair. All the same, however, this had a lasting impact on the way Waugh dealt with the subjects of adultery and

divorce in his subsequent writing. As William Cash notes in his book investigating the affairs of Waugh's good friend, Graham Greene, the infidelity of She-Evelyn

was an event that was to leave deep scars on [Waugh's] fiction, as well as provide further evidence of how adultery can be bad for marriage but good for literature. Waugh's black novel [*A Handful of Dust*] is a brilliantly savage stripping down of the chaos lurking beneath the hard, chromium veneer of upper-class England, where adultery is regarded as a smart after-dinner party game.¹¹⁸

In the years following break-up of his marriage, Waugh wrote a number of articles on marriage and divorce, such as the one quoted earlier, and made his opinion on the matter clear. In an article in *John Bull* in 1930 he writes that

There is nothing essentially 'modern' in making a mess of one's marriage, although to hear people talk, you might suppose that there were. Unhappy marriages are as old as monogamy. The thing that's modern about them is the admission of failure and the cheerful readiness to start again [. . .]. The law of monogamy and indissoluble marriage has, of course, been one of the factors which has determined the development of western civilisation.¹¹⁹

This, four years before *A Handful of Dust*, sums up the idea that was to find fuller expression in fictive form: marriage, like the aristocracy and their houses, represents the stability of civilised society. In *A Handful of Dust* Waugh clearly posits that Brenda Last's adultery is, like that of his former wife, thoroughly uncivilised and barbaric, and totally 'modern' —undermining the development of western civilisation.

Waugh experimented with modernism in his own way —the literary movement as well as the general lifestyle and attitude. Later in his life it became evident that Waugh had little patience with all things modern; he despised 'ready-made' clothes and shoes, aeroplanes, jazz, Picasso,

¹¹⁸*The Third Woman: The Secret Passion that Inspired The End of the Affair*, London: Little, Brown, 2000, p 52.

¹¹⁹ 'Tell the Truth About Marriage', *John Bull*, 23 August 1930, p 1.

chromium, divorces. Waugh's dislike of the modern technological and industrial world is chillingly expressed in the twelfth chapter of *Vile Bodies* when Nina and Ginger are looking down from their aeroplane; Ginger is quoting, badly, from *Richard II*: 'This sceptre'd isle, this earth of majesty, this something or other Eden . . . this happy breed of men, this precious stone set in the silver sea... This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England . . .'. But Nina looks down and sees

inclined at an odd angle a horizon of straggling red suburb; arterial roads dotted with little cars; factories, some of them working, others empty and decaying; a disused canal; some distant hills sown with bungalows; wireless masts and overhead power cables; men and women were indiscernible except as tiny spots; they were marrying and shopping and making money and having children. The scene lurched again as aeroplane struck a current of air.

'I think I'm going to be sick,' said Nina.

(168)

This scene marks a significant epoch in Waugh's fiction: it separates him from the lifestyle of his peers as it epitomises his distrust of the modern lifestyle, his fear that it would reduce people themselves, and 'this blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England', to the mess that Nina looks down on out of the aeroplane window. Waugh's earnest dislike for the modern lifestyle becomes apparent in such latter parts of *Vile Bodies*, written after his divorce. One can infer that by divorcing She-Evelyn, Waugh likewise divorced himself from the 'smart set' that had, until that point, been very much a part of his own life. Waugh's later, more mature novels have their starting point in his decision to divorce himself from this particular lifestyle, and in these final chapters of *Vile Bodies*.

This infamous disdain for modernity was not quite so evident in his youth and during his first marriage, however, when he led a life, if not totally whole-heartedly, quite similar to those led most whole-heartedly by 'those vile bodies', whose exploits he not only satirised but also took part in during the 1920s. The relationship and lifestyle of Adam and Nina in *Vile Bodies* have a wealth of similarities with that of Waugh and his first wife. Adam, like Waugh, is a writer, and Nina, like

She-Evelyn, leaves Adam for another man. And Adam and Nina, like the Waughs, led the full Roaring Twenties life of decadent parties: ‘Oh Nina, *what a lot of parties.*’

(. . . Masked parties, Savage Parties, Victorian Parties, Greek Parties, Wild West Parties, Russian Parties, Circus Parties, parties where one had to dress as somebody else, almost naked parties in St John’s Wood, parties in flats and studios and houses and ships and hotels and night clubs, in windmills and swimming-baths, tea parties at school where one ate muffins and meringues and tinned-crab, parties at Oxford where one drank brown sherry and smoked Turkish cigarettes, dull dances in London and comic dances in Scotland and disgusting dances in Paris —all that succession and repetition of massed humanity [. . .] Those vile bodies . . .)

(104)

This litany reflects Waugh’s own early experience with the modern lifestyle and, while he wrote of such things scornfully in *Vile Bodies* and *A Handful of Dust*, by the time he wrote *Brideshead Revisited* he was able to look back on his days at Oxford and in the London social scene of the 1920s with some affection. Waugh recreates the manic sense of this period most effectively, and, through the mad haste and hurry and stress of all the parties and balls, he draws attention to the fact that what is lacking is a still centre, a sense of permanence. For Waugh, it is this lack of stillness and permanence that makes modernity hollow and unrewarding, and, ultimately, barbaric.

Nina leaves Adam in *Vile Bodies* to marry another man, but eventually returns to Adam as his mistress. Much as Evelyn Gardner might have been the model for Nina’s character development in the latter portion of the novel, she never returned to Waugh, so neither does Brenda Last return to Tony in *A Handful of Dust*. Brenda’s defection is far more brutal than Nina’s and reflects all the hollowness of her generation; her adultery is not only personally unrewarding, but also thoroughly destructive. Waugh paints a monstrous picture of Brenda: as selfish, vapid and materialistic.

The novel is set in the 1930s and much of the action centres on Hetton Abbey, Tony Last's family home, 'entirely rebuilt in 1864 in the Gothic style and now devoid of interest' (13), as the guidebook notes. The Gothic style of the house goes so far as to having the rooms named after characters from the Arthurian legends: Tristram, Yseult, Lancelot, Guinevere, and Morgan le Fay. Significantly —perhaps too significantly— Brenda's room is Guinevere. The romanticisation of adulterous love made popular by chivalric literature receives something of a dressing-down in Waugh's account, as Brenda's affair with John Beaver, which had its beginning amidst the rooms of Hetton, utterly lacks the romance and passion that so epitomise the affairs of Tristram and Yseult, or Lancelot and Guinevere. Waugh uses this minor detail to emphasise further the total insipidness of Brenda's adultery and the affairs of all her smart-set London friends.

Of course, Brenda and her set regard the whole house as dated and ridiculous. But Tony is devoted to his family's home and to its history, and to the tradition it is meant to uphold and continue. In a time when old houses were being pulled down to put up blocks of flats (as will also occur in *Brideshead Revisited*), or being turned into schools or orphanages, due to the high costs of maintenance, Tony's devotion to Hetton and to its upkeep is unusual, and, as many regard it, foolish. Hetton is very much the centre of this novel; it is not just a central physical location, but forms a component of the novel's structure, to which Waugh repeatedly returns: the second chapter is 'English Gothic – I', the fourth is 'English Gothic – II', and the seventh, after a sojourn in the Amazon, comes back to 'English Gothic – III'. Waugh's fascination with great houses and what they represent is played out fully in *Brideshead Revisited*, but here Hetton is nearly as significant to the novel's plot and theme as *Brideshead* will be later. The disregard that the modern world shows for great architecture —or simply for these old family estates— indicates, to Waugh anyway, the disintegration of civilisation, and further implies the need for regeneration. Brenda's disregard for her home is tantamount to adultery —in terms of betrayal. That this disregard, of course, leads her into adultery is just a confirmation of the fact.

A Handful of Dust opens with reference to the destruction of an old house by fire. Mrs Beaver, the horrid interior designer who has a penchant for converting houses into flats and covering things with chromium plating, discusses the tragedy in terms of being her next job possibility.

The fire never reached the bedrooms I am afraid. Still they are bound to need doing up, everything black with smoke and drenched in water and luckily they had that old-fashioned sort of extinguisher that ruins *everything*. One really cannot complain. The chief rooms were *completely* gutted and everything was insured [...]. I must get on to them before that ghoul Mrs Shutter snaps them up.

(3)

Mrs Beaver features largely in the novel, not only because she is the mother of the equally horrid John Beaver, who later becomes Brenda Last's lover, but also because she is a figurehead for the sophisticated band of barbarians who are destroying the civilisation of the England so lauded by John of Gaunt in *Richard II*. If Hetton is representative of civilisation, Mrs Beaver and her kind are its greatest threat. Mrs Beaver converts stately homes into flats, 'suitable for base love', and wants to cover the walls of Hetton's morning room with chromium plating. When Tony leaves England for South America in search of his 'City', at the end of the novel, it is Mrs Beaver who destroys the City in his delirium: just as with Hetton, Mrs Beaver and her barbarians invade the City and cover it in chromium plating. The barbarians are everywhere. Brenda's adultery with John Beaver makes her party to this destruction, and it is at Brenda's bidding that Mrs Beaver comes to Hetton to consider the possibilities of chromium plating in the morning room. Tony is the victim in this struggle between civilisation and barbarism (as he will later be once again, and quite differently, when he is in South America), and like so many of Waugh's heroes before him, is more passive than he is heroic. A. A. De Vitis draws the similarities between Tony and earlier characters such as Paul Pennyfeather and Adam Symes:

A Handful of Dust returns to the theme of the innocent, but unlike *Decline and Fall* and *Vile Bodies*, it is more nearly a serious treatment of the society of the thirties. Tony Last [...] is much the same innocent that Paul Pennyfeather and

Adam Symes have been, except that he is overcome by the decadent world he refuses to understand [...]. Hetton Abbey is not a bulwark against the materialism of the world; it is a refuge from it [...]. In *Tony Last*, Waugh creates a hero whose nostalgia for the romantic past finds expression in his every action.¹²⁰

Waugh's perspective in this novel is far more realistic than those he took in earlier fiction, as Tony is affected, and eventually destroyed, by the decadent society, whereas Paul and Adam, both static characters, remained strangely impervious to their misfortunes. Adam is generally unaffected by Nina's infidelity but Tony feels the blow quite deeply.

Even before Tony discovers Brenda's infidelity, before, in fact, Brenda starts her tedious affair with John Beaver, he realises that Hetton, and the civilisation and tradition it represents, is in a state of disrepair and already shows the signs of the modern world slowly making its impression upon the old structure. The passage following seems to be indicative of the kind of decay that Waugh saw happened all around him in England, and the sort of situation that makes regeneration urgently necessary. By using the very structure of Hetton as a metaphor for not only the structure of his marriage, but also of civilisation, Waugh's imagery is doubly useful:

The ceiling of Morgan le Fay was not in perfect repair. In order to make an appearance of coffered wood, moulded slats had been nailed in a chequer across the plaster. They were painted in chevrons of blue and gold. The squares between were decorated alternately with Tudor roses and fleur-de-lis. But damp had penetrated into one corner, leaving a large patch where the gilt had tarnished and the colour flaked away; in another place the wood laths had become warped and separated from the plaster. Lying in bed, Tony studied these defects and resolved anew to have them put right. He wondered whether it would be easy, nowadays, to find craftsmen capable of such delicate work.

(15)

As Tony is soon to realise, it would not be easy; yet there is no shortage of Mrs Beavers eager to try their hand at renovating the old structure. What Tony does not realise at this early stage in the novel that his home is a mirror to what his marriage will become some pages in the future, and is also a

¹²⁰ De Vitis, p 31.

mirror to the changes already occurring in his civilisation. He is unable to put right the defects in his home, just as he is unable to put right the defects in his marriage and in his life.

It should not be assumed that Tony is simply a bad husband, or that Brenda is simply a particularly bad wife. In the beginning of the novel Waugh portrays their marriage as one fairly idyllic—both seem content and happy with one another. The unfortunate thing is that they both *are* content and happy with one another at this point. Had Brenda been truly unhappy her affair might have brought her some sense of fulfilment, which it failed to do. Brenda's defection from Hetton seems to be brought on by a vague feeling—nothing so definite as a decision—that her world is and must be different from Tony's, and by an accompanying twinge of boredom. Once she makes the first step—buying one of Mrs Beaver's flats in London under the pretence of taking Economics classes in town—her plunge into the superficial, barbaric London lifestyle is rapid and Brenda is revealed to be a mere type, replaceable and interchangeable, like the specks of people that Nina sees from the aeroplane in *Vile Bodies*.

The principal, probably the only, bone of contention between Tony and Brenda is, of course, Hetton. Brenda fails to understand the significance of the house for Tony, and does not appreciate his devotion to its upkeep, particularly as it is at the cost of what could be a more comfortable lifestyle. 'It seems to me rather pointless keeping up a house this size if we don't now and then ask some other people to stay in it.' Brenda remarks to Tony in the second chapter. '*Pointless?*' replies Tony,

'I can't think what you mean. I don't keep up this house to be a hostel for a lot of bores to come up and gossip in. We've always lived here and I hope John [their son] will be able to keep it on after me. One has a duty towards one's employees, and towards the place too. It's a definite part of English life which would be a serious loss if . . .' Then Tony stopped short in his speech and looked at the bed. Brenda had turned on her face and only the top of her head appeared above the sheets.

'Oh God,' she said into the pillow. 'What have I done?'

'I say, am I being pompous again?'

(19)

No, Brenda tells him, he is not being pompous: he wouldn't know how to be pompous. Which is true: Tony may be a bit dull in his obsession with his home, and may be slightly self-indulgent in regards to this obsession, but he is far too earnest to be pompous. Brenda realises this, yet fails to appreciate why Hetton is so important to Tony. Her inability to realise the significance of the tradition of which Hetton and Tony, and, by default, she herself, is a part leads to her pursuit of a totally different lifestyle. In a way, Brenda is portrayed as naïve—in her assumption that an affair will add excitement to her life and provide her with a way of living that in no way resembles her marriage to Tony, and to Hetton. Brenda's initial naivety becomes viciousness, which eventually reveals itself as being merely vacuousness, and the reader soon realises that, from a perfectly normal set of characteristics, Waugh has created a monster. The ways in which Brenda conducts her adultery, requests her divorce and reacts to the death of her son, John Andrew, all contribute to the overall bleakness of the novel. Waugh's close friend Harold Acton found the novel to be one of very black and cruel humour, as Jacqueline McDonnell notes:

It is not necessary to underline the fact that this is a story about adultery. A nice young Englishman, perhaps slightly indulgent, is deserted by a worthless wife – and for a lover without a redeeming characteristic. Harold Acton has written of Waugh's 'black humour and vein of cruelty, sharpened by the failure of his early marriage. *A Handful of Dust* was written in his blood.'¹²¹

A reviewer in *American Spectator* writes that 'married calamity is a Waugh staple [...] Family life is a battleground.'¹²² In the case of Tony and Brenda Last, the battle being quietly fought at Hetton reflects England's many battles for the cause of 'civilisation'. Waugh's firm belief in an England which stood for civilisation is hard to catch sight of in his fiction at times; the modern-day England he portrays, represented in *A Handful of Dust* by Brenda and Beaver and Jock Grant-Menzies, MP, or in *Brideshead Revisited* by Hooper, is hardly civilised enough to save its own skin, let alone further its cause in the more barbaric reaches of the world. But Waugh, at his roots, is a

¹²¹ Evelyn Waugh, London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988, p 68.

¹²² Algis Valiunas, 'Always the Loved One', *American Spectator*, volume 33, issue 1, February 2000, p 32.

satirist, and even sentimental works such as *Brideshead Revisited* are not free from irony, and *A Handful of Dust* takes his use of irony a step further.

When Brenda leaves Tony for John, her step into the role of adulteress is hardly that of an Ysult or a Guinevere, those romanticised adulteresses; nor is it passionate like Anna Karenina, Madame Bovary, or Connie Chatterley; nor is it fraught with guilt or regret like Hester Prynne. Few of the adulteresses in the novels of this period begin their affairs with a great sense of guilt; Sarah Miles in *The End of the Affair* and Julia Flyte in *Brideshead Revisited* begin their affairs like most other women of their generation: without a second thought and with little sense of shame. But both of these women have a turning point at some stage in their affairs, which imbues them with not only guilt, but also the will to leave their lovers in exchange for peace with God. This never happens to Brenda; she operates on a different level from Sarah or Julia, and, like so many of Waugh's male heroes, she is unaffected by the events in her life. Brenda can be categorised as a static character, as Paul Pennyfeather can be in *Decline and Fall*,

Brenda's affair with John Beaver begins when Beaver visits Hetton, having met Tony at his club the week before. Brenda visits Beaver when she goes to London a week later, and decides to begin an affair with him, despite telling her sister Marjorie (whose own affair with a Robin Beaseley was carried out with supposed decorum and supposedly kept secret from her husband) that she found Beaver 'rather pathetic'. Beaver's willingness to be seduced emerges only after a period of deliberation, during which he determines that carrying on with a woman like Brenda Last would cost him dearly, for 'if he took Brenda out it would mean the Embassy or some smart restaurant [...] three pounds at least' (53). Why he decides to let himself become Brenda's lover is unclear —there certainly seems to be no passion on his part, or curiosity, or even real boredom. As an unsigned review in *The Times Literary Supplement* put it, 'Passion? Certainly not; not even jolly old

appetite.’¹²³ Peter Quennell, too, found the love-affair’s lack of love, or even passion, to render Tony’s plight as a cuckolded husband even more unfortunate.

The tragedy of their love affair was its utter emptiness; Mr Waugh’s treatment of this episode is all the more convincing because he tells us so little about the lovers and, except by implication, does not attempt to analyse the nature of ‘poor Mr Beaver’s’ physical and emotional appeal. The love affair is scarcely a love affair in the genuine sense; Brenda and her paramour seem to be engaged in some, absurd, rather destructive and vaguely improper game, egged on by the gossip of their acquaintances.¹²⁴

The affair simply happens, and neither Brenda nor Beaver are significantly changed by it—even when Brenda is married to Jock at the end of the novel one gets no impression that she has changed significantly. But despite its insipidness, Brenda’s affair with Beaver manages to turn Tony’s world inside out and upside down. Waugh indicates the potentially destructive of Brenda’s affair with Beaver when he describes the very beginning of the affair, in a taxi, driving past an old house that is being torn down to make way for a block of flats. Knowing what old houses mean in Waugh’s lexicon, the symbolism here is obvious. The destruction of the Lasts’ marriage is foreshadowed in this passage, too, as Brenda uses the same affectionate gestures with Beaver as she does with Tony. Waugh emphasises the static nature of Brenda’s character by repeating the same phrase to describe how she treats Tony and Beaver alike: Brenda ‘rubbed against [Tony’s] cheek like a cat. It was a way she had’ (17); and ‘when [Beaver] had kissed her, she rubbed against his cheek in the way she had’ (61). Different as Beaver and Tony are from one another, Brenda is the same with both of them, and treats them identically: she humours them both, she patronises them, charms them and eventually lets both of them down. Although Tony’s expectations of Brenda are far different from those of Beaver, Brenda fails to be what either of them expected, or wanted. Where Tony expected fidelity, and Beaver wanted wealth and social success, Brenda provides neither.

¹²³6 September 1934, p 602.

¹²⁴*New Statesman*, 15 September 1934, *The Critical Heritage*, ed. Martin Stannard, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984, p 156.

In the examination of other novels in this study the regeneration of the adulteress through her infidelity has been discussed. Here there is no regeneration for the adulteress. The process of spiritual or emotional—or even sexual—renewal never occurs for Brenda. For her there is, on the one hand, no discovery of total sensual pleasure and liberation, nor is there, on the other hand, a spiritual awakening—whether through guilt, belief or, as with *Lady Chatterley*, through awareness of a deeper vein of life than that she had known before. Brenda's adultery causes her to shrivel, if anything, rather than regenerate. The harshest revelation of the extent of Brenda's shrivelling comes at the central crisis point in the novel, when her son John Andrew is killed at a hunting meet. It happens while Brenda is in London with Beaver. Tony still has not found out about the affair and expects John Andrew's death to bring him and Brenda closer. Brenda's reaction is far from what he hoped for. Not only does Brenda finally break the news of her affair to Tony and tell him she wants a divorce, but when Jock Grant-Menzies informs Brenda that John has been killed she responds strangely, and it is evident that she thinks it is John Beaver who has been killed. When the moment of confusion passes, Jock makes it clear that it is John Andrew who is dead and Brenda cries and says 'Oh thank God. . . '.

This passage is generally read as being indicative of Brenda's coldness and inhumanity, and lack of maternal feeling, but should also be read as being indicative of her lack of dimension, her inability to be changed by the circumstances that befall her. Brenda is not a monster because she is unfaithful and unmaternal; she is a monster because she is unresponsive to life. Just as Clifford Chatterley rejects the opportunity to be regenerated, after his brush with death in the war, so too does Brenda reject the chance to make something positive of her married life, despite her loss. Of course, *A Handful of Dust* is a satire, and does not operate with the same terms and in the same tone as *Lady Chatterley*, but these similarities remain nevertheless.

The death of John Andrew forms the central turning point of the novel. It causes Brenda to tell Tony about her affair; it is when he realises that everything Hetton represents for him is

disintegrating in earnest. It is an eye-opening moment for Tony—it is, in classical terms, his *peripeteia*:

With the death of John Andrew the Victorian dream comes to an end. Tony is the last of his kind, as his name implies. Brenda finds no more reason to remain his wife, and she seeks a divorce. Guinevere has betrayed Arthur; but Lancelot has degenerated into John Beaver, a kept man.¹²⁵

Brenda tells Tony that she is leaving him in a brief letter, which sets her case quite plainly, to Tony's utter surprise:

You must have realised for some time that things were going wrong.

I am in love with John Beaver and I want to have a divorce and marry him. If John Andrew had not died things might not have happened like this. I can't tell [...]. I suppose we shan't be allowed to meet while the case is on but I hope afterwards we shall be *great* friends. Anyway, I shall always look on you as one whatever you think of me.

(172)

The matter-of-fact way in which Brenda lands this bombshell on Tony makes it all the more monstrous, and, somehow, darkly comic: Brenda's hope that they can be great friends is so totally inappropriate and unthinkable that the effect is ludicrous. Waugh goes on to write that 'it was several days before Tony fully realised what it meant. He had gotten into a habit of loving and trusting Brenda.' But as Tony's own Camelot crumbles around his ears he does not seek revenge or try to win Brenda back. There are a few painful pages full of the accounts of interfering friends and relatives who try and talk Tony into believing that Brenda will tire of Beaver and come back to him, pouring into his ear all the things that they assume he will want to hear. But when Tony tests the waters with Brenda, over the telephone, he finds that this is not going to happen. And so he resigns himself to the gruelling process of procuring a divorce for Brenda.

Here Waugh considers a subject that the other novelists in this study have not. Waugh's personal experience of divorce perhaps makes him more inclined to give the subject a fictional treatment, but there is evidence which suggests that Waugh explores the workings of divorce in this

¹²⁵ De Vitis, pp 32-3.

novel not only because it was personally relevant but because it was socially relevant at that specific time. Pressured by her family, Tony decides to give Brenda what was known as a 'hotel bill divorce'; this meant that for the sake of her reputation he permitted Brenda to appear as the plaintiff, the injured party, even though she was in fact the guilty party in the case. In order to do this there had to be documentation and evidence of adultery on Tony's part, which was to be obtained by his setting off to a hotel with a young woman and by appearing to be having an affair with her. The divorce could then be secured by the presentation of the hotel bills and the hotel staff who could witness to the couple having had wine with dinner, shared rooms and taken breakfast in their rooms together.

This phenomenon was not unknown to courts at the time. In fact, in the years just prior to the novel's publication in 1934, there was such an increase in the number of hotel bill divorce cases that the courts made an effort to look into the matter to discover why such cases were on the rise, and then amended the current requirements for divorce, with the Matrimonial Causes Act, passed in July of 1937. Up until this Act was passed, divorce could not be obtained without evidence of adultery from the petitioner. Even in cases where abuse or neglect were the principal issues behind the petition, the courts would not grant a divorce without adultery being the motivating factor. Scotland's divorce laws had authorised abuse and neglect as reasons to grant a divorce many years before, and Parliament was beginning to think that it needed to update the English and Welsh laws on similar lines. Even Conservative ministers regarded the current legislation as too restrictive. One of the MPs promoting the reform of the divorce laws during the debates in 1936-37 posited that the sexual relationship between spouses is not in itself the sole basis of marriage and, further, that an act of sexual infidelity is not in itself the most serious danger to the marital union.¹²⁶ Sensible words, perhaps. Nevertheless, because English law before 1937 required petitioners to produce solid evidence of the adultery of either partner before their plea for divorce could even be considered, the number of divorce cases brought to the bench by means of fabricated adultery escalated between

¹²⁶ Mr De La Bere, in *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Commons, November 1936, p 2080.

1923 and 1936. It was this flagrant and often farcical abuse of the legal system that finally caused Parliament to take steps towards reforming England's divorce legislation.

As mentioned in an earlier chapter, hotel bill divorces were often described, with innocuous euphemism, by the phrase 'behaving like a gentleman', because in almost all of such cases it was the wife's infidelity that caused the marriage to break up. In the majority of these cases the husband was willing to go through with this 'gentlemanly' charade, being as keen on a divorce as his unfaithful wife, and in some cases having been unfaithful himself. In short, this method of collusion and perjury was the only possible way for married couples to divorce by 'mutual consent'. Despite the frequent documentation of such cases in *The Times*, and other, less respectable, papers —some of which read like sensational novels— it took some time before the courts and members of Parliament actually appreciated the significance of what had been happening under their noses for some time. One account in *The Times* in 1931 reported that 'his Lordship said that people outside the precincts of that Court did not believe that such things happened. It was a disagreeable business to sit there day by day and learn that those things did happen and that frauds of that kind were practised.'¹²⁷

Another reason that the number of hotel bill divorce cases had reached such a high level by 1936 was because of the 1923 Marriage Act, which for the first time permitted *women* in England to divorce their *husbands* for adultery. This is the reason, too, that it became customary for the husband to be the 'guilty party' in these cases, taking part in a carefully planned rendezvous with a woman other than his wife, often at a seaside hotel. The 'other woman' in these cases could be anyone from a well-turned-out prostitute, paid handsomely for the job, to a close female friend. In one case the husband actually took his own wife with him in disguise, since he couldn't countenance even the pretence of adultery. The accounts of these cases, especially the cases that went awry, are indeed as far-fetched and farcical as Waugh's account in *A Handful of Dust*.

¹²⁷Law Report, 3 March 1931, microfilm p 13.

So it was that while Waugh was writing this novel the hotel bill divorce phenomenon became the cause of much debate within Parliament and the Divorce Courts. Yet while the abuse of the legal system was soundly condemned, there was great apprehension on the part of Parliament about reforming the laws so that the abuse would not occur. The main fear was that if the Law openly permitted divorce by mutual consent —as it does today— England would ‘slide down the slippery slope’ into the amorality that was, as certain ministers said, swiftly destroying the United States of America. Waugh, too, makes it clear that the entire procedure that Tony goes through to procure Brenda’s divorce for her is yet another mark of the disintegration of civilisation (Waugh, like the MPs who opposed the divorce reform, had little respect for the culture that was becoming a trademark of America); through Tony’s ordeal Waugh again demonstrates the increasing barbarism of the society of Brenda and her cronies.

Waugh did not ‘behave like a gentleman’ when his wife left him for John Heygate. He filed for divorce on the grounds of her infidelity and eventually received his decree absolute with no mishaps, and at no point made any attempt to rescue She-Evelyn’s reputation, despite audible grumbling from her family. Tony, on the other hand, meekly goes along with the demands of Brenda and her family and, initially at least, plays the game according to their rules. Waugh’s account of the whole process is very much like the accounts of hotel bill divorces that were printed in the papers at the time:

It was thought convenient that Brenda should appear as the plaintiff. Tony did not employ the family solicitors in the matter but another, less reputable firm who specialized in divorces. He had steeled himself to expect a certain professional gusto, even levity, but found them instead disposed to melancholy and suspicion.

[...] The fourth weekend after Brenda’s departure from Hetton was fixed for Tony’s infidelity. A suite was engaged at a seaside hotel (“We always send our clients there. The servants are well accustomed to giving evidence”) and private detectives were notified. “It only remains to select a partner,” said the solicitor; no hint of naughtiness lightened his gloom. “We have on occasions been instrumental in accommodating our clients but there have been frequent

complains, so we find it best to leave the choice to them. Lately we had a particularly delicate case involving a man of rigid morality and a certain diffidence. In the end his own wife consented to go with him and supply the evidence. She wore a red wig. It was quite successful.”

(176-7)

This is an accurate portrayal of the sorts of firms that ‘specialised’ in divorce by collusion, and from this account it is tempting to wonder if Waugh himself had looked into the possibilities of divorcing his first wife in such a manner. It is safer, however, to assume that he had just been reading *The Times*, like so many other novelists at the time. As with the passage above, Waugh’s accounts of the twists and turns in Tony’s quest for a divorce are some of the most comic in the entire novel, which again reminds us that we are reading satirical comedy rather than a sentimental account of a broken marriage and a doomed love affair.

Another novel, somewhat more sentimental, dealing with such matters also appeared in 1934, by A. P. Herbert. This less well-known piece of fiction (though not wholly fiction, as Herbert’s tale runs truer to fact than Waugh’s, as he did research for the book in actual cases), *Holy Deadlock*, focuses entirely on the process of hotel bill divorce, and with an overtly political aim. Herbert was not only a novelist and columnist (for *Punch*) but became MP for Oxford University in 1935, and it was he, in part because of his novel the year before, who proposed the bill that eventually became the Matrimonial Causes Act.¹²⁸ Herbert writes from a different perspective from Waugh’s, as he does not condemn the society that has permitted such things to happen—he merely condemns the legislation. Waugh regards hotel bill divorce as being emblematic of social decay, whereas Herbert simply regards it as an unfortunate result of unjustly restrictive divorce laws. The differences between Waugh and Herbert’s novels mark the divided opinion among Britons in the

¹²⁸ There is an intriguing but doubtless irrelevant fact in regard to the relationship between Herbert and Waugh. The men had only met one another a few times and, from Waugh’s diaries and letters, it would seem they were not very close acquaintances, but they had in common a Mr Cruttwell, who was the Dean of Hertford College, Oxford, while Waugh was in attendance, and who was defeated in his attempt to become MP for Oxford in 1935 by Herbert. Waugh despised Cruttwell, and even though he was in Africa at the time of Cruttwell’s defeat, he heard the news and wrote back England that he was delighted to hear the news. Cruttwell, in name at least, makes an appearance in *A Handful of Dust*, as Brenda’s ‘bone-setter’, a profession which Waugh surely disliked as much as he disliked chromium plating.

1930s as regards the subject of divorce. The 'side', as it were, that Waugh was writing for still held that marriage was the strongest and most important social adhesive, while Herbert's faction was more open to changes in the nature of marriage, insisting that marriage should be more than just a social institution, endured, if need be, for the sake of civilisation. As de Rougemont argued from 1940 onwards, the project of unifying love with marriage, unequivocally, is a tricky one. The changes occurring as regards the whole idea of marriage during this time were overwhelming for some, Tony Last being an example of this, as he finds himself feeling quite ill at ease with the whole divorce process.

The situation in which Tony finds himself involved begins ludicrously enough, when he finds a girl to accompany him to Brighton, Milly, at the seedy gentleman's club where he drinks cheap brandy with his friend the MP, and it becomes downright farcical before it's all over. Milly, it turns out, has a daughter, Winnie, who goes with her mother and Tony on their excursion to Brighton. Tony feels quite out of his depth in all of this, understandably, but he goes along with everything as if he had been used to such things all his life. Perhaps this is the result of the shock of so much change so suddenly, or simply of resignation.

For a month now he had lived in a world suddenly bereft of order; it was as though the whole reasonable and decent constitution of things, the sum of all he had experienced or learned to expect, were an inconspicuous, inconsiderable object mislaid somewhere on the dressing table; no outrageous circumstance in which he found himself, no new mad thing brought to his notice could add a jot to the all-encompassing chaos that shrieked about his ears.

(189)

Tony's circumstances are indeed outrageous. The normal process of signing into the hotel, arranging meals and setting up the scene for the supposed adultery becomes complicated by the presence of the girl. Nothing on the trip goes to plan, as Tony even makes friends with the private detectives who are watching him. 'You haven't no business at all to recognise us' (186) they tell him. All the same, despite Tony's gaffes and Winnie's presence and the whole weekend gone wrong, in the end Brenda's solicitor manages to inform her that 'We have our case now, all quite regular and

complete.’ (199). The case is regarded as being ‘regular and complete’, despite the fact that it is built upon a foundation of lies. So with Brenda’s statement of suspicion of her husband’s infidelity in place, and her suspicions duly confirmed by the detectives, the divorce petition goes through. In all of this, Tony is portrayed as bewildered —perplexed by this situation that is so alien to him. The barbarians were at the doorstep and he had done nothing to hold them at bay.

The situation finally comes to a head, however, when Tony meets with Brenda’s brother Reggie to discuss the terms of the divorce, and when he discovers that the amount of money Brenda is demanding in alimony would require him to sell Hetton. This is the straw that finally breaks the proverbial camel’s back for Tony, and perhaps what makes him snap out of the confused haze that surrounded him since John Andrew’s death. And this is where Waugh makes it clear that Hetton represents something much more permanent than marriages and divorces, something with which Tony is unwilling to part, for any reason. Hetton represents Tony’s last grip on a civilised life, and Reggie’s suggestion that he let go of it jolts Tony into decisive action. In Waugh’s mind, Reggie is the worst kind of modern aristocrat. His attempt to convince Tony of the benefits of giving Brenda her divorce and of giving up Hetton distinguishes him immediately as one of the barbarians. The way he eats, too, messily, picking at food off of Tony’s plate, gives an impression of not only crassness but barbarism: plundering and pillaging. Reggie had sold his family’s home, Brakeleigh, and tells Tony so, adding that afterwards he felt a kind of liberation, ‘free to go where I liked’. ‘But I don’t happen to want to go anywhere else except Hetton’, Tony tells him, to which Reggie merely says ‘Big houses are a thing of the past in England I’m afraid.’ (206). This attitude that Reggie presents is the kind of attitude that Waugh’s later fiction fought against, particularly *Brideshead Revisited*.

In *Vile Bodies*, and here in *A Handful of Dust*, Waugh uses the medium of telephone conversation to create a certain sense of disconnectedness, revealing how communication technology caused communication to break down, to be cold and sporadic. At crisis moments Waugh likes to

exploit this method of dialogue. So it makes sense for him to have Tony to ring Brenda to see if she really understands the repercussions of what she is demanding.

‘You know it means selling Hetton, don’t you? ... hullo, are you still there?’

‘Yes, I’m here.’

‘You know it means that?’

‘Tony, don’t make me feel a beast. Everything has been so difficult.’

‘You do know just what you are asking?’

‘Yes . . . I suppose so.’

‘All right, that’s all I wanted to know.’

‘Tony, how odd you sound . . . don’t ring off.’

He hung up the receiver and went back to the smoking room. His mind had suddenly become clearer on many points that had puzzled him. A whole Gothic world had come to grief . . . there was now no armour, glittering in the forest glades, no embroidered feet on the greensward; the cream and dappled unicorns had fled.

(209)

The closing paragraph is perhaps the most significant in the whole novel, not only in its allusion to the Gothic world and the civilised sensibilities of Medievalism to which Tony is so attached, but also in its depiction of the haze in Tony’s mind finally lifting, letting him see things as they are. Tony, at last understanding the significance of everything he has gone through in the past months, goes back to Reggie and tells him that he will not give Brenda her divorce after all. He tells Reggie that his evidence is useless and that he is going to go away for six months, and that when he returns he will divorce Brenda without settlements of any kind. And thus Tony leaves England and goes in search of a different kind of civilisation.

The last part of the novel was originally published in 1933 as a story entitled ‘The Man Who Liked Dickens’. In this story, thought by some readers to be ‘sedulously and diabolically cruel’,¹²⁹ a man goes to the Amazon and ends up being held captive by a mad half-caste who makes him read to him from the collected works of Charles Dickens, and there is no hope for a return to England, where all his friends and family believe him to be dead. Waugh’s choice to write an entire novel

¹²⁹ Ernest Oldmeadow, editorial in *The Tablet*, 8 September 1934.

around an ending is curious, and critics have often found that the main part of the novel, concerning itself with England and Hetton, does not make sense when conjoined with the last part, in South America.¹³⁰ When reading the novel as a being about a struggle between barbarism and civilisation, however, it is clear that the two sections of the novel fit together perfectly. Tony's refusal to give Brenda her divorce and his flight from the sophisticated barbarism of England to the wilds of the Amazon represents an attempt to preserve himself as a bastion of civilised England. Yet, ironically, Tony is stranded in the Amazon among barbarians, reading aloud, over and over, the collected works of Dickens, while Brenda, back in England, believes that Tony is dead and proceeds to marry, not John Beaver after all, but Tony's best friend, Jock Grant-Menzies. Hetton is left to the 'poor relations' and there is some hope that the tradition of civilisation, which Hetton stands for, will be kept up.

I am not alone in regarding the ending of *A Handful of Dust* as being an appropriate resolution to the novel's main action. Ian Littlewood's reading is similar: 'Reading Dickens among savages is a sardonic image of what Tony has been doing anyway in his attempt to maintain Hetton within the context of contemporary society.'¹³¹ Tony's position at the end of the novel is a microcosm of the life he lived in England, except in the Amazon the savages are genuine. Waugh himself made his reasons clear for choosing to use the story of the man who liked Dickens as the closing of this novel, as he wrote in response to Henry Yorke's previously cited letter:

You must remember that to me the savages come into the category of 'people one has met and may at any moment meet again'. [...] I think I agree that the Todd episode was fantastic. It is a 'conceit' in the Webster manner – wishing to bring Tony to a sad end I made it an elaborate & improbable one. I think too the sentimental episode with Therèse in the ship is probably a mistake.

¹³⁰ Rose Macaulay criticised the novel's tone and lack of cohesion in *Horizon* in 1946. Henry Yorke wrote to Waugh that he felt the end was so fantastic that it 'throws the rest out of proportion. Aren't you mixing two things together? The first part is convincing, a real picture of people one has met and may at any moment meet again [...] But then to let Tony be detained by some madman introduces an entirely fresh note and we are in fantasy.' Yorke to Waugh in *The Letters of Evelyn Waugh*, ed. Mark Amory, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1980, pp 88-9.

¹³¹ *The Writings of Evelyn Waugh*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983, p 148.

But the Amazon stuff had to be there. The scheme was a Gothic man in the hands of savages – first Mrs Beaver etc. then the real ones, finally the silver foxes at Hetton. All that quest for a city seems to be justifiable symbolism.¹³²

When the American serialised version of *A Handful of Dust* was published in *Harper's Bazaar*, under the title *A Flat in London*, the publishers requested, partly because of copyright reasons, a different ending for the novel, one that was not so bleak. Curiously, Waugh went along with the request (he was being paid handsomely) and wrote an alternative ending, in which Tony returns to England and to Brenda. As Brenda has been deserted by Beaver, she and Tony pick up where they left off, and before long Brenda is expecting a child, but Tony is surreptitiously keeping Brenda's flat in London, with Mrs Beaver the sole guardian of his secret. In this version of the novel it would seem that Tony ends up in league with the barbarians: he has either become one of them, or has just decided to play their game to get the better of them. It offers an interesting twist to the story, but one sees the shortcomings of such an ending. Bernard Bergonzi finds that it prevents the real theme of the novel from coming through.

This version of the novel centres the interest much more squarely on Brenda and Tony as a couple, and less on Tony as a doomed romantic; it becomes a fairly conventional story of the failure of a marriage in fashionable society, and the full implications of Tony's Gothic aspirations are not brought out.¹³³

Tony's 'Gothic aspirations', as Bergonzi puts it, are what finally lead him away from England in search of a different civilisation. Like Charles Ryder in *Brideshead Revisited*, Tony feels that the horizons in England, and Europe, are too cluttered with things, and people, that have let him down. In Charles's case, as we shall see soon, he feels artistically tired in England, and for this reason goes to South America and Mexico to find new colours and scenes and textures. In Tony's search for the 'City' there is some suggestion of his being a spiritual search.

His thoughts were occupied with the City, the Shining, the Many Watered, the Bright Feathered, the Aromatic Jam. He had a clear picture of it in his mind. It was Gothic in character, all vanes and pinnacles, gargoyles, battlements,

¹³² Waugh to Yorke, September 1934, *The Letters of Evelyn Waugh*, p 88.

¹³³ Bernard Bergonzi, review in *Blackfriars*, July - August 1964, *The Critical Heritage*, p 160.

groining and tracery, pavilions and terraces, a transfigured Hetton, pennons and banners floating on the sweet breeze, everything luminous and translucent; a coral citadel crowning a green hill top sewn with daisies, among groves and streams; a tapestry landscape filled with heraldic and fabulous animals and symmetrical, disproportionate blossom. The ship tossed and tunnelled through the dark waters towards this radiant sanctuary.

(222)

There are echoes in this of Eliot's 'unreal City' of *The Waste Land*, a work is an obvious influence on Waugh's writing of *A Handful of Dust*. 'What is the city over the mountains/ Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air/ Falling towers/ Jerusalem Athens Alexandria/ Vienna London/ Unreal.' (372-7). Tony dreams of this unreal but radiant sanctuary, yet what he ends up finding is hardly radiant, and not much of a sanctuary, but a waste land of a different sort from the one he had left behind in England. He finds simply what one would expect from an unplanned journey through South America: malaria, heat, wounds, and the constant threat of death. When he is finally taken in by Mr Todd, and relegated to reading Dickens, Tony is given a permanent escape from the barbarians who had invaded Hetton, but he fails in finding any civilisation. The only link to the civilisation he loves is in Dickens, and now this sole representative of civilisation becomes his punishment. It is a cruel, and indeed unfair, end for Tony.

So where, one might ask, is the regeneration in this novel? The answer is not in Tony himself, for he has been destroyed, first by his wife's infidelity, and eventually by his own 'Gothic aspirations', and has failed; nor is it in Brenda, for she remains unchanged, even in her adulterous affair with John Beaver, and her eventual marriage to Jock Grant-Menzies. The answer is in Hetton. When Tony is believed to be dead, and a stone erected in his memory at Hetton, the 'impoverished Lasts' take up where he left off and the novel ends with a glimmer of hope, as the new Lasts try to 'restore Hetton to the glory it had enjoyed in the days of Cousin Tony' (308). Do all things work together for good? The glory that Hetton represented for Tony lives on in the house itself, even if Tony himself has failed in his endeavour. The novel stands as a bleak commentary on the social

developments in Britain during the 1930s, yet amidst the bleakness in this narrative the way is being paved for the light that Waugh will leave burning before the sanctuary in the chapel at Brideshead.

***Brideshead Revisited* and the spiritual repercussions of adultery**

When I wrote my first novel sixteen years ago, my publishers advised me, and I readily agreed, to prefix the warning that it was ‘meant to be funny’. The phrase proved a welcome gift to unsympathetic critics. Now, in a more sombre decade, I must provide them with another text, and, in honesty to the patrons who have supported me hitherto, state that *Brideshead Revisited* is *not* meant to be funny. There are passages of buffoonery, but the general theme is at once romantic and eschatological.

It is ambitious, perhaps intolerably presumptuous; nothing less than an attempt to trace the workings of the divine purpose in a pagan world, in the lives of an English Catholic family, half-paganized themselves, in the world of 1923-39. The story will be uncongenial alike to those who look back on that pagan world with unalloyed affection, and those who see it as transitory, insignificant and, already, hopefully passed. Whom then can I hope to please? Perhaps those who have the leisure to read a book word by word for the interest of the writer’s use of language; perhaps those who look to the future with black forebodings and need more solid comfort than rosy memories. For the latter I have given my hero, and them, if they will allow me, a hope, not, indeed, that anything but disaster lies ahead, but that the human spirit, redeemed, can survive all disasters.

‘Warning’ written by Waugh for the first edition of *Brideshead Revisited*, 1945.

Talking of re-reading, I re-read *Brideshead Revisited* and was appalled. I can find many excuses – that it was the product of Consule Bracken, of spam, Nissen huts, black-outs – but it won’t do for peace-time.
Letter to Graham Greene, 27 March 1950.

The two quotations above, one written only five years after the other, represent two distinct attitudes towards *Brideshead Revisited*. That Waugh skipped from the first to the second in so little time is not surprising, knowing how swiftly Waugh tended to make judgements on his own writing and how eager he was, always, to perfect his style. Both attitudes, however, contain important points: from the first, ‘that the human spirit, redeemed, can survive all disasters’, and from the second, ‘it was the

product of Consule Bracken, of spam, of Nissen huts, black-outs'. It is a novel that affirms the potential redemption of the human spirit, and it is a war novel —these points are essential to an understanding of the novel. While *A Handful of Dust* is a social commentary, *Brideshead Revisited* is much less a commentary and more a reflection of a personal journey; it is Waugh's personal journey that is revealed, slowly and deliberately, as the memories and development of Charles Ryder. The novel is sub-titled 'The Sacred and Profane Memories of Captain Charles Ryder', but it emerges from Waugh's own memories, sacred and profane, and marks his full commitment to writing novels from his Catholic perspective.

A Handful of Dust did not spring from the depths of Waugh's faith, as his faith in the 1930s was still very new, and he was 'a rather coldly intellectual, not very fervent convert'.¹³⁴ This was a humanist novel, as Waugh himself claimed in 1946: '*A Handful of Dust* [...] dealt entirely with behaviour. It was humanist and contained all I had to say about humanism.'¹³⁵ Jacqueline McDonnell comments that 'Tony Last embodies the humanist endeavour to live a good life without religion. He fails, and the novel conveys a sense of total desolation.'¹³⁶ *Brideshead Revisited* is the work of a more spiritually concerned Waugh, and perhaps tells much the same story that *A Handful of Dust* does, but written in a different tone and from an entirely different perspective, with the addition of an eschatological vision. McDonnell, again, puts forth a proposition: 'It is tempting to wonder if [*A Handful of Dust*] would have been a stronger, or weaker, moral satire if Waugh had included a Catholic protagonist.'¹³⁷

I suggest that *A Handful of Dust* is all the more successful a moral satire because of the exclusion of a Catholic protagonist. *Brideshead Revisited*, on the other hand, is not a moral satire, nor did Waugh intend it to be. Its protagonist is not, initially, a Catholic, and is, in fact, a

¹³⁴ Donat Gallagher, ed., *The Essays, Articles and Reviews of Evelyn Waugh*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1983, p 295.

¹³⁵ 'Fan-Fare', *Life*, Chicago, 8 April 1946, *The Critical Heritage*, p 254.

¹³⁶ McDonnell, p 73.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

pronounced atheist. Waugh's intention with *Brideshead Revisited* is to outline the development of Charles Ryder from atheist to believer through his interaction with the Flyte family, an ancient and noble English family, with a staunch Catholic mother at its helm, and with Lord Marchmain, a lapsed convert, whose return to his family and to his faith at the end of the novel is instrumental in the eventual conversion of Charles Ryder. In Waugh's own words, he means to show how 'the human spirit, redeemed, can survive all disasters'. Redeemed, here, is the key word. Waugh, as much as

Lawrence, preaches his own doctrine of regeneration, but where Lawrence preached the gospel of 'phallic regeneration', Waugh's gospel is *the* Gospel, as made explicit in the tenets of Roman Catholicism. Waugh was adamant that this fact was clearly understood, as he spelled it out to the Hollywood producers who discussed filming the novel in 1947: 'The physical dissolution of the house of Brideshead has in fact been a spiritual regeneration.'¹³⁸

Waugh's theme becomes eschatological, like Greene's, grappling as it does with the realities of death, judgement, heaven and hell. Waugh, unlike Greene, was a 'logical, rule-of-thumb' Catholic, showing 'clear sympathy with cut-and-dried legalistic formulations when Greene, like almost every other Catholic novelist then writing, sought to transcend them'.¹³⁹ This accounts for the moral ambiguity that often creeps into the writings of Greene, especially in his more morally problematic novels such as *Brighton Rock*, *The Heart of the Matter* and *The End of the Affair*, and it accounts for why there is no such ambiguity in *Brideshead Revisited*, despite its similarities to *The End of the Affair*. Greene's adulterers are separated, it is suggested, by God —as are Waugh's; but Waugh's protagonist is more open to submitting himself to this higher will than is Greene's. As

¹³⁸ 'Waugh versus Hollywood' in 'Review', *The Guardian*, 22 May 2004, p 35.

¹³⁹Gallagher, p 296.

William Cash notes, ‘unlike Bendrix, Ryder does take the leap of faith at the end of the “fierce little human tragedy” in which he plays a part’.¹⁴⁰

Waugh’s change in attitude towards his own novel, in the space of just five years, is still intriguing. Upon its publication he was wholeheartedly committed to *Brideshead Revisited* and even said it was his favourite novel to date. Yet five years later, after its immense success, he found it appalling. Perhaps it was its success with American readers that made him think twice about its strengths and weaknesses, or perhaps he matured in the time between 1945 and 1950, and recovered sufficiently from the war to realise that the novel was full of faults and clichés; it is certain that he matured enough stylistically to find the style of the novel far too lush and unbalanced. All the same, *Brideshead Revisited* represents an important moment in Waugh’s development as a novelist, and it is a work that firmly marks him as a writer who is not merely a satirist, and who concerns himself with more complex than social commentary. The *Sword of Honour* trilogy, which follows on the heels of *Brideshead Revisited*, reverts to the sly satire that Waugh had been known for, but bears the scars of *Brideshead Revisited* in its Catholic protagonist, Guy Crouchback, and his preoccupation with not only keeping the faith but passing it on.

As I suggested earlier in this chapter, it can be argued that *Brideshead Revisited* marks the culmination of Waugh’s ‘Bright Young People’ saga. It certainly marks Waugh’s definitive move to an unsympathetic position towards the modern world. After the War, Waugh’s journalism, previously light-hearted and, if satirical, jovially so, became more openly anti-modern and conservative. His journalism occupied itself with Catholicism more and more, and letters to his Catholic friends increased, as did his movement in Catholic society. There is an overall evidence of personal changes in Waugh during the years after the war, and these changes undoubtedly affected the way he wrote.

¹⁴⁰Cash, p 44.

It may be valuable to remember that *Brideshead Revisited*, as popular as it was at the time, and still is, was, and is, panned by a great many critics and other novelists. Some objected to its subject matter, other to its style. John Beresford, in *The Manchester Guardian*, represents the former group, saying that ‘Mr Waugh’s principal themes are adultery, perversion, and drunkenness, and while I could not fail to admire the brilliance of his writing, I greatly disliked his story.’¹⁴¹ The *Times Literary Supplement* took issue with both Waugh’s story and his style:

Mr Waugh seems to be convinced that there was less madness among human beings when there was less talk of progress. He has only scorn for the bathroom with chromium fittings in place of the copper, mahogany-framed bath, brass lever, coal fire and chintz armchair of an earlier, more obliging day [...] his prepossessions where such things as wealth and privilege are concerned, are of an unambiguously romantic character [...] Mr Waugh has his felicities of illustration and phrase of course, but seems in general to have had his style cramped by a too obviously preconceived idea.¹⁴²

There are more such reviews from papers sources ranging from the *New Statesman* to the *New Yorker*, but nevertheless the novel remains one of Waugh’s best-known and most often read, perhaps due to its serialisation by Granada television in the early 1980s. But what possibly has drawn even the most caustic of critics back to this novel is its vision of England as it hung precariously between the two World Wars. However romanticised or inaccurate this vision may be, or however snobbish Waugh’s perspective might have been, it still represents one of the most important literary portraits of England during the inter-war period, and represents, too, part a significant literary reaction to the Second World War.

Written over a year before the bomb was dropped, but not published until 1945, Waugh’s novel of hope among the ruins of a vanishing civilisation was none the

¹⁴¹ 1 June 1945, *The Critical Heritage*, p 233.

¹⁴² Unsigned review, 2 June 1945, online archive, p 257.

²⁷ Joseph Pearce, *Literary Converts*, London: HarperCollins, 1999, p 235.

less animated by the same post-war pessimism and anxiety which permeated the poetry of Sitwell, Sassoon and Knox.¹⁴³

Waugh's reaction to the war, and his desire to escape from the discomforts of wartime life, makes *Brideshead Revisited* all the more a personally motivated work, just as *Women in Love* was Lawrence's personal diatribe against the First World War and its effects.

In looking at how Waugh copes with the subject of adultery in this novel it is helpful to locate passion in Waugh's catalogue of goods. Perhaps inspired by the paucity of goods in wartime Britain, he presents a vast collection, and a hierarchy, of goods in *Brideshead Revisited*, of which passionate love—expressed in the adulterous relationship between Charles and Julia—is very near the top. Algis Valiunas suggests similarly when he says:

Waugh's most important theme is what makes for complete humanity in an age that whittles away at man until almost nothing is left of him. The theme finds its fullest expression in *Brideshead Revisited* [...] nowhere else in modern literature are the goods of this world – friendship, beauty, wealth, gaiety, superb food and drink – more richly evoked, only that the greatest of such good, passionate love, be renounced in the end for the demands of sacred duty.¹⁴⁴

Waugh uses Charles and Julia's adultery, on one hand, to indicate the decay that has crept into the moral fabric of England, and even into Brideshead itself; but he does not condemn the couple, he merely makes them forfeit one another, as, on the other hand, Waugh uses this 'sin' of theirs to bring them into redemption. His suggestion is that love that does not include the love of God cannot be the best and truest love. Just as Sarah Miles's love for Bendrix, in *The End of the Affair*, causes her to give him up for the sake of a promise she made to God when she thought he was dead, Julia's love for Charles makes her leave him in order to love him better by loving God better. Through Julia's sacrifice of Charles, she is redeemed; and by Charles's acceptance of Julia's decision, and by his eventual understanding of her reasons for leaving him, he is redeemed. But this

¹⁴⁴Valiunas, p 32.

all happens in the very last pages of *Brideshead Revisited*, so what is the significance of all that goes before? And how does this fit into Waugh's vision of 'hope among the ruins of a vanishing civilisation'?

Pursuing this leads invariably back to the image of a house; as with Hetton in *A Handful of Dust*, Brideshead represents Waugh's still point, the unchanging factor in a chaotic world. Here there is, as A.A. DeVitis writes, 'the same reliance on tradition and on aristocracy that informed Waugh's earlier novels – in Brideshead Castle are symbolised the same ideas that were portrayed by Anchorage House and, to a far greater extent, by Hetton Abbey'.¹⁴⁵ As in *A Handful of Dust*, Waugh uses the physical structure of Brideshead, as well as all its symbolic intangibles, as a reference point. As the plot weaves in and out of different times and places, from Oxford to France and to South America, and finally in the grim winter of war, Brideshead remains a constant. Waugh's theme, he states at the beginning of Book II of the novel, is memory. And as Charles Ryder travels forwards and backwards in time in his recollections, it is the memory of Brideshead that continuously informs every moment of his life. The significance of the structural Brideshead is heightened by the fact that Charles, after Sebastian and his first experiences at Brideshead, becomes a painter of architecture, and specifically of stately homes.

Much of Waugh's narrative is devoted to descriptions of Charles's art and his appreciation of the architectural monuments of Britain. When, after the death of Lady Marchmain, Charles is asked to paint Marchmain House, the Flytes's London home, it is because it is to be pulled down to make room for a new block of flats. This, just as much as Mrs Beaver's renovations, represents an attack of the modern barbarians. Brideshead, even when it is being used as a post for garrisons of soldiers during the War, maintains its place as a guardian of a civilised time, and is made an even more solid guardian in that it has a chapel, where a light burns before a tabernacle. It is this burning light that represents permanence, and hope among the ruins.

¹⁴⁵De Vitis, p 43.

Waugh has been criticised for his blinkered view of modern civilisation, and for his overt, even militant, Catholic conservatism. There are some critics who are unclear as to what it is that Waugh is so bent on conserving. David Gervais is one such critic and he puts forth a very convincing argument that Waugh's vision of a civilised England is not only an unhealthy one, but also an unrealistic and inaccurate one.

Brideshead Revisited is a conservative, not to say reactionary, novel but that does not tell us what it is that Waugh would like to conserve if he could. What is the past the book hallows? Waugh indulges in a convert's dream of an alternative England that masquerades as England itself, an England 'the age of Hooper' is about to blot out, a noble never-never land [...] Instead of finding continuity and change in the England of 1945, Waugh preferred to see it as an historical watershed, and either/or choice between civilisation and, if not barbarism, democracy.¹⁴⁶

Gervais is correct in stating that Waugh found no continuity in 1945, but he did indeed regard it as a time of change; Waugh's objection to this change was not that it was simply forward-moving, or that it was just different, but that it was change which moved civilisation away from a still centre — that still centre being Christianity— and onto very unsure and slippery footing. What Waugh wrote in 1930, after his conversion to Catholicism, can be placed here as a response to Gervais's query of 'what is it?', and attempts to explain why he believes it is Christianity, not simply Catholicism, that must maintain civilisation.

It seems to me that in the present phase of European history the essential issue is no longer between Catholicism, on one side, and Protestantism, on the other, but between Christianity and Chaos. [...] Today we can see [loss of faith] on all sides, as the active negation of all that western culture has stood for. Civilisation— and by this I do not mean talking cinemas and tinned food, nor even surgery and hygienic houses, but the whole moral and artistic organisation

¹⁴⁶*Literary Englands*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, p 166 .

of Europe— has not in itself the power of survival. It came into being through Christianity, and without it has no significant power to command allegiance.¹⁴⁷

This would have only been more emphatic had Waugh written it in the context of the Second World War. Waugh's problem with the Hoopers of the world, the up-and-coming Ordinary Men, was not so much that they were ordinary, but that they were not committed to conservation of Christian civilisation.

If this answer would not satisfy Gervais, he could look to another passage that Waugh wrote in 1939, after a trip to Mexico to observe the political and cultural situation there. Waugh defines his stance as a conservative and not only pinpoints what it is he wants to conserve, but what conservatism really means in the twentieth century, as a positive movement rather than a negative one.

A conservative is not merely an obstructionist who wishes to resist the introduction of novelties; nor is he, as was assumed by most nineteenth-century parliamentarians, a brake to frivolous experiment. He has positive work to do [...]. Civilisation has no force of its own beyond what is given it from within. It is under constant assault and it takes most of the energies of a civilised man to keep going at all [...] Barbarianism is never finally defeated; given propitious circumstances, men and women who seem quite orderly will commit every conceivable atrocity.¹⁴⁸

Gervais at least understands Waugh's juxtaposition of civilisation against barbarism, and even if he does not agree with Waugh's divisions of who is civilised and who is not, or with Waugh's assessment of modern culture, he appreciates the representation of the two factions in *Brideshead Revisited*.

In the dreary, egalitarian world of Hooper and the pushy Rex Mottram, the heedless, upper-class 'thirties' figure as a land of Cockayne; when the war ends,

¹⁴⁷'Converted to Rome: Why it has happened to me', *Daily Express*, 20 October 1930, *Essays, Articles and Reviews*, p 103.

¹⁴⁸'Conservative Manifesto', 1939, *Essays, Articles and Reviews*, p 161.

the Goths are at the gates. As in Lawrence, free individuals have to make room for the average man; by the end of the book, Marchmain house is converted into luxury flats for the likes of Rex, Brideshead is left desolate and 'Arcadia' is gone forever.¹⁴⁹

Here, in the last line, Gervais misunderstands Waugh again. Waugh makes it quite clear that, despite the furniture being removed, and the paintings ruined, and owners absent, Brideshead is not desolate, and although Arcadia (represented in the first book of the novel, titled 'Et in Arcadia Ego', which takes place in Charles's early years at Oxford and holidays at Brideshead with the pre-dipsomaniacal Sebastian) may be gone forever, there is still hope for civilisation to rise out of its ashes, and burn brightly alongside the light at the tabernacle. This is very much akin to Lawrence's optimistic writings on England's regeneration, in 'The Crown' (1915) and, later, post-war, in 'Resurrection' (1925). While Lawrence saw civilisation recovering and rising again from the ashes of the Great War through means of a 'resurrection of the body', Waugh quite literally regards *the* resurrection, as epitomised by the light burning before the sacrament, as being the model for England's recovery from the Second World War. And while Lawrence reconciled himself to the idea that war, or destruction, was necessary for a resurrection, or regeneration, Waugh only ever regarded the War as a terrifying manifestation of civilisation moving further and further away from its roots.

So if Brideshead's chapel, with its ever-burning light, is the image of hope, and regeneration offered at the end of *Brideshead Revisited*, how are Charles and Julia affected by this, and how, ultimately, is Charles, in particular, able to find the regeneration that Tony never finds in *A Handful of Dust*? Charles's relationship with Brideshead, the house, is rather like a relationship with a woman. At the start of the novel Charles likens his relationship with the army to a loveless marriage to a woman who has proved herself false and unenchanting: 'I caught the false notes in her voice and learned to listen for them apprehensively.' (6). It would be easy to claim that if the army represents Charles's loveless union, Brideshead stands for just the opposite, and could be likened to a

¹⁴⁹Gervais, p 165.

woman by whom he was endlessly enchanted and in whose voice there were no false notes. When Charles totally unexpectedly finds himself at Brideshead with his troops and is told by his second-in-command where they are, he loses himself in memory, becomes as a man transfixed by the memory of a woman, having only heard her name mentioned:

It was as though someone had switched off the wireless, and a voice that had been bawling in my ears, incessantly, fatuously, for days beyond number, had been suddenly cut off; an immense silence followed, empty at first, but gradually, as my outraged sense regained authority, full of a multitude of sweet and natural and long-forgotten sounds – for he had spoken a name that was so familiar to me, a conjuror’s name of such ancient power, that, at its mere sound, the phantoms of those haunted years begin to take flight.

(15)

Charles’s peculiar attachment to Brideshead is partly explained by David Rothstein’s study of the historicisation of memory, in which he draws on Pierre Nora’s *Les Lieux de Mémoire*.

The novel is about tracing one’s history by studying the traces and sites of memory that provide one with a sense of historical identity. This historical identity is uniquely modern and as portrayed in the novel results from an awareness of the distance between a coherent, meaningful past identity, enclosed and enshrined in memory, and a present experience of dislocation, of having been severed from an ancient bond of memory.¹⁵⁰

It is significant to note that Charles has no personal experience of family: his mother died when he was young, and his father is an eccentric who lives a reclusive life in London. When he meets Sebastian’s family, in Book I, they enthrall him, not only because they lead him deeper into Sebastian’s life, but also because they allow him to experience what a family is like. Sebastian is the first stage in Charles’s love-affair with Brideshead; Charles’s relationship with the house goes beyond his relationship with Sebastian, for, even when that founders and, eventually, Sebastian

¹⁵⁰ ‘*Brideshead Revisited* and the modern historicization of memory’, *Studies in the Novel*, volume 25, issue 3, Fall 1993, p 318.

disappears into his own alcoholic world where Charles no longer has any part, he maintains his attachment to Brideshead.

Sebastian was the 'forerunner' to Julia, of course, as Charles tells Julia herself when they begin their affair on the steamer from New York. Through loving Sebastian the way is paved for Charles to love Julia. It is suggested that this love for Julia was present even before either of them realised it, through Charles's relationship with Sebastian, and that this is why Brideshead holds such an importance for Charles. But I am willing to suggest that Charles's attachment to Brideshead has less to do with either Sebastian or Julia, and all to do with the sense of permanence that Charles finds embodied in the house itself. A.A. De Vitis would come close to agreeing with this position as he writes of Charles's love for both Sebastian and Julia as being forerunners to his ultimate love of God, which is symbolised in Brideshead's chapel.

Charles accepts the fact that his love for Julia is the forerunner of a greater love, as his love for Sebastian had been a forerunner of his love for Julia. He had never ceased to love Sebastian, for he had loved him in Julia; and in Sebastian he had loved her. In his love for the two of them is implicit a love of God. 'Perhaps all our loves are merely hints and symbols . . .'. Both loves presage a love of God. And in the love of God he discovers permanence.¹⁵¹

Jacqueline McDonnell, too, suggests that Charles's ultimate love-affair is not with Julia, after all, but with Catholicism: 'The focus of [Charles's] life is first of all Sebastian [...] then it is Julia, who is moved by grace at the last moment and will not marry him; but both are forerunners of his final love, Catholicism.'¹⁵² Taking both these statements one step further, one can posit that Charles's love for even Brideshead itself is a forerunner. For although Charles's first understanding of and entrance into Catholicism is utterly bound up in the physical place of Brideshead, he is eventually able to take this away with him, as Catholicism is the universal which Brideshead represents in the particular.

¹⁵¹ De Vitis, p 51.

¹⁵² McDonnell, p 91.

It is significant that Charles and Julia do not begin their affair at Brideshead, although they do carry it on there for two or so years. Their affair is started on the ship that is bringing Charles back to England from his sojourn in South America, and Julia back from what seems to have been a failed attempt at another adulterous relationship. The reason that it is significant that they are away from Brideshead when they begin their affair is because it is a sacred place for both Julia and Charles. For Charles, it is still the place where he loved Sebastian, and for Julia it is the place where she was imbued with her religion. It might have been impossible for their affair to begin within its walls. As the affair begins on the steamer, however, it inevitably accompanies them when they go, together, back to Brideshead.

Charles's wife, Celia, is on the ship with them when the affair starts. Celia, who had been unfaithful to Charles some years before, has no part in the world of Brideshead, and, so, in a way, it makes sense that Charles leaves her to be with Julia. Julia's marriage to Rex Mottram, which was rooted in her adolescent rebellion against her mother, her family and her faith, was in shambles by the time she met up with Charles on the ship. Unlike in *A Handful of Dust*, this affair does not break up any families. Charles has two children (who are only mentioned) and Julia has none, and both marriages were in the last stages of disintegration before their affair begins. Waugh's earlier emphasis on the permanence of marriage being essential for a sense of permanence in society is, strangely perhaps, absent in this novel. Even the Flytes are a broken family, as Lord Marchmain left his wife and lives exiled in Italy with his mistress until he returns home at the end of the novel to die—yet within themselves they still stand for a sense of permanence. This is the result, perhaps, of Waugh having exchanged the humanist endeavour of *A Handful of Dust* for the Catholic vision in *Brideshead Revisited*. In the latter, the sense of permanence, which Tony and Brenda never find, is not contingent upon the stability of marriage, because it is rooted in something much deeper. This is not to suggest that Waugh's position on the importance of the solidity of Christian marriage has altered since the 1930s; it is simply that his emphasis is elsewhere in *Brideshead Revisited*.

The adultery in *Brideshead Revisited* is never presented in explicitly negative terms. When the pious eldest Flyte, Bridey, criticises Julia for her ambiguous relationship with Charles, it is Bridey who is portrayed as being thoughtless, not Julia. Julia and Charles's relationship is given all the depth and beauty of marriage, insofar as they are committed to one another, love one another for the best reasons and are not playing the usual frivolous adultery-game Waugh portrays in his social satires. This is why it is all the more painful for Julia to renounce Charles in the end, and to call off their marriage, and to say she must never see him again. Waugh implies through this that happiness is only a good when it is earned. As Michael Black writes, 'Happiness is not given on demand; it is something harder, something earned – that consciousness of a right overall relationship with something beyond the ego.'¹⁵³ Charles and Julia's relationship is incomplete because their overall relationship with God, something beyond ego, is warped. The passionate love of Charles and Julia is indeed portrayed as being a good, but a good that Julia is obliged to renounce in order to make room for a greater good. And it is through this dynamic that Waugh uses adultery to lead to regeneration.

The end of the affair does not happen as dramatically as in Greene's novel, but here, too, the end is motivated by a moment touched by the supernatural. When Lord Marchmain is brought home to die there is some fuss about calling in a priest to give him his last rites. Although a vociferous apostate, Lord Marchmain makes the sign of the cross, even in his weakness, as the priest anoints him. It is the 'sign' that Julia has prayed for, and for which even Charles, in his moment of acceptance, learns to pray. As Charles suddenly understands Julia's faith, a faith that has tormented her just as Sarah Miles's faith torments her in *The End of the Affair*, he realises at the same time that it is all over. And so it is. Julia tells him that she must give him up, because she has finally seen 'the bad thing I was on the point of doing, that I'm not quite bad enough to do; to set up a rival good to God's. [...] Now we shall both be alone, and I shall have no way of making you understand.' But Charles does: 'I don't want to make it easier for you, [...] I hope your heart may break; but I do understand.' (340-1).

¹⁵³ *The Literature of Infidelity*, London: Chatto and Windus, 1975, p 106.

At this point Charles's memories end and we are brought back to the present moment, when he is at Brideshead with his fellows in the army. Charles, by this time, it is implied, has become a Catholic himself. And his visit to the Brideshead chapel is his first visit there since he accepted the faith that took Julia away from him. The description is carefully crafted and emphasises the newness, brightness and yet, at the same time, the sameness of the chapel. It is this image and sense of constancy and permanence that is significant here, especially if we remember the passage, written fifteen years earlier in *Vile Bodies*, that states that the young people of the age were possessed with 'an almost fatal hunger for permanence'. Charles Ryder's revisitation of the Brideshead chapel provides, finally, for him a sense of permanence, and, in this, a hope for personal regeneration.

The chapel showed no ill-effects of its long neglect; the art-nouveau paint was as fresh and as bright as ever; the art-nouveau lamp burned once more before the altar. I said a prayer, an ancient, newly learned form of words, and left, turning towards the camp; and as I waked back, and the cookhouse bugle sounded ahead of me, I thought: —

The builders did not know the uses to which their work would descend; they made a new house with the stones of the old castle; year by year, generation after generation, they enriched and extended it; year by year the great harvest of timber in the park grew to ripeness; until, in sudden frost, came the age of Hooper; the place was desolate and the work all brought to nothing; *Quomodo sedet sola civitas*. Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.

And yet, I thought, stepping out more briskly towards the camp, [...] that is not the last word; it is not even an apt word; it is a dead word from ten years back.

Something quite remote from anything the builders intended has come out of their work, and out of the fierce little human tragedy in which I played; something none of us thought about at the time: a small red flame — a beaten-copper lamp of deplorable design, relit before the beaten-copper doors of a tabernacle; the flame which the old knights saw from their tombs, which they

saw put out; that flame burns again for other soldiers, far from home, farther,
 than heart, than Acre or Jerusalem. If could not have been lit but for the
 builders and the tragedians, and there I found it this morning, burning anew
 among the old stones.

(350-51)

This scene is the crux of the whole novel, really, as here Charles discovers the possibility of his own regeneration. At the beginning of the novel we find Charles feeling midwintery and old and tired, but by revisiting Brideshead, finding the light still burning in the chapel, and the paint still fresh, Charles realises again what it is that Brideshead symbolises. Charles's wartime visit to a familiar place is the final step in his process of regeneration; it is the closest he can come to becoming part of Brideshead, as he always longed to do. Rothstein discusses this element of Charles's development, and suggests that because he is always an 'outsider' he will never be able to get through the 'low door in the wall', which leads to a new Arcadia. Perhaps the low door in the wall is closed for good—for Charles and for the rest of his age. But, as Rothstein says, 'the closest he can come is to interiorise the memory that Brideshead evokes and preserve it through a personal acceptance of Catholic faith'.¹⁵⁴

There is no suggestion in the novel that Charles and Julia will be reunited after the war and live happily ever after. This is not part of the plan of regeneration that Waugh has mapped out in the novel. Julia's renunciation of Charles and her self-imposed exile from England during the war, working in the ambulance service with Cordelia, can be read as a figurative death. The fate of the paradigmatic literary adulteresses, from Anna Karenina to even Sarah Miles, is death, whether self-imposed or otherwise. Julia does not follow in their example, not literally at any rate. Yet at the same time, like Sarah Miles, she has to undergo a spiritual death in order to be regenerated. While Sarah's spiritual death is compounded by her physical death, Julia's spiritual death is embodied in

¹⁵⁴Rothstein, p 319.

her renunciation of Charles and her exile from England; Waugh suggests that she has to pay for her lapse from faith, yet her redemption, or regeneration, is no less apparent.

Conclusion

It has been made evident in this chapter that Waugh is using the subject of adultery and the theme of regeneration together in a way which, on the one hand, is very much like the literary efforts of his contemporaries, but which, on the other hand, stands out on its own for two reasons. The first reason is Waugh's consideration of the issue of divorce, and the social relevance of *A Handful of Dust* to the period in which it was written, with its changes in divorce legislation and in attitudes towards marriage and the family. The second reason is in Waugh's unique use of physical, architectural structures as representatives of civilisation, out of which stem stability and a sense of permanence, and the hope of regeneration. Waugh's contribution to the body of adultery fiction is significant, as he portrays adultery in two different novels in two quite distinct ways. His similarities with Lawrence and Ford have been pointed out, and his work is definitive evidence of the fact that writers of his generation were using adultery as a means in mapping out the process of regeneration, whether personal or otherwise.

The two novels examined here represent only a fragment of what Waugh has written on both adultery and regeneration, but *A Handful of Dust* and *Brideshead Revisited* are the most full and detailed treatments of these themes from the sum of his writings, and therefore most appropriate for this study. Waugh's similarities with Greene are more notable, perhaps, than his affinities with Ford and Lawrence, as both Waugh and Greene are often categorised as 'Catholic novelists'. Waugh's focus on spirituality and religion in *Brideshead Revisited* is distinct from the approaches taken by both Ford and Lawrence, and Greene picks up a similar strand of spiritual regeneration in his novels dealing with adultery.

**‘Adultery can lead to sainthood’:
Passion, pity and spiritual regeneration in the novels of Greene**

As an acute literary critic, and a close reader of the English novel, Greene knew full well that adultery and narrative in a novel are inextricably bound; from *The Heart of the Matter* and *The End of the Affair* onwards, the subject of adultery becomes the life force of his fiction.

William Cash, *The Third Woman*, p 29.

Fact or fiction?

The cover of *Time* magazine on 29 October 1951 featured a picture of Graham Greene and the caption ‘adultery can lead to sainthood’. This caption —simple but ironic— sums up the central point that this chapter will attempt to convey: adultery is used in Greene’s fiction to lead towards spiritual regeneration, indeed, towards what some might call sainthood —with or without a capital ‘S’. One could rephrase the caption and simply assert that, in Greene’s fiction, ‘adultery leads to regeneration’. While the novels of the other three writers studied so far have used adultery as being either symptomatic of a disintegrating society in need of regeneration (such as in *The Good Soldier*), or as being emblematic of the means whereby a society can be regenerated (such as in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*), Greene’s novels tend to ignore the larger question of social regeneration and operate almost entirely on a personal level, probing the ways and means of personal salvation —or damnation.

Time presented its special feature on Greene in 1951 because of the enormous success of his novel *The End of the Affair*, which was published earlier in the year. The parallels between this novel and Greene’s personal life are now well known, since the three-part official biography, begun by Norman Sherry during the 1990s and finished in February 2002, has unearthed facts about Greene’s romantic involvements which had been, quite sensibly, suppressed during most of his life. Greene’s adulteries caused a great deal of pain within his own family, and it was not until after his

death that his widow, Vivien Greene, was willing to talk openly about their marriage and what she knew about her husband's philandering. The affair between Greene and Catherine Walston certainly bears resemblance to the affair presented in Greene's 1951 novel, but one must question how important the parallels between fact and fiction are to a scholarly appreciation of the latter. As with the affair between Bendrix and Sarah, Greene's affair with Catherine did in fact provide Greene with a kind of personal regeneration, or, what William Cash calls a 'literary re-awakening'¹⁵⁵ or 'literary rebirth or salvation'.¹⁵⁶

A large portion of what is written on Greene's work tries to make sense of his fiction by over-scrutinizing his personal life. This is a simple, but somewhat haphazard, method of literary analysis; it too easily allows for conjecture, while at the same time blurring the all-important lines between an artist's life and his work. This approach does little justice to either Greene's life or his fiction, always causing the one to be, somehow, just a copy of the other, and in the end reduces Greene, the man, to his work alone. Conversely, biographers of Greene regard his extensive body of writing merely as a tool to help answer difficult questions about the writer's life, treating the novels as clues to solving the larger, more important puzzle of Greene's life. As Norman Sherry says in the second volume of his biography of Greene, 'To begin to understand his personal experiences it is necessary to read his fiction.'¹⁵⁷ True as this assertion might be, Sherry, and other biographers like him, do not read Greene's fiction as fiction, but read it as autobiography. In this way, as Robert Murray Davis states in a review of Sherry's biography, 'the result [...] is that the novels turn out to be little more than material for the biographer', treated as letters or diaries or any other autobiographical data.¹⁵⁸ One would hope that Greene's fiction is, in fact, more complex than this.

¹⁵⁵*The Third Woman*, London: Little, Brown, 2000, p 158.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.* p 29.

¹⁵⁷*The Life of Graham Greene, Volume Two: 1939-1955*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1994, p 234.

¹⁵⁸'Perfection of the life or of the work: Lives of Graham Greene', *World Literature Today*, volume 70, issue 2, Spring 1996, p 329.

Biographers who try to read too much of Greene's fiction into his life perhaps do more damage to the way people read Greene than do the literary critics who try to read too much of his life into his fiction. Michael Sheldon, whose single volume biography appeared at nearly the same time as Sherry's second volume, is an example of this. Sheldon's biography of Greene paints him as a monster, 'an adulterer, a whoremaster, a masochist, a liar, an anti-Semite, a quasi-paedophile, a racist, a snob, a hater, a spy, a hypocrite, and, if it is not redundant, a bad Catholic'.¹⁵⁹ Sheldon, who did not have the liberties that Sherry was granted as 'official biographer', had to find some way of supporting his claims, and Greene's fiction provided this 'evidence', being full of adulterers, whoremasters, spies, liars, anti-Semites, haters, hypocrites, bad Catholics and the rest of the peculiar 'Greeneland' menagerie. Sheldon's biography encourages readers to regard the novels as clues to the secret horrors of Greene's own life, yet at the same time encourages us to value Greene's novels for their artistic merit, as that is all there is about Greene to value:

Trying to find moral excellence in his life is not a helpful way to honor him. There is too much evidence to the contrary. Only his best writing can plead a case for the value of his life. Books made him, and books must sustain his reputation. After all the voices have been heard, Art will have the last word.¹⁶⁰

But for Sheldon, and even Sherry, art does not have the last word in studies of Greene's life. The art remains in service to uncovering facts about the life. Davis questions the integrity of the biographer, 'If art is more important than life, then why not talk about the art?' Greene, a writer whose art too dangerously resembles his life at times, is rarely treated as a serious novelist whose work can be valued independently of his personal experience. 'Inquiring minds want to know,' continues Davis, 'not about the books, which are too hard to understand, but about the author's weaknesses, which are all too comprehensible to most of us.'¹⁶¹ The harm that this kind of scandal-hungry inquisitiveness, coupled with intellectual indolence, has done to the way that people read

¹⁵⁹Charles Trueheart, 'The God-Haunted Adulterer', *The Atlantic Monthly*, May 1995, p 115.

¹⁶⁰*Graham Greene: The Enemy Within*, New York: Random House, 1994, pp 407-8.

¹⁶¹Davis, p 331.

Greene is immeasurable; the books themselves have been neglected by biographers at the expense of finding out why or how the books came to be written. As Cash asserts, confusing the novelist's life with his art is 'insulting to Greene's narrative'.¹⁶²

The affair between Greene and Walston is one aspect of Greene's life that did quite openly cross the fact/fiction boundary, and, because of this, the novel has been read more autobiographically than any of Greene's other novels. But even though Greene made no attempt to hide the fact that he was writing about something quite personal (he dedicated the novel to 'C', for Catherine), it is also clear that he did not mean biographers, or critics, to read *The End of the Affair* as a fact-for-fact account of his affair with Walston. The propensity for occurrences of this kind of reading was heightened with the release in 1999 of the most recent film treatment of *The End of the Affair*, directed and adapted by Neil Jordan and starring Ralph Feinnes as Bendrix. An interview with Jordan reveals that it was his intention to make the film as much about Greene and Walston as about Bendrix and Sarah, even going so far as to have Feinnes model his character as closely as possible on Greene, and casting Julianne Moore in the role of Sarah, in part because of her uncanny resemblance to Catherine Walston. Jordan departs from the text of Greene's novel and elaborates the plot with details from Greene's affair with Walston, and with additions from his own imagination. Film, being a creative medium, allows for these kinds of liberties; such leaps between fact and fiction are part of the freedom that is the right of the filmmaker.

But this blurring of fact with fiction as regards Greene and Walston, and *The End of the Affair*, is found in Sherry's biography as well, and Sherry was an adviser to Jordan during the production of his film. In portions of his biography, Sherry uses passages from Walston's letters to Greene interchangeably with passages from Sarah's journal from *The End of the Affair*, so one loses track of whether it is Catherine's feelings we are reading, or Sarah's. This is a cheap trick on the part of Sherry, as it was too for Jordan; as Alberto Huerta claims, 'Fiction is never the best proof for

¹⁶² Cash, p 33.

establishing the facts. At best it is a hypothesis.’¹⁶³ Greene, who was shy about his personal life in the first place, and wary of how he would be publicly perceived after Sherry’s biography appeared, would have been made uncomfortable by this blurring.¹⁶⁴ Cash considers the passage in *The End of the Affair* when Bendrix is quizzed by a journalist about the relationship between his life and his novels and regards the passage as a warning note to presumptuous critics, present and future — Cash even singles out Sherry by name: ‘The darkly comic scene when Waterbury, the black corduroy-wearing and tediously self-important journalist, interviews Bendrix before Sarah’s funeral is a sharp cautionary warning against critics, or readers, assuming that Bendrix and Greene are the same (Sherry: “Bendrix, in some senses, reminds me powerfully of Greene”).’¹⁶⁵

As Greene once said, ‘I am my books.’ Not reducing himself to his fiction as so many of his critics have done, Greene was happier, in the end, to have people know of his fiction, but to leave his personal life well enough alone. But well enough has not been left alone, and Greene’s personal life has been thoroughly raked through, and is still being plundered for more personal debris. Despite his defence of the sanctity of Greene’s personal life, Cash’s recent book attempts to prove that Greene was, in addition to everything else, a bigamist; articles were written in the *Times* about this latest discovery, as well as about Greene’s last affair with Yvonne Cloetta, and as always, about his lapse from the Catholic Church. So with all this ‘evidence’ about the life of the novelist, it is difficult to approach Greene’s work without referring to the so-called facts that motivated his fiction. Yet this study will attempt to look at two of Greene’s novels that deal with the question of adultery, leaving room for ample reference to his other writing, and to the writing of others around him, and to relevant aspects of his personal life, but with as little reference as possible to the facts obsessed over by his biographers. The parallels between Greene’s own adultery and the adultery

¹⁶³Alberto Huerta, ‘Graham, we hardly knew ye’, *Commonweal*, volume 122, issue 13, 14 July 1995, p 20.

¹⁶⁴Greene died in 1991, after Sherry’s first volume of biography appeared, and was in fact satisfied with what Sherry had done. The second volume, which deals with the war years, the most crucial for Greene personally and artistically, appeared after Greene’s death, so it is safe to say that Sherry felt able to take more liberties with the second volume than the first, as it did not have to be approved by Greene himself.

¹⁶⁵ Cash, p 160.

depicted in his novels are of marginal importance to this study. What is of central importance is discovering how Greene's fictional treatments of adultery resonate with other such treatment written by his contemporaries and predecessors, and examining how he fuses the subject of adultery with the theme of spiritual regeneration in *The Heart of the Matter* and *The End of the Affair*. Placing Greene in context, in terms of his literary influences, is helpful in determining why Greene takes the approach he does in his writing, particularly in the way that he treats moral issues, such as adultery, in a peculiarly paradoxical manner. There are a few writers whose influence on Greene is notable.

Greene and the 'Great Tradition'

Greene, frequently dismissed by scholars of the British novel, is too often considered a popular rather than serious novelist, a writer of entertainments.¹⁶⁶ To this dismissal Greene would quite probably give little notice. Like Holly Martins in *The Third Man*, Greene was not bothered about making a distinction between 'good' and 'popular'. When Martins, speaking to a literary club, reveals that Zane Grey was an important influence on his work, a club member protests that 'He was just a popular entertainer', to which Martins retorts, 'Why the hell not... what was Shakespeare?' (76). Greene was not ashamed of his own literary debt to 'popular' writers, as he writes in his essay on Rider Haggard:

How seldom in the literary life do we pause to pay a debt of gratitude except to the great or the fashionable [...] Conrad, Dostoevsky, James, yes, but we are

¹⁶⁶Greene called his earlier novels, and some of his later ones as well, 'entertainments' rather than novels, being perfectly comfortable with writing such popular forms of entertainment: thrillers, sleuth fiction and the like. *Brighton Rock*, the first of Greene's so-called 'Catholic novels', and the first seriously noted novel, was initially written as an 'entertainment', but changed some years after its first printing, in 1938, to a novel. It is difficult to say how important this distinction really was to Greene, as he was more obsessed with writing well than with conforming to any particular tradition or style.

too ready to forget such figures as A.E.W. Mason, Stanley Weyman, and Rider Haggard, perhaps the greatest of all who enchanted us when we were young.¹⁶⁷

However important popular literature was to Greene's formation as a novelist, it remains apparent that his position as a twentieth-century novelist is more than marginal.

Much criticism of Greene's work tends to focus on his Catholicism, approaching the novels from a theological angle, questioning his orthodoxy, his lapses into heresy and his eschatological vision of the world. Alan Warren Friedmann notes that 'Greene's protagonists are judged by Catholic rather than worldly criteria: are they damned? are they saints?'¹⁶⁸ As much as this type of criticism is generally illuminating, and as much as it regards Greene's work as being important, it tends to be insular, only considering the novels in terms of being 'Catholic' and rarely measuring Greene's work against the development and tradition of the novel as a genre. Greene himself was unhappy with being categorised as a 'Catholic novelist'. Grahame Smith's study of Greene notes this fact and warns against the tendency towards 'placing even some of his work in one of the dreariest corners of the bookshelf as Catholic novels'.¹⁶⁹ Smith provides an alternative category for Greene's fiction: 'the novel of belief, which poses severe problems of understanding and judgement'. All the same, he maintains, Greene's works are still novels and, as such, the problems presented within them 'can be resolved by the techniques and methods common to literary criticism.'¹⁷⁰ This is a useful way of approaching Greene's work; it allows for the specific issues and dilemmas that are raised in his fiction to be duly appreciated but does not reduce his work to being merely 'Catholic fiction' and, importantly, it analyses Greene's novels in terms of being *novels*.

An increasing number of critics are recognising the importance of Greene's fiction in the development of the twentieth-century novel; one critic claims that Greene, 'like Dickens and

¹⁶⁷ 'Rider Haggard's Secret', *The Collected Essays*, London: The Bodley Head, 1969, p 209.

¹⁶⁸ *Fictional Death and the Modernist Enterprise*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, p 230.

¹⁶⁹ *The Achievement of Graham Greene*, Brighton: Harvester, 1986, p 77.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

Conrad, [...] took the popular fictional form and raised it to an artistry that few other writers of the period attained.'¹⁷¹ And another writes that

It seems certain by now that the work of Graham Greene is, after that of Conrad and Lawrence, the last expression of what F.R. Leavis once called the 'great tradition' of the British novel [...]. Some feel that Greene's traditional approach is unremarkable, coming as it does after such works as Joyce's *Ulysses*. Yet no one else so caught—or was so much caught by—the spirit of paradox that both protected and undermined the modern temper between the rise of the Third Reich and the evaporation of the Soviet Union.¹⁷²

More than merely a literary revolt against secularism, Greene's fiction is significant in its development of the genre perfected in the nineteenth century by Dickens, Conrad and James: Leavis's 'great tradition'.

In one of his essays on Henry James, Greene quotes Conrad's statement that 'Art itself may be defined as a single-minded attempt to render the highest kind of justice to the visible universe'.¹⁷³ Greene says that 'no definition in his own prefaces better describes that object Henry James pursued so passionately',¹⁷⁴ and indeed the same definition might be applied to Greene's own work. Greene's appreciation of James is significant, for as much as Greene's style and technique might differ from that of James, their treatment of reality itself is similar. Greene, like James,

wasn't a prophet, he hadn't a didactic purpose [...] He was a realist: he had to show the triumphs of egotism [...] the egotists had no escape, there was no tenderness in their passion [...] they were, inescapably, themselves [...] This is not 'poetic justice'; it was not as a moralist that [he] designed his stories, but as a realist [...] He had always been strictly just to the truth as he saw it, and all

¹⁷¹Ann M Begley, 'Voyage to Greenland', *American Scholar*, volume 66, issue 1, Winter 1997, p 128.

¹⁷²Frank D McConnell, 'Two Reports from Greenland', *Wilson Quarterly*, volume 19, issue 3, Summer 1995, p 74.

¹⁷³'Henry James: The Private Universe', *The Collected Essays*, London: The Bodley Head, 1969, p 23.

¹⁷⁴*Ibid.*

that his deepening experience had done for him was to alter a murder to an adultery.¹⁷⁵

Greene's assessment of James is as good as an assessment of his own work, and he goes on to say that while James 'in *The American* had not pitied the murderer, in *The Golden Bowl* he had certainly learned to pity the adulterers'.¹⁷⁶ Unlike James, perhaps, Greene had pity on the murderous Pinkie in *Brighton Rock* as much as he had sympathy for the adulterers in *The End of the Affair*. Clearly, there are many differences between Greene's writing and James's—notably, Greene allowed his personal belief to become more involved in his writing than did James.¹⁷⁷ But both writers are alike in their depiction of humanity as 'cannon fodder in a war too balanced ever to be concluded'.¹⁷⁸

It is Greene's fascination with the spiritual, or religious, dimension that does set him apart from the novelists of his own time. Novelists of the nineteenth century, too, differ from Greene in spiritual tone, but are more like him than are his contemporaries in that they *have* an overt spiritual tone. Dickens, for one, whose work greatly influenced Greene, was spiritual in a very different way from Greene. Greene goes so far as to call the world of *Oliver Twist* Manichaeian—an adjective which has been employed by several critics to describe Greene's own theology:

This world of Dickens is a world without God; and as a substitute for the power and the glory of the omnipotent and omniscient are a few sentimental references to heaven, angels, the sweet faces of the dead [...] In this Manichaeian world we can believe in evil-doing, but goodness wilts into philanthropy, and those strange vague sicknesses into which Dickens's young women so frequently fall and which seem in his eyes a kind of badge of virtue, as though there were a merit in death.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁵Ibid, pp 38-9.

¹⁷⁶Ibid, p 39.

¹⁷⁷Smith classifies James, alongside Conrad, Joyce and Woolf, as one of the modern novelists who had an 'abhorrence of belief as a muddier of the pure waters of fiction', and indeed James's writing is clearly not as charged with intense personal belief as is Greene's, despite Greene's insistence that James was writing from a 'religious sense' (Smith, p 72).

¹⁷⁸*The Collected Essays*, p 39.

¹⁷⁹'The Young Dickens', *The Collected Essays*, p 108-9.

Although he built on many of the foundations Dickens had laid —particularly in his focus on the ugly, the deformed, the dirty: the ‘seedy’— Greene found more personal affinity in the spiritual tone and dimension of James, whom he believed to have been attracted to the Catholic Church because of its treatment of supernatural evil. Again, Greene’s thoughts on James can be easily applied to himself:

The world of Henry James’s novels is a world of treachery and deceit, a realist’s world in which Osmond is victorious, Isabel Archer defeated, Densher gains his end and Milly Theale dies disillusioned. The novels are only saved from the deepest cynicism by the religious sense; the struggle between the beautiful and the treacherous is lent, as in Hardy’s novels, the importance of the supernatural, human nature is not despicable in Osmond or Densher, for they are both capable of damnation.¹⁸⁰

Greene goes on to quote Eliot on Baudelaire, a passage often referred to by critics when looking at Greene’s work: ‘It is true to say that the glory of man is his capacity for salvation; it is also true to say that his glory is his capacity for damnation’.¹⁸¹ This theme is not new with Greene, then, or with Baudelaire for that matter, but is one that preoccupied certain nineteenth-century novelists as much as it did Greene. By recognising this important ‘religious sense’ in the work of James and Hardy, Greene is not so much akin to his modernist contemporaries —Forster, Woolf, Joyce— as he is to his predecessors, James and Hardy and, in a contrary way, Dickens.

Greene stands quite apart from most his contemporaries, and does so almost by conscious choice. Alan Friedmann goes so far as to claim that ‘Greene defined his early fiction against high modernism’s apolitical and irreligious stance, Bloomsbury’s elitism, Woolf’s rejection of storytelling.’¹⁸² Deeply critical, however respectful, of novelists such as Forster and Woolf, Greene regarded James as the last great English novelist —although he did maintain very high regard for Conrad and Ford. By criticising the development of the novel following the death of James, Greene is obviously including his own work in his criticism, but he perhaps tries, not too modestly, to save

¹⁸⁰ *The Collected Essays*, p 24.

¹⁸¹ *Selected Essays*, London: Faber and Faber, 1951, p 429.

¹⁸² Friedmann, p 230.

himself by noting the reasons why James was so superior to the Forsters and Woolfs of the twentieth century. These reasons, expressed in an essay written in 1968, mirror much of what he himself realised he 'stood for' as a novelist by that point: religious sense. Greene states that

After the death of Henry James a disaster overtook the English novel [...] for with the death of James the religious sense was lost to the English novel, and with the religious sense went the sense of the importance of the human act. It was as if the world of fiction had lost a dimension: the characters of such distinguished writers as Mrs Virginia Woolf and Mr E.M. Forster wandered like cardboard symbols through a world that was paper-thin [...] The novelist, perhaps unconsciously aware of his predicament, took refuge in the subjective novel [...] The visible world for him ceased to exist [...].¹⁸³

James, like the French novelist Mauriac, possessed a strength which the subjective novelist does not: 'He is a writer for whom the visible world has not ceased to exist, whose characters have the solidity and importance of men with souls to save or lose, and a writer who claims the traditional and essential right of a novelist, to comment, to express his views.'¹⁸⁴ Greene was not one to blow his own trumpet, but in 1968, thirty years after writing his first notably serious novel, *Brighton Rock*, Greene would have surely realised that while defending the tradition of James he was simultaneously setting himself apart from the 'subjectivity' of his contemporaries and allying himself with a literary tradition which had, in his mind, all but completely faded. When Tanner claims that the British novel in the twentieth century mutated in two directions only —towards total physicality or towards total linguistics— he ignores completely the novels of Greene (as well as those of Evelyn Waugh, Muriel Spark and many others), whose work could be called 'novels of belief', representing an evolution towards recapturing a 'religious sense', particularly in novels about adultery.

¹⁸³'François Mauriac', *The Collected Essays*, p 115.

¹⁸⁴*Ibid.* pp 115-16.

Greene's concept of this 'religious sense' is important not so much in its obviously theological implications, but in the implications it has in regard to the construction of character. For Greene, characters were more than entities created to represent a particular force, idea or movement, but became, as he put it, 'men with souls to save or lose'. This is what makes Greene's portrayals of social, and religious, misdemeanours —adultery, murder, betrayal— so different from those of many of his contemporaries: his sympathies seem to lie with the least likely objects. And this is where Greene's central theme of paradox makes itself evident. Eliot's words on Baudelaire resonate throughout Greene's fictive creations, and Greene's sympathetic treatment of the potentially 'damned' has been interpreted by some as being a 'post-Romantic, post-Nietzschean extolling of evil over inaction, sin over moral neutrality, [with] anti-democratic and fascistic implications.'¹⁸⁵ All labelling aside, Greene's literary world focuses on the paradoxes he perceives in reality, on the unexpected —on that which should not be, nor should make sense. His 'epigraph for all the novels I have written'¹⁸⁶ is now well known, from Browning's 'Bishop Bloughram's Apology':

Our interest's on the dangerous edge of things.
 The honest thief, the tender murderer,
 The superstitious atheist, demirep
 That loves and saves her soul in new French books—
 We watch while these in equilibrium keep
 The giddy line midway.

The giddy line midway; 'between the stirrup and the ground', the areas of grey: these are the things which catch Greene's attention, and which make his novels of adultery quite distinct from those of his contemporaries.

¹⁸⁵Friedmann, p 235.

¹⁸⁶*A Sort of Life*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, p 117.

Public duty v. private passion?

Literature has nothing to do with edification [...] I am not arguing that literature is amoral, but that it presents a personal moral, and the personal morality of an individual is seldom identical with the morality of the group to which he belongs.

Greene, letter to Elizabeth Bowen, 1948.

In the nineteenth-century European novel of adultery the main struggle presented is one between 'public duty and private passion' —a phrase often connected in England with the Victorian sensibility, obsessed as it was with keeping its public face clean. In these novels, the inability of the adulterous lovers, the woman in particular, to embrace duty at the cost of passion culminated in suffering, distrust and often in death. In the twentieth century, however, this struggle is not of central concern to novelists attempting to explore the dynamics of marital infidelity. For many reasons, the division between public and private became less marked, and the British novel began to concern itself less with the struggle between duty and passion, but between humankind and nature, or between man and industry. Lawrence, for instance, in his novel of adultery, certainly addresses the question of whether duty should come before passion, but emphatically states that the struggle between duty and passion is less important than the struggle between man and the industrialised, sterile world around him. Greene, not wholly unlike Lawrence, also ignores for the most part the duty/passion struggle, albeit for different reasons.

In *The Heart of the Matter* (1948) the struggle Greene creates is not so much between public duty and private passion as it is between public duty and private pity; by the end of the novel duty and pity become the same thing, arguably leading to Scobie's suicide. In a way, perhaps, the duty/passion dichotomy is still in place in *The Heart of the Matter*, with passion being replaced with pity, as Greene calls pity 'a terrible thing [...] the worst passion of all'. In *The End of the Affair*

(1951) the central struggle has little to do with duty and everything to do with passion, culminating in a struggle between two equally powerful passions: sexual passion on one side and spiritual passion on the other. Sarah never would have kept her promise to God had it been merely a duty to her, and had not become a passion as strong as her love for Bendrix.

In neither of the novels does Greene impart a moral, either in religious or in social terms. Unlike in Hawthorne, the religious tone of Greene's novels is not didactic; and unlike Tolstoy, and even Lawrence for that matter, his social tone is not corrective. The ethic of both novels is intensely personal, and paradoxical in its absolute yet subjective nature. Greene, like many of his generation, recognised, personally as well as artistically, the value of the personal as opposed to the public, or the collective. This in particular made Greene very different from many of his Catholic contemporaries, and led many of his Catholic friends to disagree with the theological implications of some of his works. But on the other hand, Greene's constant awareness of the 'religious sense' prevents his subjectivity from becoming anything like that of Forster or Woolf, as discussed previously. Greene's fiction may present a character working towards spiritual regeneration, or struggling on the way, but does not claim to offer a resolution, particularly not a philosophical or aesthetic resolution. Written during the Second World War, and in the post-war years, Greene's most significant work values action above thought, which makes it distinct from the work of writers such as Woolf or Joyce, who seemed to suggest that thought should be valued over action. Greene 'was committed to action in an increasingly broken, indeed terrifying, world. As he put it, "Action has a moral simplicity which thought lacks."¹⁸⁷

It would be misleading to claim that the twentieth century saw a total reversal in attitude regarding the nineteenth-century concern with public duty, image and reputation over personal desires, needs and feelings. A reversal was developing, but slowly enough for the public/private dichotomy to remain hanging on as a theme in literature, if only marginal. This theme never

¹⁸⁷Werner J Dieman, untitled book review, *America*, volume 174, issue 7, 3 March 1996, p 27.

permeated Greene's fiction as it did that of others, perhaps because the literary world that he creates does not concern itself with the black-and-white, but rather all the grey areas in between.

Transcending the common, or secular, understanding of right and wrong, Greene's fiction tends to dwell on good and evil. In *Brighton Rock* this is made clear, with Rose's criticism of Ida who knows only about what society regards as being right or wrong, rather than knowing, innately, what is good or evil. But even with this preference for the good/evil distinction to the right/wrong distinction, Greene still focuses primarily on what goes on between the two extremes, in his words, what happens 'between the stirrup and the ground'. Public duty and private passion are extremes that are out of place in the ethical scheme of Greene's fiction.

Love or pity? *The Heart of the Matter*

The word 'pity' is used as loosely as the word 'love': the terrible promiscuous passion which so few experience.

The Heart of the Matter

The Heart of the Matter was written in 1948, and was largely the result of the two years Greene was stationed in Sierra Leone during the war, from 1941 to 1943. One might be presumptuous and claim that the depiction of Scobie and Louise's breaking marriage is taken from Greene's own marital situation, thus identifying Greene with Scobie and his wife, Vivien, with Louise—but presumption provides no conclusive evidence. Greene's experiences in West Africa are certainly integral to the construction of this novel, but the particular characters and events have no direct resemblance to Greene's life. Perhaps Greene feared that *The Heart of the Matter* would be read autobiographically, as he printed a sort of disclaimer on the first page of the book:

No character in this book is based on that of a living person. The geographical background of the story is drawn from that part of West Africa of which I have personal experience—that is inevitable—but I want to make it absolutely clear that no inhabitant, past or present, of that particular colony appears in my book. [...] I have a special reason for not wanting such characters in my book to be identified with real people, for I remember with very great gratitude the courtesy and consideration I received from the [...] colony where I worked in 1942-3.¹⁸⁸

Few disclaimers of this kind appear in Greene's work, and it must be noted with some curiosity. The ambitious biographer might view it with suspicion and assume that Greene in fact had something to hide. As it is, however, any correlation the events in the novel might in fact have with Greene's personal experience has little bearing on this reading.

The Heart of the Matter certainly breaks from the archetypal adultery novel: its central character is an adulterous husband rather than an adulterous wife; the adultery is propelled neither by passion, eroticism or boredom; in the end it is the man who dies and not the woman. It is a novel that explores the dangers of pity and concerns itself more with the human heart, or soul, than it does with the family, with domestic and social stability, or even with personal fulfilment—all of which concern the writers of the 'bourgeois' adultery novels. Multiple plots weave their way towards the work's conclusion, which we can attempt to compress into a general summation.

Scobie is married to Louise and works as a police officer in a war-torn state in West Africa. Middle-aged and in hope of being promoted, perhaps to commissioner, Scobie's life revolves around his duties as an officer and as a husband. Louise, bored and weary of West Africa, wants to go to South Africa for a holiday. Not having the money to finance such a journey, the normally strict and conscientious Scobie—called 'Scobie the Just' by his colleagues— gets involved in some shady dealings with Yusef, a disreputable Syrian storekeeper, moneylender and diamond-trader. When

¹⁸⁸Disclaimer in first and all subsequent editions of the novel. There is a similar disclaimer in *The Human Factor*.

Louise goes to South Africa, Scobie meets Helen Rolt, a young widow who survived a shipwreck and had been brought to their village for care. Scobie and Helen eventually become lovers; Louise hears of the fact through a network of friends, says nothing of it to Scobie but returns home. Scobie then is faced with repaying his debts, keeping his clandestine dealings with Yusef from becoming public knowledge, and, most importantly, keeping both Louise and Helen happy. Louise, a cradle-Catholic, presses Scobie, who converted upon marriage, to receive communion with her at Mass. Scobie, realising he is in what the Church considers a state of mortal sin, knows he cannot. Yet he thinks that if he persists in not receiving communion Louise would find out about his affair with Helen and would be unhappy. To make Louise happy he takes communion and, as he sees it, damns himself in the process. He tries to detach himself from Helen but is unable to. Eventually the guilt and burden of responsibility become too much for Scobie so he takes an overdose of heart medication, trying, unsuccessfully, to make it appear as if he died naturally, of angina. By taking his life Scobie believes he can alleviate the suffering of both Helen and Louise, and in his mind he willingly sacrifices his soul for the sake of their happiness. Helen is left alone, disillusioned and confused, letting herself be used by other men; Louise discusses her concerns about Scobie with the priest but seems ready to start a new life with the sentimental Wilson, the detective and would-be poet, who discovered that Scobie's death was a suicide.

The novel met mixed reactions upon its publication. Most critics found it an excellent novel, and one of Greene's most important to date. Catholic critics found Greene's sympathetic treatment of Scobie's suicide disturbing, as well as Greene's treatment of adultery. Evelyn Waugh, in a moment of characteristic overreaction, called the novel a 'mad blasphemy'.¹⁸⁹ *Time* magazine, in 1951, stated that Waugh was asked in Manhattan by a reporter, 'Mr Waugh, where's Scobie?' To which Waugh replied, 'In hell, of course.'¹⁹⁰ Greene himself found these reactions surprising and commented, 'I don't know what all the fuss is about.' He goes on to explain, 'I wrote a book about a man who goes to hell —*Brighton Rock*— another about a man who goes to heaven —*The Power*

¹⁸⁹Review, *Collected Writings of Evelyn Waugh*, p 365.

¹⁹⁰*Time*, 29 October 1951, p 45.

and the Glory. Now I've simply written one about a man who goes to purgatory.'¹⁹¹ If *The Heart of the Matter* was the third in Greene's 'Catholic' trilogy, it is certainly the most ambiguous and least dogmatic, not to mention the least orthodox—at which Catholic readers took offence. But, as Frank McLynn remarked, 'who but an idiot would go to a novelist for guidance on orthodox theology?'¹⁹²

Scobie's pity—not his lust, or greed, or envy—motivates all the crimes that he becomes involved in, from his deals with Yusef to his adultery with Helen. Greene's development of Scobie's pity—a gargantuan, world-embracing pity—is what makes the reader sympathise with Scobie's situation, and which makes the average reader—not the Evelyn Waugh, evidently—find it difficult to make any moral judgements regarding Scobie's actions or his death. In *The Heart of the Matter* Greene, more so than in *Brighton Rock* and *The Power and the Glory*, creates a great expanse of grey, and does not set up moral poles on either side in black and white. Perhaps because in the eschatological scheme this novel is Greene's *Purgatorio*, there is a more pervasive sense of being in a middle ground, in a kind of moral limbo, where no final judgement can be cast.

Scobie's pity controls all his emotional reactions; he can feel no emotion unless it somehow stems from his capacity for pity. It is his pity that makes him love his wife. Early in the novel we see the way that he cares for Louise, when he finds her asleep under the mosquito netting: 'These were the times of ugliness when loved her, when pity and responsibility reached the intensity of passion. It was pity that told him to go: he wouldn't have woken his worst enemy from sleep, leave alone Louise.' (22). Scobie's sense of responsibility is the closest thing he has to passion at this point in the novel, as it is what drives him. 'It had always been his responsibility to maintain happiness in those he loved. One was safe now, for ever, and the other was going to eat her lunch.' (26). The one who is 'safe' is Scobie and Louise's daughter who died fifteen years ago. Bereft of that responsibility, it has been suggested that Helen Rolt revived Scobie's nipped-in-the-bud

¹⁹¹Ibid.

¹⁹²'On Danger's Edge', *New Statesman*, volume 126, issue 4341, 4 July 1997, p 46.

paternal instincts, as he became more of a father figure to her than a lover. Scobie's sense of responsibility for Louise, as well, is in fact more like the relation of a father to a daughter than a husband to a wife. Pity repeatedly takes the place of sex in this novel, causing one to wonder at the importance Scobie places on his adultery with Helen. Scobie's infidelity might not be hinged on the fact that he has sex with another woman, but that he learns to pity another woman with the same intensity that he pities his wife.

Scobie's happiness, realised early, and only briefly, in his relationship with Helen, is just another manifestation of his pity. Leaving Helen's Nissen hut, after their first real conversation, Greene writes that Scobie 'walked away, feeling an extraordinary happiness' (140). Rather than being happy because he has fallen in love, Scobie is happy because he has fallen in pity, a new pity, a deserved pity, and a pity that gratifies him in the object's need of it. Scobie needs objects for his pity, as other men might need objects for their desire.

He watched her with sadness and affection and enormous pity because a time would come when he couldn't show her around in a world where she was at sea. When she turned and the light fell on her face she looked ugly, with the temporary ugliness of a child. The ugliness was like handcuffs on his wrists...He had no sense of responsibility towards the beautiful and the graceful and the intelligent... The word 'pity' is used as loosely as the word 'love': the terrible promiscuous passion which so few experience.

(159)

Greene replaces Scobie's expected capacity for love with a capacity for pity, and his recognition of his pity as a 'promiscuous passion' ties into his realisation that this new pity and responsibility for Helen will hurt Louise, more severely, perhaps, than his sexual promiscuity would hurt her.

He had sworn to preserve Louise's happiness, and now he had accepted another and contradictory responsibility. He felt tired by all the lies he would some time have to tell; he felt the wounds of those victims who had not yet bled [...].

(162)

Scobie's own perception of his pity makes itself clearer in another passage later on, particularly his realisation that his pity for Helen is gradually turning her into Louise. As Emma Bovary finds in adultery 'all the platitudes of marriage', likewise Scobie finds in his adultery the same destructive pity that rules his marriage. Helen fights Scobie's pity just as she might fight a lover's jealousy:

She said furiously, 'I don't want your pity.' But it was not a question of whether she wanted it —she had it. Pity smouldered like decay at his heart. He would never rid himself of it. He knew from experience how passion died away and how love went, but pity always stayed. Nothing ever diminished pity... He wondered whether if this went on long enough, she would be indistinguishable from Louise. In my school, he thought, they learn bitterness and frustration and how to grow old.

(178-9)

Tired of lying, and feeling himself at fault for the unhappiness of both Louise and Helen, Scobie begins to think of suicide as the only way of settling everyone's problems. Very much like Anna Karenina, Scobie's solution is in his eyes the greatest act of selflessness while in reality is utterly selfish: 'They wouldn't need me if I were dead. No one needs the dead. The dead can be forgotten. O God, give me death before I give them unhappiness.' (189).

Despite the fact that Scobie knows that suicide is regarded by the Church as an unforgivable sin, 'the final expression of an unrepentant despair', at the same time he believes that 'God had sometimes broken his own laws, and was it less possible for him to put out a hand of forgiveness into the suicidal darkness than to have woken himself in the tomb, behind the stone?' (190).

Kierkegaard described this phenomenon as 'the teleological suspension of the ethical', epitomised by the story of Abraham and Isaac: when God momentarily suspended the ethical and asked Abraham to kill his own son to test his love for God. In this story, of course, God stops Abraham from killing Isaac, saying that Abraham's obedience and willingness was sign enough: 'By his act

he overstepped the ethical entirely and possessed a higher *telos* outside of it.’¹⁹³ Scobie begins to think that God might allow him to overstep the ethical, in order to test his love for his wife, for Helen and, in a way, his love for God. By ceasing to cause pain Scobie thinks he would do more good than he would by continuing to exist —lying, causing pain and offending God. Scobie is not only guilty of pity in excess, but of an ‘almost monstrous pride’.

Scobie has often been regarded as Greene’s most perfectly tragic hero, perfect in the sense that he and his situation best conform to the Aristotelian paradigm. Henry Donaghy claims that

In this the third of his religious novels, Greene writes the genuine tragedy that he came close to writing in many of his other novels. His protagonist [...] is a virtuous man whose *hamartia* lies in the excess of pity he possesses [...]. In Scobie, pity exceeds all bounds and becomes as vicious as does Macbeth’s ambition.¹⁹⁴

Scobie’s awareness of his *hamartia*, as Donaghy would have it, heightens what critics perceive as the novel’s tragic sense. The noted Jesuit scholar, Joseph Kurismmootil, interprets Scobie’s downfall as tragic, and all the more so because of his realisation of his errors:

Scobie is made aware of broken pledges. He finds he has taken on more than he can really bear: he is answerable to two women, rivals for his love. Both have absolute claims on him. This is a situation of his own making, but he is not adequate to cope with it. Pity had urged him on; now it has him ensnared.¹⁹⁵

The death of Scobie’s ‘boy’, Ali, resulting from Scobie’s dealings with the Syrians, is what finally sends him over the edge. ‘He died because I existed’, Scobie tells Helen (249). Scobie’s pity for Ali, for Helen, for Louise, even for Yusef, compels him to his last act of pity, suicide. At this point in the novel it is evident that Scobie regards suicide as his duty, in the way a guilty man will feel

¹⁹³ Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling: A Dialectical Lyric* (1843), trans. Walter Lowrie, *A Kierkegaard Anthology*, ed. Robert Bretall, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1943, p 129-133.

¹⁹⁴ *Graham Greene: An Introduction to his Writings*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1983, p 55.

¹⁹⁵ *Heaven and Hell on Earth: An Appreciation of Five Novels of Graham Greene*, Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1982, p 95.

obliged to turn himself into the police. Unable to turn himself in while in the confessional, a place where Scobie feels neither remorse nor forgiveness, he determines that he can only eradicate the pain he has caused by eradicating himself.

This attitude towards suicide is quite emblematic of the nineteenth-century heroine of adultery novels. Comparing Scobie's suicide with Anna Karenina's and Emma Bovary's would reveal some similarity between Greene's treatment of adultery and that of Tolstoy, or Flaubert. But Scobie's despair is of the most severe kind, because Greene is writing from within *his* 'religious sense', while the despair of the women in Tolstoy and Flaubert's novels do not consider the moral repercussions in quite the same way that Scobie does. If Scobie's inner torment runs parallel to that of another character in adultery literature, it would be Arthur Dimmesdale in *The Scarlet Letter*, whose secret guilt destroys him in a manner similar to Scobie, although Dimmesdale does not take his own life.

Scobie is what Greene himself was called, in an article titled 'The God-Haunted Adulterer'.¹⁹⁶ Scobie's fundamental devotion to God haunted him and wore him down, more than did his adultery. The irony of the novel is in the question of whether Scobie did in fact love anyone, even God—a question Louise puts to Father Rank after Scobie's death. 'I think, from what I saw of him,' says Father Rank, 'that he really loved God.' To which Louise claims, 'He certainly loved no one else.' 'And you may be in the right of it there...' says the priest, and the novel ends. But Scobie's last words were, 'Oh God, I love...'—significantly cut off. We are never told what or who it is whom Scobie loves, but there is the hint that he finally is able to look past pity and see love, the hint that Scobie might reach some kind of spiritual regeneration.

Like Ford, Lawrence and Waugh, Greene too writes about regeneration in a cyclical manner. If *Women in Love*, for instance, focuses on the destruction that precedes regeneration, or the death that precedes resurrection, *The Heart of the*

¹⁹⁶ Charles Trueheart, 'The God-Haunted Adulterer', *The Atlantic Monthly*, May 1995, p 113.

Matter, similarly, represents not only a *Purgatorio*, but also a phase leading to regeneration. *The End of the Affair* is arguably Greene's equivalent to, say, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*: it centres on an adulterous affair, but is essentially a novel about regeneration. In this case Sarah's regeneration is spiritual—her adultery leads to sainthood—and completes what Scobie's story does not.

'Ordinary corrupt human love'?
Spiritual regeneration in *The End of the Affair*

I'm tired and I don't want any more pain. I want Maurice. I want ordinary corrupt human love. Dear God, you know I want to want Your pain, but I don't want it now. Take it away for a while and give it me another time.

The End of the Affair

The adultery in *The Heart of the Matter* differs much from the adultery in Greene's next novel. The affair of the title is clearly physical, passionate, erotic and has very little to do with pity. Roger Sharrock calls the novel a 'natural history of love, concentrating on the psychology of passion in a manner more French than English'.¹⁹⁷ Greene's treatment of adulterous passion ignores the social ramifications of adultery and is much more interested in probing the psychological and emotional motivations for, and repercussions of, such passion. Approximating the nineteenth-century model, *The End of the Affair* sets up the classic love-triangle, and draws on motifs such as jealousy and distrust. In the archetypal novel there are generally two stages of distrust and jealousy within the triangle of adultery: the husband is distrustful and jealous of his wife; and the wife becomes distrustful and jealous of her adulterous lover, as he begins to tire of the tension and discomfort necessarily present in an affair of this kind. In *The End of the Affair*, however, the triangular situation develops, and ends, rather unusually, particularly with the addition of a fourth corner—not another human lover in this case, but God. There is no suspicion, distrust or jealousy between

¹⁹⁷ *Saints, Sinner and Comedians: The Novels of Graham Greene*, Tunbridge Wells: Burns and Oates, 1984, p 161.

Henry and Sarah at any point in the novel. Sarah is never distrustful or jealous of Bendrix, a fact that infuriates him, reinforcing his own distrust and jealousy. Bendrix's distrust and jealousy of Sarah are present almost from the beginning, and Greene's first-person narrative makes the destructive nature of Bendrix's jealousy overwhelmingly apparent, as his jealousy of Sarah turns to hatred of God.

The novel tells the story of the novelist Maurice Bendrix and the wartime affair he had with Sarah Miles, a politician's wife. Bendrix met Sarah first in order to find out about Henry's life as a civil servant, so as to integrate this information into a novel. The affair began rather swiftly, however, and continued quite intensely until one day Bendrix's house was bombed and Sarah, thinking Bendrix dead, prayed to a God she did not believe in; she promised that if Bendrix lived, she would give him up forever. Bendrix did live, and Sarah walked away with no explanation, and began a life apart from Bendrix, until two years later when he met Henry in the Common in the pouring rain. Henry tells Bendrix he is worried about Sarah, thinks she might have a lover, and Bendrix's jealousy is re-ignited. Henry is too placid to pursue an inquiry with a private detective, but Bendrix is not. Parkis, the detective, eventually pilfers Sarah's journal from the Miles household and from this Bendrix discovers, at last, the truth about the end of his affair. But before Bendrix can win Sarah back from God, she dies. In a bizarre twist of plot, Bendrix moves in with Henry so they can be company for each other, but Bendrix's bitterness towards Sarah and God intensifies, and the novel closes with Bendrix's invocation to God, to leave him alone forever.

Following the example of Ford Madox Ford in *The Good Soldier*, Greene writes in the first person, his narrator being neither wholly reliable nor omniscient. Greene was impressed with Ford's novel, and read it frequently. Yet while Ford's narrator calls the story he is about to relate 'the saddest story' he has ever heard, Bendrix makes no such claims of sorrow, beginning his narrative by stating that 'this is a record of hate more than of love' (7). Bendrix narrates the story of his own affair, which he conducts as an unmarried man with a married woman, while Ford's narrator tells the story of another man's infidelities; despite the fact that one of Teddy

Ashburnham's conquests was the narrator's wife, now deceased, Ford's narrative voice is all sorrow and pity, while Greene's is hatred, jealousy and bitterness. The narrators may be similar in their untrustworthiness, but are very different in tone. The questions explored in Ford's novel are quite different from those wrestled with in Greene's. Ford's narrator questions the morality that guides human interaction, questions what it is to be a 'gentleman', questions the ideals of marriage, and ultimately questions how we can ever fully know or trust another person. Greene explores, as he did in *The Heart of the Matter*, the moral expanse between such absolutes as good and evil, as well as examining different kinds of love, and different kinds of hatred. Where Ford's novel examines human interactions on an intensely human level, Greene examines these same interactions on a spiritual level.

Greene's awareness of the 'religious sense' is more evident in this novel than even in *The Power and the Glory*. Although not considered part of Greene's 'Catholic trilogy' of novels (*Brighton Rock*, *The Power and the Glory*, *The Heart of the Matter*), *The End of the Affair* can be paired with *The Power and the Glory*—both being novels in which the central characters are 'regenerated', or in more theological terms, 'sanctified'. If *The End of the Affair* acts as *Paradiso* to the *Purgatorio* of *The Heart of the Matter*, it might be expected that the novel's religious tone be particularly optimistic. This is not the case, however, as Bendrix, as the narrator, sets the tone for the novel; despite the religious language, themes and imagery, the overall tone is one of scepticism and bitterness.

Bendrix is the centre of his own story. All our reactions are his; we can only perceive his world through his description. It is his lack of knowledge that causes the story to develop at all—first as a novelist requiring information from a civil servant's wife, and then as a jilted lover, requiring information from a detective. This is perhaps Greene's only novel in which he examines what it is to be a writer; Bendrix's story of his affair with Sarah is a reflection of himself—and perhaps of Greene—as a novelist. The question of how to order the events of the story is raised at

the beginning of the novel, as it is in *The Good Soldier*. Greene's narrative voice is anxious about how his story is told, for indeed Bendrix is a professional storyteller, something Ford's narrator is not.

A story has no beginning or end: arbitrarily one chooses that moment of experience from which to look back or from which to look ahead. I say 'one chooses' with the inaccurate pride of a professional writer who —when he has been seriously noted at all— has been praised for his technical ability, but do I in fact of my own will *choose* that black wet January night on the Common, in 1946... or did these images choose me?

(7)

Bendrix's desire to control his narrative is immediately striking; however, his attempts to control his story seem as futile as his attempts to control his affair. When Bendrix's affair is nearing its end, to his horror he 'begins to see himself as a character who is being manipulated in a plot by someone else.'¹⁹⁸ In the end it is Sarah who gains control of both the narrative and the affair, and just as she turns the 'record of hate' into a 'record of love' she turns her tormenting affair with Bendrix into an equally tormenting, but ultimately regenerating, affair with God, or with faith.

There are essentially three different narratives in *The End of the Affair*, working on different levels and, in places, overlapping. Each tells a different story and reaches different conclusions. Although Bendrix narrates all three versions of the story, his own story, which operates on a material level, reveals only part of the truth. Sarah's narrative, which operates on a spiritual level, is meant to put all the pieces of the puzzle together. Parkis stands between Sarah and Bendrix, as his narrative is both 'grotesquely comic' and stereotypically romantic. It is Parkis who obtains Sarah's side of the story, as it is he who brings Bendrix the journal. But the story that Sarah's journal reveals is not the story that either Bendrix or Parkis had expected. Greene seems to be experimenting with different kinds of narratives: Parkis's narrative is that of the romantic observer,

¹⁹⁸Sharrock, p 166.

comic in his professional incongruity with the situation in which he is involved; Bendrix's is that of the jealous and obsessed lover; Sarah's narrative of spiritual regeneration is ultimately incomprehensible to both Bendrix and Parkis, not to mention Henry, as her narrative transcends material love and romantic love alike.

Parkis's narrative operates on the lowest level, and represents a specific kind of adultery narrative. The language of Parkis's story is the very plain, legal language of court cases and detection —largely euphemistic and sterile, but romantic in its euphemisms, in the sense that it caters to a popular notion of 'romanticised adultery', fed by the sorts of romance novels written in the early twentieth century. Jordan's film treatment of the novel, in a departure from Greene's text, has Bendrix call Parkis, 'the vicarious lover', and later intimates that Bendrix wrote a novel with that title. Not quite subtle enough for Greene himself, but a fitting choice. Parkis is a romantically inclined character —his son is called Lancelot, mistakenly thinking that it was Lancelot who found the Holy Grail, when in fact, as Bendrix pitilessly puts him straight, Lancelot was found in bed with Guenevere. Parkis's only encounters with romance are in the cases he takes on; quite often, the only romance in these cases is that which he endows on them, inspired by the stereotypes of cheap romantic fiction. Parkis's reports to Bendrix resemble a kind of narrative that was quite popular in the eighteenth and nineteenth, and even into the twentieth, centuries, represented best by a journal called *The CrimCon Gazette*. This journal, and others of the same kind, as well as the Court sections in *The Times*, retold adultery court cases, often including direct transcriptions from the trials, and were immensely popular, even among the higher echelons of society. This kind of narrative embodies a branch of adultery literature all its own —not fiction, but heavily romanticised non-fiction. The romanticisation of adultery may have begun in the twelfth century with the troubadours in France and Germany, but certainly thrived in the newspapers and magazines of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Parkis's narrative of the affair begins only after the affair has been over for two years; he is to follow Sarah's movements and discover whom she is now having an affair with. Parkis's

speculations first lead him to think that Sarah is carrying on an affair with Bendrix (he saw them having lunch together, the first time in two years), and then, after meeting Bendrix and realising his error, he deduces that Sarah is involved with a Mr Smythe, which is in fact incorrect. Bendrix finally discovers this when Parkis is able to infiltrate the Miles home and bring him Sarah's journal, which reveals not only the reasons why she left him but why she was visiting Mr Smythe. Parkis can only watch, speculate, and surmise at the truth. All of his speculations turn out to be incorrect, as he is expecting this case to unravel as all his previous cases have. This affair turns out to be more complicated and less stereotypically romantic than Parkis would ever have guessed, and even at the end he is unsure as to the actual facts, as he appears at Sarah's funeral at Golders Green—a patently romantic gesture in the least romantic of places. In his eyes, Sarah was a heroine in a romance, and Bendrix the jealous lover; Parkis fails to understand the complexity of Bendrix's jealousy, and although he realises there is something different about Sarah, fails also to fully understand her love.

Bendrix is the 'secular commentator on the religious theme of the novel'.¹⁹⁹ His perspective is necessary to provide a literary balance to the heavily religious themes that become more prevalent as the novel nears its end. In a novel that reaches its crisis through an ostensible miracle, and in which two more miracles are reported to occur in its denouement, Greene has managed to prevent the novel from spilling over into sensationalism by making Bendrix the credible sceptic that he is. Bendrix is similar to many of Greene's protagonists in his combination of good and bad qualities. He is not a 'nice' character, particularly as we see him through his own story: spiteful, angry, full of hate and distrust and jealousy. But he is not unlikeable. He is a realist and a materialist; his jealousy is merited, and his anger explainable. Sarah's actions and emotions are less easy to understand than Bendrix's are, which serves to make Bendrix a credible, if not wholly reliable, narrator.

Bendrix's narrative tells the reader about the material facts of the affair: how it began, how she looked, where they made love for the first time. But he also tells the reader of the internal

¹⁹⁹ J.P. Kulshrestha, *Graham Greene: The Novelist*, London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, p 127.

workings of the affair: the movements between love, hatred and jealousy. Bendrix tells about what Sarah later calls ‘ordinary corrupt human love’ —the kind of love that she gave up in exchange for a different kind of love, a kind of love that Bendrix neither wants nor understands. Bendrix’s love, we see clearly, is obsessive. His jealousy of Sarah turns his obsessive love into an obsessive hatred. In Bendrix’s account of the affair, the three words he repeats most often are love, hate and jealousy. The three become intertwined in Bendrix: the more he hates, the more he loves, and the more he loves, the more jealous he becomes. Sarah’s belief that Bendrix ‘thinks he hates, and loves, loves all the time. Even his enemies’ (101) is confirmed by Bendrix’s own narrative. At the end of the novel Bendrix is offered his own chance of regeneration, and is seen to reject it, but Sarah’s comment above makes the reader wonder if the hatred that Bendrix believes he feels for God is actually the beginning of love.

At the beginning of the novel, Bendrix perceives almost everyone as his enemy; indeed he regards Sarah as much as an enemy as he does Henry, and ‘that other, in whom in those days we were lucky enough not to believe’ (7). Bendrix immediately begins on the subject of his hatred:

If hatred is not too large a term to use in relation to any human being, I hated Henry —I hated his wife Sarah too [...] So this is a record of hate far more than of love, and if I come to say anything in favour of Henry and Sarah I can be trusted: I am writing against bias because it is my professional pride to prefer the near-truth, even to the expression of my near-hate.

(7)

Bendrix’s ready denial of his love is repeated a few pages on when he comments on the bitterness of his tone: ‘If I could I would write with love, but if I could write with love, I would be another man: I would have never lost love.’ (12). In Bendrix’s desire to be perceived as hateful there is a kind of pride, pride in being a ‘jealous lover’, whose love is twisted into hatred by the strength of his jealousy, and all because he has been tragically wronged. Bendrix wallows in his unhappiness, and even acknowledges the egotism that this stems from:

The sense of unhappiness is so much easier to convey than that sense of happiness. In misery we seem aware of our own existence, even though it may be in the form of a monstrous egotism: this pain of mine is individual, this nerve that winces belongs to me and to no other. But happiness annihilates us: we lose our identity.

(47)

Bendrix indeed believes that jealous lovers are admirable characters, as he says half-seriously to Henry, 'Jealous lovers are more respectable, less ridiculous, than jealous husbands. They are supported by the weight of literature. Betrayed lovers are tragic, never comic.' (17). Part of Bendrix is as romantic as poor Parkis, in identifying himself with a literary type, even when he goes to the detective agency to have Sarah watched. 'Perhaps you and the lady are —intimate?' Mr Savage asks. 'No. I've only seen her once since 1944 [...] Can't one love or hate [...] as long as that? Don't make any mistake. I'm just another of your jealous clients, I don't claim to be any different than the rest [...]'. (21)

But Bendrix *is* different 'from the rest', as he is jealous of God, not of another man. And it does not take Bendrix long, in his narrative, to discover what Sarah seemed to know all along: that his protestations of hate are transparent:

As I write of 1939 I feel all my hatred returning. Hatred seems to operate the same glands as love: it even produces the same actions. If we had not been taught how to interpret the story of the Passion, would we have been able to say from their actions alone whether it was the jealous Judas or the cowardly Peter who loved Christ?

(27)

Soon Bendrix turns his narrative into one of jealousy rather than of hatred, as jealousy can contain within itself both love and hate.

Jealousy, or so I have always believed, exists only with desire. The Old Testament writers were fond of using the words ‘a jealous God’, and perhaps it was their rough and oblique way of expressing belief in the love of God for man. But I suppose there are different kinds of desire. My desire now was nearer hatred than love [...].

(42)

Even after reading Sarah’s journal and discovering that she still loves him and that it was God who had taken her away from him, and not an unknown human rival, Bendrix turns his hatred towards God —hating God as if he believed in him. Sarah, too, initially hates God for making her keep her promise, but through her suffering she learns to love God; this does not happen to Bendrix, although through his hatred of God he is forced to acknowledge him, which opens up the possibility that his hatred could turn to love, which would lead to his own spiritual regeneration. For in acknowledging God, and in trying to hate him, Bendrix begins to fear that his love might be as petty as his hate.

From the drawer of my bedside table I took her journal and opening it at random, under a date last January, I read: ‘O God, if only I could really hate you, what would that mean?’ And I thought, hating Sarah is only loving Sarah and hating myself is only loving myself. I’m not worth hating [...] Nothing — not even Sarah— is worth our hatred if You exist [...] O God, if I could really hate you [...] My hate was as petty as my love.

(182)

Bendrix begins to lose strength, as Sarah’s love fights him even after her death. He even tries to destroy Sarah’s journal so as not to be reminded that he lost Sarah to God, but is unable to do anything except try to keep God at an arm’s length from him. Bendrix ends the novel, speaking hatred but living in fear of losing even that.

I went up to my room and took the journal out. I tore the covers off [...] The last page lay upwards and I read again, 'You were there teaching me to squander, so that one day we might have nothing left except this love of You. But You are too good to me. When I ask You for pain, You give me peace. Give it him, too. Give him my peace—he needs it more.'

I thought, you're failed there Sarah. One of your prayers at least has not been answered. I have no peace and I have no love, except for you, you. I said to her, I'm a man of hate [...] if *you* are a saint, it's not so difficult to be a saint. It's something He can demand of any of us, to leap. But I won't leap. I sat on her bed and said to God: You've taken her, but You haven't got me yet [...] I don't want your peace and I don't want your love. I wanted something very simple and easy: I wanted Sarah for a lifetime and You took her away. With Your great schemes You ruin our happiness like a harvester ruins a mouse's nest: I hate You, God, I hate You as though You existed.

(190-1)

The novel ends on this dual theme of guilt and redemption, hate and, ultimately, love. William Cash, interestingly, likens the ending of the novel to *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, building perhaps too much on the fact that there is a reference to the poem in the novel. All the same, like the Mariner, Bendrix only moves towards his own redemption, or regeneration, through a desperate and violent fight with his conscience. Cash comments that

Bendrix comes close to experiencing an understanding of 'grace', through love, as well as through hate. The strange mercy of God was an obsession with Greene; the more unlikely the recipient the better. Bendrix's intense ability to hate is, as Father Martindale pointed out to Greene in a letter written just after the novel came out, really an admission of his equal ability to love.²⁰⁰

²⁰⁰ Cash, p 157.

Sarah's narrative contains the same fears and hatred as Bendrix's narrative, which in a way make her transition from adulteress to saint more believable than if it had been free of such emotions. What happens to Sarah, after loving and giving up Bendrix, can be called a 'dark night of the soul', as she moves from a state of total brokenness to regeneration. Bendrix himself uses the phrase *noche oscura* to describe the pain that lovers can feel, perhaps recognising that both he and Sarah were experiencing this very thing. Sarah has been likened not only to Mary Magdalene but to St Augustine, the latter of whom wrote in his *Confessions*: 'You have created us for Yourself, and our soul is restless until it rests in You.' If Greene did intend Sarah to be regarded as a saint, by the end of the novel—as he clearly did with his whisky-priest in *The Power and the Glory*—the two years after leaving Bendrix are her own Way of the Cross, a path that many saints throughout history have recognised as being essential to their sanctification. K.C. Kurismmootil has described this process:

Of all the enigmas of the mystical way of life, perhaps none is more elusive to reason than what is known as 'the paradox of the illuminative way'. This may be stated thus: the inner self is awakened to the degree the ego is denied satisfaction. So long as the individual is active on the sensual or the ego level, his true self remains inert; it cannot emerge, cannot bloom. Let him die to the senses, and to his ego, and he is already at the threshold. Saints speak of this point as the *Sunya*, the Tao, *le point vierge* and 'the centre of nothingness'. It is only reached by a leap in faith.²⁰¹

Sarah's leap of faith takes some time, and she does not 'bloom' until she has been totally broken, indeed, perhaps not even until she dies. Like the cycle of regeneration that Lawrence traces so clearly, Sarah has to be destroyed before she can be resurrected, or regenerated. J.P. Kulshrestha argues that Sarah is 'led from concupiscence through renunciation to sanctification.'²⁰² It is

²⁰¹ *Heaven and Hell on Earth*, Chicago: University of Loyola Press, 1982, pp 151-2.

²⁰² Kulshrestha, p 113.

enough to say that she is led from restlessness and unhappiness, through renunciation, to eventual sanctification. Greene makes it clear that neither Sarah nor Bendrix should be judged by strictly religious moral standards. Sarah, particularly, is portrayed as a very moral person—a moral enough person to consider herself ‘a bitch and a fake’. The sanctity within Sarah is evident before she ends her affair with Bendrix, in her capacity for love. In this capacity for love is an equal capacity for suffering. Through her renunciation she suffers just as intensely as Bendrix does, but her love seems to be able to focus itself unwaveringly, and even as she learns to love God, her love for Bendrix grows, as does her love for Henry, Smythe and other people in need.

Kulshrestha’s comment that Sarah is led on from a state of ‘concupiscence’ is too harsh a statement, and fortunately he does not build his entire argument on it. What is unusual about *The End of the Affair* is that Greene does not depict the affair as being a product so much of concupiscence (which Greene may very well chalk up as the normal human condition) but of genuine love—realistic, grown-up love.

The grasping ‘coarse’, ‘crude’, unaesthetic love of Bendrix and Sarah on a hardwood floor is an adult love. It has managed to discard the notions of romance, pity, morality, and, equally important, spiritualised psychology. It requires no justification and does not resort to abstraction. It just is.²⁰³

But as solid as this love is, five years of Bendrix’s jealousy and frustration wear Sarah down to a point where she is in need of a love stronger and more perfect, a love that can regenerate her. Bendrix, because of his inability to trust Sarah, cannot give this to Sarah; only through Bendrix’s injury, Sarah’s promise to give him up, and her integrity, which makes her keep her promise, is she able to understand that her love for and with Bendrix was leading her to something that could in fact regenerate her. As Charles tells Julia in *Brideshead Revisited* that loving Sebastian made possible his love for her, Sarah similarly could say to Bendrix, ‘you were the forerunner’. By loving Bendrix, Sarah is ultimately able to love God. She writes in her journal, close to the end, of how

²⁰³ Ibid. p 116.

she believes that she loved God all the while she was loving Bendrix, but was unable to recognise it at the time:

Did I ever love Maurice as much before I loved You? Or was it really You I loved all the time? Did I touch You when I touched him? Could I have touched You if I hadn't touched him first, touched him as I never touched Henry, anybody? And he loved me and touched me as he never did any other woman. But was it me he loved, or You? For he hated in me all the things You hate. He was on Your side all the time without knowing it. You willed our separation, but he willed it too. He worked for it with his anger and his jealousy, and worked for it with his love. For he gave me so much love, and I gave him so much love that soon there wasn't anything left, when we'd finished, but You [...] You were there, teaching us to squander, like you taught the rich man, so that one day we might have nothing left except this love of you.

(123)

The narrative of Sarah's journal fills in the gaps in the story as it completes the regenerative cycle of Greene's fiction, began perhaps as early as *Brighton Rock*. What Pinkie opposes and rejects, and what Scobie falls short of, and what Bendrix refuses to accept, Sarah, and the Whisky-Priest, embrace and venture into fully: loving God to the annihilation of self. Greene, not unlike Lawrence, demonstrates how a person can come to 'bloom', or be regenerated, through suffering. Sarah's suffering is inextricably linked to her adultery; her adultery with Bendrix has made her love of God possible. It would be exaggerating to suggest that Greene is positing that adultery necessarily leads to sainthood, but it is clear, from this novel as well as others, that in Greeneland suffering through sin is essential before a person can reach sanctity, or wholeness. Bendrix, Scobie, Helen, Sarah, Louise—all are broken through the psychological and emotional repercussions of adulterous love, but only Sarah is resurrected, even through her physical death.

Both Sarah and Scobie's deaths lead them into a deeper knowledge of love, although while Scobie is perhaps learning about love for the first time in his life, Sarah is transforming her human love to a divine love. Greene's fusion of the theme of regeneration with the subject of adultery is hardly as straightforward and unambiguous as Lawrence's, in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, or Ford's in *The Last Post*; but Greene's writing always explores paradox, and does not rely on black and white distinctions. 'Adultery can lead to sainthood' is in itself paradoxical, but the dynamics of regeneration that Greene explores in *The Heart of the Matter* and *The End of the Affair* are not all that removed from those depicted by Ford, Lawrence and Waugh.

Pregnant conclusions:

The symbolism of pregnancy, illegitimacy, children and childlessness

By way of a conclusion, attention is now turned to a central issue in relation to the novel of adultery that remains to be examined here, namely, children. Traditionally —and by this I mean in the nineteenth-century model of the adultery novel— the child, or children, affected by the parent's infidelity was a significant factor in the shape and outcome of the novel. In the majority of these cases the mother is presented as the unfaithful parent whose adultery rips apart the child's sense of domestic order. Contrary to the Old Testament dictum, in these novels it is not the sins of the father that are laid upon the head of the children, but the sins of the mother. By placing the mother in the position of the guilty party in these novels, the tension within the family itself was made all the more violent and threatening; not only could the unfaithful wife be a breeder of bastards, but even the legitimate children of an adulterous woman were scarred by her infidelity.

The mother-child relationships in such novels as *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), *Madame Bovary* (1857), *Anna Karenina* (1878) and Theodor Fontane's *Effi Briest* (1895) have been heavily commented upon, by Naomi Segal, Marie Maclean, Bill Overton and others, but there has been little said of the mother-child relationships in the twentieth-century novel of adultery. There is an obvious reason for this: very few of the adulterous women in the novels studied here are actually mothers. Unlike the images of the adulteress given to us in the previous century —of Anna Karenina torn between her love of Vronsky and little Seryozha, of Emma Bovary and her fear of and indifference towards Berthe, of Hester Prynne and her burning devotion to the aptly named Pearl— the twentieth-century model rarely has a child clinging to her skirts. Georges de la Tour's seventeenth-century paintings of Mary Magdalene (*The Magdalen with the Nightlight* and *The Penitent Magdalen*) portray the archetypal 'repentant adulteress' as being pregnant; this image,

haunting as it is, does not resonate consistently with the images of the adulteresses, repentant or otherwise, portrayed in the novels considered in this study.

Of all the women examined in the previous chapters, only a handful actually are mothers, or have been mothers: Sylvia Tietjens, Brenda Last, Julia Flyte. Sylvia is seen to be an atrocious wife and an indifferent mother, but at least her child is not killed. Brenda Last's son John Andrew is, of course, kicked in the head on a hunt meet, and she is not so much stricken with grief as with relief – relief that it is John Andrew and not her lover, John Beaver, who is killed. Julia Flyte's daughter dies at birth and she sees this as a direct reflection of her unworthiness to be a mother and of her essential sinfulness. A further two women in these novels are, quite significantly, expectant mothers. Valentine and Connie Chatterley are both pregnant at the endings of *Parade's End* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* respectively.

It is fair to make a generalisation here and argue that in the twentieth-century novel the female sex instinct is fully explored without much attention given to the maternal instinct—two things that prior to the contraceptive age would have necessarily gone hand-in-hand.²⁰⁴ The separation of the female sex instinct from the maternal instinct in these fictions is a reflection of a similar factual and practical separation and change in attitude, which was becoming more marked as the century progressed, as the birth rate decreased and as more women became aware of the options available to them in the realm of 'family planning'. The separation of sex from parenthood, or more specifically, from motherhood, can be said to be one of the major influences on the idea of the family in the twentieth century, and it is certainly as important an influence on the literature of this period. Yet, despite societal shifts in attitudes towards sex and the absence of children in this group of representative novels, it is not impossible to find presentations of the role and function of motherhood in the twentieth-century novel of adultery. The absence of motherhood and children

²⁰⁴ *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is the most notable exception to this generalisation, as Connie Chatterley's sexual and erotic exploration has its basis in the 'womb', as has been established in the chapter on Lawrence. Lawrence is exceptional in his emphasis on sex as being potentially procreative, and in this is more in keeping with Catholic notions of sex than are, the so-called 'Catholic novelists', Waugh or Greene.

can be as significant as its presence, and certainly in the case of the novels studied here, the various instances of motherhood, children and childlessness are heavily symbolic. What I aim to establish in this conclusion is that the image of a child, and particularly that of an illegitimate child, is the ultimate symbol for post-war regeneration. There is a curious irony in the image of a bastard child becoming the hope and future for post-war England—an image seen most clearly in Ford's *Parade's End*, Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and, as another example, although not considered in depth previously, Waugh's *Sword of Honour* trilogy. The role of the illegitimate child as a marginalised character and a socially destabilising or threatening force is reversed in these novels, just as the function of the adulteress as a socially destabilising figure has been similarly reconsidered, if not overturned.

Pregnancy: the ultimate symbol of regeneration

If things go on as they are, there's nothing lies in the future but death and destruction, for these industrial masses. I feel my inside turn to water sometimes—and there you are, going to have a child by me. —But never mind. All the bad times that have ever been, haven't been able to blow the crocus out: nor even the love of women.

Lady Chatterley's Lover

Oliver Mellors, writing to Connie at the end of the novel, condenses in a few short sentences the regenerative cycle that the whole book rests upon. He presents a pessimistic image of the world, of the newly-industrial world, as a dark and deadly thing; throughout the novel, in fact, Lawrence presents the industrial landscape as some sort of threatening beast, but in Mellors's letter to Connie he juxtaposes the dark future of industrial England with the unborn child in Connie's womb. As soon as this contradictory image —'there you are, going to have a child by me'— is presented Mellors is able to push aside the darkness and moves on to a thoroughly optimistic appraisal of life.

Mellors understands, as Lawrence does, the significance of a child and, further, of a pregnant woman. Next to the classical symbol of the phoenix, more apt symbol could there be for regeneration than the image of a pregnant woman?

The Christian cycle of birth and death and resurrection begins, of course, with a pregnancy; images of the pregnant virgin, throughout history, have been seen as images of hope. Even before the story of Mary and Joseph and the infant Christ, the image and idea of a pregnant woman has symbolised the whole future of a family, a generation, a religion, a country —has indicated a wealth of potentiality. Children have been deemed important for different reasons —as signs of the father's potency, as indications of the parents' mutual love, as heirs to a family name, tradition, fortune and future. It is no wonder, then, that writers during and after the First and Second World Wars would return to the image of the pregnant woman, and to the infant, in some attempt to carve out a picture of post-war rejuvenation. Lawrence, in particular, used both the symbol of the phoenix and the pregnant woman to embody the regenerative cycle of life that he was attempting to trace in a number of his novels — *Lady Chatterley's Lover* being the most obvious, building on groundwork laid earlier in *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*. As has been demonstrated in the chapter on Lawrence, his non-fictional writing, too, focused on mapping out the cycle of death and destruction, resurrection and regeneration, culminating in rebirth.

Pregnancy, and language relating to pregnancy, is a significant feature in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. While Connie's pregnancy becomes known only towards the end of the novel, even before she has her affair with Mellors, the language Lawrence employs in the narrative is full of allusions to pregnancy, as well as direct discussions of pregnancy: what it would mean for Connie to have a child; what it would mean for Clifford to have an heir. One of the most significant aspects of the fictional representation of the child is in its role as a propagator of tradition. This function of the child is often overlooked, or simply left out, in the adultery fiction of the nineteenth century, being replaced with an emphasis on the function of the child as an extension of the adulterous mother's

conscience. However, the child's role in carrying on tradition is one that is given central importance in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, as well as in the other novels in this study that deal with the question of children. The fact that the theme of regeneration, especially on a national scale and in the post-war sense, is closely linked to the idea of tradition is largely responsible for this.

Clifford Chatterley, unable to father an heir because of his physical condition, nevertheless regards having an heir as important. A discussion takes place between Connie and Clifford on this subject, early in the novel, and what makes this discussion so significant is Clifford's suggestion that Connie have a child by another man, any suitable man, so that there can be an heir for Wragby. Blood is not so much important as intention, here, yet Clifford's willingness to raise a bastard child as his own, in order to propagate the tradition of his home and family, is ironic, because he reacts with shock and disgust when, at the end of the novel, Connie does become pregnant by Mellors, certainly an *unsuitable* man, what Clifford would call the 'wrong sort of fellow' (44). But what is most important about the discussion between Clifford and Connie at the beginning of the book is its affirmation of the child as an indispensable link between the old world, before the war, and the new world, after it.

Both Connie and Clifford, albeit in different ways and for different reasons, long for a child. Clifford, for all his short-sightedness in other matters, is useful here because he sums up the role of the child in the regeneration of England, ideas which echo later in the works of both Ford and Waugh:

'If some of the old England isn't preserved, there'll be no England at all,' said Clifford. 'And we who have this kind of property, and the feeling for it, must preserve it.'

There was a sad pause.

'Yes, for a little while,' said Connie.

‘For a little while! It is all we can do. We can only do our bit. I feel every man of my family has done his bit, here, since we’ve had the place. One may go against convention, but one must keep up the tradition.’

Again there was a pause.

‘What tradition?’ said Connie.

‘The tradition of England! Of this!’

‘Yes!’ she said slowly.

‘That’s why having a son helps. One is only a link in a chain,’ he said.

(43)

For all that Clifford represents so much of what Lawrence is lashing out against in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, he introduces the theme of ‘tradition’ into the novel. What Clifford regards as being ‘the tradition of England’ is certainly distinct from what Lawrence has established as being the most important ‘tradition’. Clifford uses the word to vaguely refer to something that is physically represented by his home and his business. Lawrence’s idea of tradition, like Connie’s, is an intensely personal one, and is also an organic one: it is a tradition of life and of the fullest expression of personal life. It is about passing on life, not passing on a name or a bank balance. When Clifford talks about the importance of preserving ‘old England’, and the importance of ‘tradition’, the reader understands immediately that he is speaking hypocritically and mechanically. The mining industry that becomes Clifford’s obsession at the end of the novel is precisely what Lawrence, and Connie and Mellors, are pointing to as being the root of the destruction of ‘old’ England. Clifford’s desire for an heir is merely a desire to draw a line under his own ephemeral achievements: ‘one is only a link in a chain’. His feigned desire to preserve the ‘tradition of old England’ is merely an attempt to convince himself that even if he ‘goes against convention’ (remembering that Clifford regards himself as a free-thinker, a neo-Platonist) he is still doing his part. Clifford is not truly passionate about having child, just as he is not truly passionate about the tradition of ‘old England’; there is significance here in that he not only wants a child, but

specifically wants a son. A daughter would not have the same lasting effect on Clifford's life as would a son —and what Clifford is after is just that: an 'effect'.

As the discussion continues, Connie is put off by Clifford's 'impersonal' desire for a son, but at the same time she realises that she needs a child, personally, just as much as Clifford wants one, impersonally. Whether or not Connie agrees, or whether the reader agrees, with Clifford's ultimate argument is unimportant. Like Lawrence himself, Clifford is proposing (however unwittingly) that a child is one of the greatest means of regenerating England. Not totally blinkered, Clifford also realises, to his credit, that Connie might feel 'disintegrated' from not having a child, as he tells her:

There's no point in a disintegrated life. If lack of sex is going to disintegrate you, then go out and have a love affair. If lack of a child is going to disintegrate you, then have a child if you possibly can. (45)

Connie inwardly agrees with this, knowing that part of her is indeed in a process of disintegration, and of course it is no accident that Lawrence gives Mellors his first entrance at this point in the novel. Mellors's entrance foreshadows the eventual love affair between him and Connie, and it is almost as if Clifford's words have willed Mellors to enter the scene. Connie's awareness of her need for reintegration, for a child, is what initially pulls her towards Mellors. Carol Sklenicka has commented on this, asserting that 'The idea of a baby pulls Connie out of the meaninglessness into which she is sinking and makes her receptive to [...] Mellors.'²⁰⁵

Clifford and Connie each have their own thoughts about what a child would mean for them, individually. For Clifford it would be an heir for Wragby, a continuation of the family name and tradition, a physical embodiment of the future of England, and, in a way, a validation of his own manhood, even if the child were not his own. But for Connie, and this may be the ultimate conclusion of the novel, a child would be not just an embodiment of England's future, but an extension of her own life, and her love, and her sexuality. In Lawrence's own jargon, a child would

²⁰⁵ *D.H. Lawrence and the Child*, Columbia: The University of Missouri Press, 1991, p 170.

represent a continuation of the 'life of the body'. Mellors likens their unborn child to a 'flame', which flickers between him and Connie (300). Mellors thinks of the child, and thinks of sex. Connie, conversely, thinks of sex, and thinks of a child. Her first experience of orgasm with Mellors is likened to feeling pregnant: 'In her womb and her bowels she was flowing and alive now [...]. It feels like a child, she said to herself; it feels like a child in me.' (140) Both believe that their love, and the child that is a physical manifestation of it, is something with regenerative qualities. Mellors, perhaps naively, believes that if more people could learn the art of 'connection' in the way that he and Connie have, the world would have fewer problems.

For Connie, her pregnancy represents her full development as a woman. She feels incomplete without affirmation of her femininity, but more than this, she feels incomplete without affirmation of her fertility. This is made clear in Chapter Ten, when Connie is looking at the chicks with the mother hen, at the gamekeeper's hut: 'Connie was fascinated. And at the same time, never had she felt so acutely the agony of her own female forlornness. It was becoming unbearable.' (114) Connie's need to become pregnant is also made clear in the way that Lawrence repeatedly describes her sexual longing in terms of her reproductive organs rather than sexual organs, for example, 'the warmth ran through her womb' (265). Sex, in this adultery novel, is fully intertwined with procreation; unlike in many novels of this period, the sex instinct is subject to the maternal instinct, or at least works in unison with it. Lawrence sets Connie against the 'modern' woman, the sort of woman who would prefer to live her life without the inconvenience of motherhood, the sort of woman who would embrace the 'contraceptive age' for the independence it would allow her. One small episode in the novel makes this juxtaposition obvious. Connie is contrasted with Olive Strangeways and Lady Bennerley during a discussion, inspired perhaps by Huxley's *Brave New World*, which Lawrence had seen in manuscript, on the possibility of someday being able to breed babies 'in bottles':

Olive was reading a book about the future, when babies would be bred in bottles and women with be 'immunised.'

‘Jolly good thing too!’ she said. ‘Then a woman can live her own life... the future’s going to have more sense, and a woman needn’t be dragged down by her *functions*—‘

‘Perhaps she’ll float off into space altogether,’ said Dukes.

(74)

While Olive and Lady Bennerley, and even Clifford, laughingly affirm that such a thing might be desirable, Connie is horrified by the coldness and sterility of such a notion, as is Tommy Dukes. Dukes, who frequently acts as Lawrence’s mouthpiece throughout the novel, continues later to criticise this attitude of Olive, and of modernity in general, and convinces Connie that she needs to live more bodily, more fertile:

We’re not men —and the women aren’t women. We’re only cerebrating makeshifts, mechanical and intellectual experiments. —There may even come a civilisation of genuine men and women, instead of our little lot of clever-jacks all at the intelligence-age of seven. It would be even more amazing than wisps of smoke or babies in bottles... Give me the resurrection of the body!

(75)

The focus in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* is on the life of the body, as opposed to the life of the mind. England’s potential regeneration, in Lawrence’s terms, will come from fertility and birth, from the body —not from abstract thought, organised religion or mechanical and industrial achievement. Connie’s ultimate fulfilment as a woman begins with her sexual liberation with Mellors in the gamekeeper’s hut and culminates with her pregnancy, as Lawrence presents her as a great, glowing bundle of potential life, carrying regenerative power.

Parade’s End culminates with a similar vision, in *The Last Post*. Like Connie Chatterley, Valentine Wannop is pregnant, and her pregnancy is significant in its representation of the new age and of the continuation of the Tietjens name and tradition. But it seems also to signify, in Valentine’s mind, a return to a nobler, older England as well. Her thoughts about her child, as being

part of the old England and making way for the new England, resonate with Clifford Chatterley's 'If some of the old England isn't preserved, there'll be no England at all.' As has been shown, for Christopher Tietjens, as well as for Valentine, the poet George Herbert throughout the series of novels represents the 'old England'. The England that Tietjens fights for in the War is the England of George Herbert and his parsonage at Bemerton. The world in which Valentine imagines her unborn child, Chrissie, is the world of George Herbert. In her rambling train of thought Valentine goes over this scenario in *The Last Post*:

Christopher probably believed that there was a Provvy or he would not dream for his little Chrissie a country parsonage.... He proposed, if they ever made any money, to buy a living for him —if possible near Salisbury.... What was the name of the place... a pretty name?... Buy a living where George Herbert had been parson.... [...] Bemerton, then. George Herbert, rector of Bemerton, near Salisbury.... That was what Chrissie was to be like.... [...] England with its pleasant green comeliness would go on breeding George Herberts [...].

(813-4)

Valentine wonders, later, 'whether the time has come for another Herbert of Bemerton,' and concludes that 'Christopher thought it had; he was always right, always right.' (815). If Christopher *is* in fact always right, then his child is meant to be the continuation of the seventeenth century, what he called in the second novel of the saga, *A Man Could Stand Up*, the 'only satisfactory age in England!' (566). Valentine, like Connie Chatterley, is thoroughly empowered by the child that she is carrying within her; as Lawrence has done with Connie, Ford conveys the sense that Valentine possesses a greater capacity for vigorous living in her pregnant, and newly maternal, state than she did previously. Both Connie and Valentine are made more alive by their pregnancies, and the life that is emphasised in them is meant to be reflected in the new life that is possible for post-war England.

The pregnancies in these two novels are important for their similarities, and for the ideas they signify. If one were to select two novels from those examined in the previous pages that

contain the most clear regenerative symbolism, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and *The Last Post*, or *Parade's End*, would be the most obvious choices. The regenerative symbolism is unequivocal, in the manner in which both novels close: an adulterous couple with a chaotic history, facing an unsure future, but with the promise of a new beginning, in the form of an unborn child. Lawrence, of course, stated that 'If England is to be regenerated [...] then it will be by the arising of a new blood-contact, a new touch, and a new marriage.'²⁰⁶ Connie and Mellors, like Christopher and Valentine, achieve that 'blood-contact', and pass it on, in the form of their illegitimate children.

Children and childlessness: distinct visions of hope and despair

It is, of course, the absence of children in many of these novels that is most striking. If the treatment of children is to be a point of reference, by which to measure the 'regenerative potential' within the different novels discussed here, certainly those novels which do not portray children or which portray children pessimistically contain less such potential. But this is not necessarily the case, as each novel examined in this study has dealt with the subject of adultery alongside the theme of regeneration in a different way. Those less-obviously regenerative novels, such as *The Good Soldier*, *A Handful of Dust*, *Brideshead Revisited*, *The Heart of the Matter* and *The End of the Affair*, have been proven to concern themselves with the idea of regeneration in less direct and apparent ways than the other novels, while dealing with the subject of adultery in much depth. *Parade's End*, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and *Sword of Honour* all employ obvious symbols to map out the cycle of regeneration: war, death, love, pregnancy, children. The other novels, by contrast, approach the matter more subtly. It is worth looking again at each novel individually and ascertaining how each, first of all, treats the subject of children, and, second, how this treatment, or lack of treatment, works alongside the novel's treatment of adultery and overall scheme of regeneration.

²⁰⁶A Propos of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, p 328.

The Good Soldier is essentially a prelude to the cycle of regeneration that is clearly completed in *Parade's End*, and, as established in the first chapter of this thesis, is not so much about regeneration itself as it is about the *need for regeneration*. The fact that children play practically no part in this novel, and that both marriages at the centre of the novel's crisis are childless, attests to this. The world of *The Good Soldier* is a sterile world; the relationships in the novel are equally sterile. There are only two notable references to children in the novel. First, Dowell's commentary on why the Ashburnhams have no children: 'I don't know why they never had any children—not that I really believe children would have made any difference.' (136). He goes on to outline the debate between Edward and Leonora on the religious education that their possible children would receive, Leonora being adamant that any children would be raised as Roman Catholics, Edward being equally insistent that any *boys* would be raised Anglican. This passing reference to the importance placed on inherited belief by both Ashburnhams is relatively insignificant, but reinforces the traditional notion of children as being representative of not only family tradition, but also—particularly in the case of male children—of a patriarchal and patriotic tradition, in which the male heads of the family must adhere to the national faith.

The second reference to children is at the end of the novel, when we learn that Leonora has remarried, and is expecting a child, who will, of course, be brought up a Catholic. Dowell's comments here are typical of the cynicism that colours the tone of the narrative towards its close:

The heroine—the perfectly normal, virtuous, and slightly deceitful heroine—has become the happy wife of a perfectly normal, virtuous and slightly deceitful husband. She will shortly become a mother of a perfectly normal, virtuous and slightly deceitful son or daughter. A happy ending, that is what it works out at.

(225-6)

Far from regarding this child as a symbol of positive regeneration, Dowell instead regards it as a mere continuation of the tradition of deceit that caused the death of his own wife and of Ashburnham, and caused the madness of the girl, Nancy. Ford's authorial voice is hard to locate

here, as it is throughout the novel. Dowell's pessimism, engendered by the course of events that his narrative relates, indicates that this world is one that badly needs regeneration. While it is difficult for the reader to judge objectively whether Leonora and her new family are in fact just a repetition of the deceit that has gone before, it is clear that Dowell does not expect any kind of regenerative effects from Leonora's new life. Ford's use of children as negative imagery in this novel may very well stem from his personal experience with his own children —being unable to see his daughters and living most of his life without his children near him. However, the negative attitude towards the future that Ford, through Dowell, presents is one that he is able to overturn, and respond to, in *Parade's End*; the absence of positive child-based symbolism in *The Good Soldier* is as significant as its presence in the later novels.

Waugh's *A Handful of Dust* presents us with perhaps the most chilling treatment of a child, and the way the situation is presented gels perfectly with the overall picture that Waugh is painting, of an increasingly sterile and barbaric modern England. John Andrew is the child of Tony and Brenda and is the most warm and likeable character in the whole of the novel —Naomi Segal calls him 'the only appealing figure of the text'.²⁰⁷ Waugh uses John Andrew to draw attention to the adulterous mother's offences —not in the subtle, probing manner of Tolstoy or Flaubert, but in a harsh and abrupt way, highlighting not just Brenda's offences, but also her total callousness. If we divide the novels examined in this study into two groups —those in which adultery functions as a means towards regeneration, and those in which adultery is presented as emblematic of the *need* for regeneration— *A Handful of Dust* falls easily into the latter category. Waugh's depiction of Brenda's infidelity is indicative of the demise of not only the Last family, but the downfall of 'civilised' England as well. The portrayal of John Andrew's death, and Brenda's reaction to it, serves to underline this further. Waugh's choice in giving the same name to Brenda's lover as to her son is undeniably intentional. Without this potential for the confusion of names, the central crisis of the novel would not be able to unfold as it does. It is Brenda's momentary misunderstanding,

²⁰⁷ *The Adulteress's Child: Authorship and Desire in the Nineteenth-Century Novel*, Cambridge: Polity Press 1992, p 111.

fearing that John Beaver is dead and not even thinking of John Andrew, that makes the reader keenly aware of the extent of Brenda's moral, and maternal, disintegration. This 'scene of her damnation is a black comedy of misunderstanding'.²⁰⁸ Although fond of her son, Brenda is ultimately presented as unmaternal, more grieved at the thought of losing her shallow lover than of losing her only son. The presence of a child in this adultery narrative is heavily significant, and the removal of the child from the narrative equally so. The elimination of John Andrew from the novel signifies further the withdrawal of civilisation from Hetton, as John Andrew (despite his crass figures of speech) is clearly a representative of all that is good about 'civilised' England. Far from drawing Brenda back to Tony and her home, John Andrew's death severs the marital relationship for good.

The only other children that are mentioned in *A Handful of Dust* are the children of the poor Lasts who eventually inherit, and care for, Hetton, the two sons of the seemingly unmaternal Mrs Rattery and the wildly eccentric Winnie, daughter of Millie the dancer who is Tony's partner in crime in the hotel bill divorce fracas. Winnie, the child of a single mother and undoubtedly born out of wedlock, can be contrasted with John Andrew in her innocence and forthrightness. Winnie appears in the novel after John Andrew has been killed, so the comparisons are obvious. But Winnie's situation is as bleak as John Andrew's, despite the fact that she has little fear of being kicked in the head during a hunting meet. A rough sketch is given of Millie's background, with suggestions of sexual abuse and a clear indication of a difficult passage into adulthood; there is every reason to believe that Winnie's future will be equally difficult, as Waugh briefly presents the reader with a brief commentary on this seedier side of 1930s London life. The reader gets the impression that the poverty and desperation of Winnie's situation, as well as Millie's, is yet another indication of England's need for regeneration.

Interestingly, when Waugh was asked to rewrite the novel's ending, he chose to have Tony return from South America, be reunited with Brenda and, eventually, be expecting another child. This much less problematic ending would seem to suggest that by continuing the family line, all

²⁰⁸ Ibid. p 100.

would be well. But this is not the case, of course, as the alternative ending closes with Tony keeping Brenda's London flat, unbeknownst to her, presumably for adulterous purposes of his own. Rather than Brenda's pregnancy indicating hope for a regenerated, or revitalised, Hetton, it only creates a more heightened sense of stasis. In this version, Tony, rather than being beaten by the barbarians and leaving his poor relations to take up the struggle, seems to take the line 'if you can't beat 'em, join 'em'. The alternative ending, despite Brenda's pregnancy, is more pessimistic than the dismal, original ending. As in *The Good Soldier*, the alternative ending of *A Handful of Dust* hints that it requires more than a pregnancy to regenerate a deteriorating civilisation. The original, and accepted, ending of *A Handful of Dust* is more satisfying, even in its morbidity, as it hints at the potential for regeneration in its presentation of the 'poor relations' who take over Hetton after Tony's presumed death. The family line is continued, albeit indirectly, and the famous silver foxes are being bred once again; without Brenda and her smart ultra-modern set, there is some hope for a renewal of civilisation, even in the absence of Tony.

In *Brideshead Revisited*, Waugh takes up similar themes to those dealt with in *A Handful of Dust*: infidelity, sterility, civilisation at war with modern barbarism. In this case, however, the adultery between Julia and Charles can be construed as having regenerative potential, as it leads directly to Julia's return to her faith, and Charles's discovery of faith—despite the fact that the relationship has to end in order for this spiritual regeneration to be attained. There is little mention of children in the novel. Charles has two children, towards whom he seems relatively indifferent. Julia had a daughter from her marriage to Rex, but she died at birth. Julia herself regards the death of her daughter as being symbolic of her spiritual sterility, indicative of her gradual decay. Here the contradicting images of birth and death are compounded; rather than Julia's pregnancy bringing forth new life and hope for the future, it brings forth death and is a symbol of Julia's own sense of moral, or spiritual, hopelessness. Many aspects of this novel are perplexing, but few more so than Waugh's use of Julia and Charles's relationship to lead them both towards salvation, in the Christian sense, using it to demonstrate the influence of the Flyte family on Charles's spiritual development, yet at

the same time making it quite clear that the relationship is wrong —cutting Julia and Charles off from one another at the end of the novel. Julia's growing awareness that her relationship with Charles is preventing them both from attaining moral or spiritual health is made clear when Bridey makes an unpleasant remark about their relationship over the dinner table. The ensuing 'appalling scene', as Julia afterwards calls it, demonstrates how she links her sins with the death of her child, the death of her mother, and the death of Christ as well. The guilt of the traditional adulteress is here coupled with a slightly melodramatic exploration of eschatological themes:

Living in sin, with sin, by sin, every hour, every day, year in, year out. [...] Past and future; the years when I was trying to be good wife; [...] when I was trying to bear his child, torn in pieces by something already dead. [...] Mummy carrying my sin with her to church, bowed under it and the black lace veil. [...] Mummy dying with my sin eating at her, more cruelly than her own deadly illness.

Mummy dying with it; Christ dying with it, nailed hand and foot. [...] Nameless and dead, like the baby they wrapped up and took away before I had seen her.

(287-8)

Julia even suggests that her sin —whether it is her non-Catholic marriage to Rex, her rejection of her faith or her affair with Charles— replaces the role of a child in her life, she even contrasts her 'strong' little sin with her weak, dead baby:

Always the same, like an idiot child carefully nursed, guarded from the world. 'Poor Julia,' they say, 'she can't go out. She's got to take care of her little sin. A pity it ever lived,' they say, 'but it's so strong. Children like that always are. Julia's so good to her little, mad sin.'

(287)

Brideshead Revisited does not use children to represent the hope of Britain, using rather more explicitly religious symbolism, such as the light burning before the tabernacle in the chapel at Brideshead. Charles and Julia are redeemed not through being fruitful and multiplying —as are Mellors and Connie, and Tietjens and Valentine— but through renouncing love of each other for a

greater love, of God. The absence of children here does not render the novel less 'regenerative'; it simply makes way for the emphasis to be placed on distinctly religious symbolism.

The two Greene novels that have been discussed here contain fewer references to children than any of the works by other novelists, and will be touched on only briefly here. This is not to suggest that Greene as a novelist does not use children as signifiers of hope in his fiction; he clearly does this with the children in his 1940 novel *The Power and the Glory*, where the theme of regeneration is linked to the role of children, and the role of a bastard child at that. But the adultery being explored in *The Heart of the Matter* and, especially, *The End of the Affair*, is very much adult-centred adultery. And the regeneration that is being worked towards in each novel is an intensely personal spiritual regeneration. Both of these novels contain references to children, however, or contain episodes where the protagonist has an encounter with a child, which deeply affects him or her.

There are three such instances in *The Heart of the Matter*, which do not so much prove that Greene is using children as symbols of regeneration in this context, as simply demonstrate that the child-parent dynamic is in fact at work in this novel. The first instance is in the revelation that Scobie and his wife Louise had a daughter who died in England. The loss of their daughter is referred to, vaguely, at various points in the narrative and is not addressed fully until Scobie tells Helen how it happened, and how he found out about it, in the middle of the novel. The loss of their daughter did not so much weaken Scobie and Louise's marriage as it made Scobie less and less responsive to loving those with whom he came in contact, Louise included. Pity, as we have seen, is Scobie's greatest weakness, and his capacity for pity overwhelmed his capacity for love. The second instance is in Scobie's encounter with the girl in the shipwreck, whom he watches die, all the while asking God to 'take away my peace forever, but give her peace.' (125). The third instance is Scobie's relationship with his servant boy, Ali. Ali's death, at the very end of the novel, reveals that Scobie is capable of emotion other than pity; Louise may have claimed that Scobie did not love anyone, other than himself, but when he finds Ali dead he says 'I loved him' (248). It is at this point

in the novel that Scobie begins to believe he has become evil, in his inability to feel real pain, and it is after this incident that he decides to kill himself. Greene uses children throughout this novel to reveal a softer side, and even a more humorous side (such as the reading of the story of ‘the Bishop and the Bantus’ to the boy in hospital) to Scobie’s nature. Children are not necessarily tools in Scobie’s futile search for regeneration, but markers along the way.

The End of the Affair features only one child, and he is the child neither of Sarah and Henry nor of Bendrix, but of Mr Parkis, the private detective. Lancelot Parkis is a significant character, not only because he highlights a potentially maternal instinct in Sarah, but more so because he forms the centre of the ‘miracle’ that takes place after Sarah’s death —believing that his illness was cured by Sarah, having been given one of her childhood books. Lance is therefore a very strong link in the regenerative cycle that the book is working towards as he, along with Mr Smythe with his disappearing birthmark, proves Sarah’s alleged sanctity, and likewise proves her regeneration. As in *Brideshead Revisited*, regeneration can only begin once the affair is over, and in Sarah’s case, once the adulteress is dead. Bendrix’s regeneration is still in question, balanced on whether or not he accepts Sarah’s sanctity, accepts the so-called miracle, and ultimately accepts Sarah’s God.

Bastards and the idea of the ‘illegitimate’: reversing the roles

Why bastard? Wherefore base?
 When my dimensions are as well compact,
 My mind as generous, and my shape as true,
 As honest madam’s issue? Why brand they us
 With base? With baseness? Bastardy? Base? Base?
 ... I grow, I prosper.
 Now, gods, stand up for bastards.
King Lear

One finds a certain amount of this thing nowadays in all classes.
 Husbands abroad in the army or prisoners of war; that sort of thing.
 Conventions are not as strict as they used to be —there’s not the same
 stigma attached to bastardy.
 Waugh, *Unconditional Surrender*

The role of the bastard child in a number of these novels is a curious one. There is a long literary tradition of the portrayal of bastards, and the way in which illegitimate children are portrayed in these selected twentieth-century fictions, as I have already suggested, turns this tradition on its head. Far from possessing salvific qualities, as I will suggest that these illegitimate offspring do, the traditional 'bastard' in literature is tantamount to 'villain'. Even before the Renaissance and its assortment of villainous stage bastards (think of *Lear's* Edmund, Don John in *Much Ado About Nothing* and Spurio in *The Revenger's Tragedy*), the bastard was an established figure, in reality and fiction alike, whose primary qualities were loneliness and corruption. In Michael Neill's work on the origins of the literary bastard, he states that the bastard has been

Habitually figured as a creature who reveals the 'unnaturalness' of his begetting by the monstrous unkindness of his nature. An 'out of joint' member of a hybrid genus, he is defined as neither one thing nor the other. [...] Thus when Spurio in *The Revenger's Tragedy* proclaims that 'adultery is my nature' he appeals to a whole set of cultural assumptions that made of the bastard a distinct sub-species amongst the swarm of attractive villains who populate late Elizabethan and Jacobean drama.²⁰⁹

John Danby similarly asserts that the bastard is 'the Elizabethan equivalent of "outsider". [...] He is outside Society, he is outside Nature, he is outside Reason.'²¹⁰ The, quite literally, adulterated character of the bastard rendered him untrustworthy, dangerous, subversive and, inevitably, marginalised.

Scripture, of course, and the Church, took as bleak a view of bastardy as it did of adultery, and can be held responsible for most of the negative opinions about illegitimacy throughout history and literature. The Book of Wisdom declares that

bastard slips shall not take deep root, nor any fast foundation and [...] through the force of winds they shall be rooted out. For the branches not being perfect,

²⁰⁹ Michael Neill, "'In Everything Illegitimate': Imagining the Bastard in Renaissance Drama', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, vol 23, 1993, pp 272-3.

²¹⁰ John F. Danby, *Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature*, London: Faber and Faber, 1961, p 44.

shall be broken, and their fruits shall be unprofitable, and sour to eat, and fit for nothing. For the children that are born of unlawful beds, are witnesses of wickedness against their parents in their trial.

(4:3-6)

This establishes the illegitimate child as an embodiment of the sin of its parents, and therefore as tainted as the very act that created it. This view of the bastard is one that held much resonance in the adultery novels of the nineteenth century, particularly in *The Scarlet Letter*, where one has to ask if the scarlet ‘A’ embroidered on Hester’s dress is not seen as a secondary symbol of her adultery, her daughter Pearl being seen as the primary one. The Puritans of Hawthorne’s narrative would have regarded illegitimacy in much the same way as the sixteenth-century jurist John Fortescue regarded it, that a bastard was not just the ‘chylde of synners’ but the ‘chylde of synne’ itself, believing that nature ‘mark[ed] the naturall or bastard children as it were with a certain prive mark in their soules’.²¹¹ As Neill summarises Fortescue’s conclusions: “‘the steine of bastardy’ [...] was no mere heraldic metaphor, but a literal brand of infamy’.²¹² That it is Dimmesdale who literally becomes branded with the mark of his sin is telling; it seems to free Pearl from any stigma that might have been hitherto attached to her. Hawthorne, in his own way, is overturning the principles that applied to illegitimate children by making it clear that Pearl is ultimately untainted by the ‘sin’ of her parentage, allowing her to live a free and happy life.

Even in the twentieth century, a bastard —whether in fiction or in fact— is regarded as something of a social threat. It is true, as the doctor in Waugh’s *Unconditional Surrender* tells Virginia, that bastardy does not carry the same stigma as it used to, but all the same, ‘bastard’ remains a fully negative signifier, partially due to the long tradition of distrust towards anything ‘illegitimate’. Few of today’s worries about bastardy are related to issues of property, family names and the overthrowing of monarchies, but rather relate to the worries about ‘single mothers’, an attitude that some sociologists describe as a ‘recurrent moral panic about the social implications of

²¹¹ John Fortescue, *A Learned Commendation of the Politique Lawes of England*, 1567, cited in Neill, p 276.

²¹² Neill, p 276.

sexual nonconformity'.²¹³ This 'moral panic' may well have been a motivation in the hostility towards illegitimacy that has been prevalent in society since the beginnings of written history. The stigma attached to bastardy does not go away as society becomes more permissive—it simply changes direction.

What is peculiar about the portrayals of bastardy in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, *Parade's End* and Waugh's *Sword of Honour* is that they turn illegitimacy into a positive signifier, and simultaneously, attach to adultery constructive, rather than destructive, properties. In these portrayals, as also in Forster's *Howards End* as well as Greene's *The Power and the Glory*, the illegitimate child is made symbolic of the future for the next generation, and the 'stain of bastardy' becomes instead a mark of hope. All of the children portrayed in these novels should be social misfits—indeed, Forster's novel makes it clear how polite society at the time would have regarded Helen's illegitimate child, setting up the broad-mindedness of the Schlegels against the narrowness and judgmental hypocrisy of the Wilcoxes. Yet the social misfit—itself the product of a socially, and religiously, unacceptable union—signifies positive change, forward movement. The endings of these three novels in particular are heavily pregnant—pregnant with regenerative potential, just as are the adulterous mothers-to-be.

We are not given the opportunity to see the final outcome of the progress towards regeneration in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, *The Last Post* or *Sword of Honour*, just as the author does not follow the development of the children conceived in these novels. As the novelists studied here present it, it is the potential for, and movement towards, regeneration that is of more fictional interest than the actual outcome. For Ford, Lawrence, Waugh and Greene, what is of fictional interest are the revitalisation of the traditions of 'old England', the rediscovery of the virtues of George Herbert, the movement towards Christian conversion, the discovery of what it means to love—these are the focal points of the novels analysed in this study. All of these modes of connection,

²¹³ Andrew Blaikie, 'Motivation and Motherhood: past and present attributions in the reconstruction of illegitimacy', *Sociological Review*, vol 43, no 4, 1995, p 641.

to borrow one of Forster's favourite terms, are leading to regeneration, whether limited to a personal, spiritual level, or extending to a national level. In the most emphatically optimistic of these novels, adultery and its offspring are established as metaphors for these instances of regeneration, thereby overturning the traditional notion of adultery leading to social disintegration. What is unique about these novelists is their emphasis on the process, not on the outcome. Set against the anxiety and uncertainty of their pre-war, wartime and post-war generations, their focus on the potential for regeneration in the darkest and most difficult of situations is perennially resonant and increasingly relevant.

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