A PARTICULAR VIEW: ASPECTS OF FORM IN THE NOVELS OF HENRY GREEN

ANNE STEWART STAVELEY

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IN THE NOVELS OF HENRY GREEN

By

Anne Stewart Staveley, B.A. (Hons.), Dip. Ed.

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ABSTRACT

It is customary to talk of a novelist's development as though man's aesthetic powers grew naturally alongside his physical. As it is easy to arrange a man's life into the tidy compartments of youth, maturity and old age, it is tempting to assign the aesthetic processes to the similar categories of 'early, middle and late'. This allows for an accompanying critical judgement that middle is better than early and that late is best of all.

The subject of this study, Henry Green, is a novelist who can not be confined by this kind of critical labelling. His nine novels each evince a consistency of skill and vision that is as finely controlled in his first novel, Blindness, as in his final one, Doting. This is not to say that his novels all conform to the same pattern. Indeed, there is little similarity among his novels, either in characterization or form. Given the distinct nature of each novel it is remarkable that there is such a consistency in his artistic accomplishment.

This study is an attempt to show how each of Green's novels are conscious and disciplined works that, when read closely, present a particular view of life. In a study of the various forms that a writer uses there is always the danger that "La passion frénètique de l'art est un chancre qui dévore le reste"[1] and it is hoped that an investigation of Henry Green's artistic skills will not disavow the compassionate sensibility that is also at work in his novels.

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[1] Baudelaire, L'Art Romantique, (Paris: Louis Conard, 1923), p. 97.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It was Macaulay who said, "Nothing is so useless as a general maxim" but as this is the place for general maxims I hope I will be forgiven for making one. Without the introduction to Henry Green's work and the encouragement and scholarly advice that was provided me by Mr. D. D. Stuart this thesis would not have been written. So I would like to thank him, most sincerely.

INTRODUCTION

Perhaps it is inappropriate to begin a serious study of a writer's work with an apparently flippant conversation from an imaginary dinner party. Yet when the study is one of the writer, Henry Vincent Yorke, who is better known by his pseudonym, Henry Green, a passage that, in a few lines, mocks the pretentious world which Green found so comic and mentions the enigmatic nature of Green's personality and style, may serve as a useful opening.

> Mrs. Mandible was so very literary. She belonged to three different book clubs, in addition to being Chairman of the book department of the Woman's Civic Club. What was that she was saying to Harry now?
>
> "What do you think of Henry Green, Mr. Sterling?"
>
> "I'm afraid I don't know him," said Harry. "What outfit's he with?"
>
> "Of course you don't know him. Nobody does. He's that Pseudonymous English writer nobody knows, the one who has pictures taken of the back of his head."
>
> "Why?" asked Harry. "Is there something special about the back of his head?"
>
> "No, no. How could he stay anonymous if his face showed? And it's ever so much better publicity to be shy about publicity. Everybody knows that. Remember Greta Garbo? I've just finished his new novel."
>
> "What's it called?"
>
> "Nothing."
>
> "You mean it hasn't got a title? A book without a name by an anonymous writer really would be something."
>
> "No, its name is Nothing. Green always uses queer names, Beginning, Concluding, Loving--names like that."

> "What's it about?"
>
> "Well, it isn't really about anything, Mr. Sterling, just some people in London talking. Green is supposed to be ever so subtle and original and a marvelous stylist. Lots of critics think he's brilliant. The adjectives they use about him! You'd think he was Swift and Shelley and Virginia Woolf combined. But I don't. Would you like to know what it's like?"
>
> If Harry hadn't caught his wife's frantic signal he would have said, "God, no!" What he did say was: "Yes, I ought to keep more up to date on these things."[1]

Harry Sterling's sensible but awkward questions about the purpose, content and nature of Henry Green's novels cannot be answered by a literary lady over a dinner table. If one merely comments on the originality of his subject matter and the brilliance of his stylistics and fails to come to grips with the nature of his art, one is on a par with Mrs. Mandible. To summarize Green's work by using adjectives like Mrs. Mandible is fruitless though for some reason Green seems to inspire reviewers and critics to attach adjectives to him. C. P. Snow, a novelist who is widely read and who has set convictions about the art of the novel concedes that Green is admired by other writers and critics, but he, himself, is unimpressed by such eminent praise. Snow accuses Green of "artistic diffidence" and "decay".[2] His style is easily recognizable, according to Snow, for its "childish patter", his "frittered sentences",[3]

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[1] Orville Prescott, In My Opinion: An Inquiry into the Contemporary Novel, (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company Inc., 1942), p. 92.

[2] C. P. Snow, "Books and Writers", The Spectator, September 22, 1952, p. 320.

[3] Ibid.

and his "fiddled commas". Snow's review of Green's work is cursory, as must have been his reading of Green's novels.

Critics, like Snow, who are irritated by the obvious failure of Green to write within a preconceived artistic framework, are bound to be frustrated. Henry Green's world is not the nineteenth century world where characters progress from birth to death in an orderly, chronological movement. Green's world is one which has been affected ineluctably by the knowledge provided man by the scientist Darwin, the psychiatrist Freud, and the philosopher Bergson and Green's perspective on life arises, naturally, out of his personality and experience. He dismisses with characteristic brevity his affluent, privileged upbringing.

> I was born in 1905 in a large house by the banks of the River Severn, in England, and within the sound of the bells from the Abbey Church at Tewkesbury. Some children are sent away to school; I went at six and three-quarters and did not stop till I was twenty-two, by which time I was at Oxford, but the holidays were all fishing. And then there was billiards.
>
> I was sent at twelve and a half to Eton and almost at once became what was then called an aesthete, that is a boy who consciously dressed to shock. I stayed that way at Oxford. From Oxford I went into the family business, an engineering works in the Midlands, with its iron and brass foundries and machine shops. After working through from the bottom I eventually came to the top where for the time being I remain, married, living in London, with one son.[4]

Thus the facts of his life are established but given no prominence. This is characteristic of a man whose novels are not concerned with

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[4] Terry Southern, "The Art of Fiction XXII: Henry Green", Paris Review, Summer, 1958, pp. 61 - 62.

factual accounts of life. Characteristic also is Green's description of his youthful pretensions, and his reticence about his publications. His novels, by date of publication are: Blindness (1926), Living (1929), Party-Going (1939), Pack My Bag (1940), Caught (1943), Loving (1945), Back (1946), Concluding (1948), Nothing (1950), and Doting (1952). These novels span three decades and despite the unity suggested by their succinct, gerundive titles, they are various in form and in subject matter. All, except the first, have gone through several impressions at the Hogarth Press in London and the Viking Press in New York, a sure indication of their steady appeal. John Lehmann in a concise foreword to a series of articles and an interview with Henry Green for the readers of London Magazine, thought that though Green was

> too fastidious, too innovating a novelist to enjoy the popular triumphs of, say Mr. Grahame Greene, he has, in spite of the success of his books with both critics and a sophisticated international public, been obliged to find some compromise between writing and bread-and-butter getting.[5]

Lehmann thought that Green's literary energies might have been debilitated by his business career, as managing director of his family engineering firm; whereas Green, himself, found the everyday experiences in this world stimulated his creative powers "more than the half-baked talk about novels people who fancy themselves put over."[6] He concluded a B.B.C. talk on how this type of communication to his readers is a

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[5] John Lehmann, "Foreword", London Magazine, April, 1959, pp. 7 - 9.

[6] Henry Green, Pack My Bag, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1952), p. 239.

communication without speech by using a pragmatic analogy for this kind of esoteric approach.

> I have tried to show that the purpose of the novelist is to create, in the mind of the reader, life which is not, and which is non-representational [sic]. This has nothing to do with the theme of this work. We are all individuals and each writer has something of his own to communicate. It is with communication that I have been dealing here. We have inherited the greatest orchestra, the English language, to conduct. The means are there; things are going on in life all the time around us. What I have tried to do here is to show one means of creating life by communication in the hopes that this may be of interest to the reading public, rather as if a mechanic were to open the door of his workshop.[7]

This analogy was appropriate as all of Green's novels, except the first, Blindness, which was begun at Eton and finished while he was at Oxford, were written while he was working in the family business, H. Pontifex and Sons Ltd. that manufactured plant equipment for the food and drink trade. This fundamental, if rather prosaic industry, seemed hardly the place to find a well-respected artist. Until his retirement in 1959, Green's mornings and afternoons were consumed with working in and then managing the industry in Birmingham and eventually directing its head offices in London. But, at lunch-time, and after supper "much as a Bluebeard reaches into a drawer for dark spectacles and a wig".[8] Henry Green the writer worked "with his stell-nibbed pen wound round and

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[7] Henry Green, "A Novelist to his Readers", The Listener, November 9, 1950, p. 506.

[8] Nigel Dennis, "The Double Life of Henry Green", Life, August 4, 1952, p. 84.

round with surgical tape to make it easier to the grip"[9] to fulfill his daily quota of 1,000 words. So the attitudes of the practical engineer, who needed efficient tools and quotas still prevailed but the skills and perceptions were those of the artist. In this way Henry Yorke, the successful business man and one-time chairman of the British Chemical Plant Manufacturers Association, found time to write his novels. This exacting discipline is evident in his novels that are as neatly tooled as any piece of precision engineering. Each novel's form is uniquely fashioned for its specific purpose. In this way it has its own vitality, a quality Green saw as essential to a work of art, and its individuality.

> It's like having a baby, but in print. If it's really good, you can't stop its living. Indeed once the thing is printed, you simply cannot strangle it, as you could a child, by putting your hands round its little wet neck.[10]

To ensure the separateness of each creation, Green claimed that he forgot everything that he had read as soon as it was finished, including his own work. In addition a writer could not, with integrity, reproduce his work in the same form because the writer's

> style is himself, and we are all of us changing every day--developing, we hope! We leave our marks behind us like a snail.[11]

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[9] Ibid.

[10] Terry Southern, "The Art of Fiction XXII: Henry Green", Paris Review, Summer, 1958, p. 68.

[11] Ibid., p. 71.

Although the primary interest of this study is with Green's major works, his novels, his shorter pieces of writing deserve mention.[12] Most of these were published in the 1940's and 1950's and consist of short sketches of personal reminiscence together with several reviews and a series of B.B.C. talks published in The Listener. Green has said that he writes "for about six people (including myself) whom I respect and for no one else"[13] and that is probably why throughout his life he was self-critical about the process of his writing. His B.B.C. talks about how he, as a novelist, tries to communicate with his readers through language in print were published in the 1950's, but his experimentation with prose pre-dates these statements by several years.

In his autobiography Pack My Bag[14] he submits to a little exercise in critical analysis of three passages that were written over a period of five years while he was a young man. This first piece was written under the fanciful pseudonym of Henry Michaelis and was a comment on a photograph of himself:

> I flatter myself that it is not in the least like me: how could it be what with the irritation at the photographer and the idiocy of being photographed. I resolutely posed myself and looked out with an easily recognizable defiance at the paste board I

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[12] A complete list of these pieces can be found in the Bibliography attached to this study.

[13] Alan Ross, "Green with Envy: Critical Reflections and an Interview", London Magazine, April, 1959, p. 23.

[14] Henry Green, Pack My Bag, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1952).

> was to mesmerize. There is anger and
> resignation in that futile flabby sneer
> of the lips, there is a terrible lankness,
> toughness almost in the figure. Altogether
> a horrible photograph.[15]

This "yell of the self" was followed five years later by one piece more consciously literary,

BARQUE

> I sail on the sea by wind which is in the sky
> and I am the most beautiful thing on the sea.
> Stiffly I go, am borne upon the waters, and
> when I am near land the white gulls wheel then
> settle in the plenty of my rigging.
>
> When I am near land on that land the people
> will come out from houses and the airman look
> down from the sky at my white sails on the
> silver sea. Or, through the great waste,
> swiftly softly straining, the birds will turn
> to me also then or, when are no more birds,
> then also I am most beautiful thing that is on
> the sea, alone, alone, my sails leaping full
> with the wind which is in sky I go stiffly, I
> am most beautiful of all.[16]

than the next.

> They have gone to bed too early, there is no
> courtesy now in guests. For as the woman may
> lie awake after the man has finished, so may
> we be sent to our rooms by the empty chairs.
> Surely mind, animated by the unaccustomed flow
> of talk, may also have its consummation. Then
> when we feel there is no more to be said, then
> we may go and lie on our beds at ease. We have
> functioned. But tonight and on such nights as
> these, I am an unsatisfied lover.[17]

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[15] Ibid., p. 164.

[16] Ibid., p. 164.

[17] Ibid., p. 165.

The fluency with which he explores his moods and feelings is evident, so is the mature ease with which he can mock himself. Already he is becoming more detached from his subject matter, attempting the objectivity that is necessary to the artist.

Further on, he can even be objectively critical about his first novel, recognizing a piece which is "not a bad piece of writing",[18]

> He was alone for the moment. Nan had left him to take a cup of tea. The nurse was taking the daily walk that was necessary to her trade union health, and Mrs. Haye had gone up to the village to console Mrs. Trench whose week-old baby was dying. Herbert leaning on the sill of the kitchen window, was making noises at Mrs. Lane while she toyed with a chopper, just out of his reach. Weston was lost in wonder, love and praise before the artichokes, he has a camera in his pocket and had taken a record of their splendour. Twenty years on and he would be showing it to his grandchildren, to prove how things did grow in the old days. Twenty years ago Pinch had seen better. Harry was hissing over a sporting paper; Doris in an attic was letting down her hair, she was about to plait the two soft pigtails. Jenny, the laundry cat, was very near the sparrow now, by the bramble in the left-hand corner of the drying-ground.[19]

but rejecting a piece which was much worse.

> The air began to get rid of the heaviness, and so became fresher as the dew soaked the grass. A blackbird thought aloud of bed, and was followed by another and yet another. The sun was flooding the sky in waves of colour while he grew redder and redder in the west, the trees were a red gold too where he caught them. The sky was enjoying herself after the boredom of

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[18] Ibid., p. 191.

[19] Ibid., p. 192.

> being blue all day. She was putting on and rejecting yellow for gold, gold for red, then red for deeper reds, while the blue that lay overhead was green.[20]

This capacity for stringent self-criticism may make, as some critics think, his style too idiosyncratic[21] but it also results in each novel having the inherent unity of manner and vision that marks him off as an individual novelist. Despite the fact that in his private life Green practices "a nervous temperamental detachment from art,"[22] Green has made the artistic statement that in each novel he attempts to create real life not by explaining it but by using prose that will heighten or extend incidents and situations in life so that each novel has a created life of its own and becomes an "image in absolute time".[23] The novel draws its vitality from the author's observations of real life but it must contain its own animation. In his case history of the death of an unfinished novel "Mood" Green makes this point.

> But the lack of animation, which is probably the first sign of dissolution, the seeds of death there is in every work of art and which existed, to me so strongly in this unfinishable novel, even while it was being written, that, in spite of encouragement I couldn't begin to

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[20] Ibid., p. 192.

[21] Max Cosman, "Essentially a Poet: The Elusive Henry Green", The Commonweal, September 9, 1960, p. 474.

[22] Alan Ross, "Green, with Envy: Critical Reflections and An Interview", London Magazine, April, 1959, p. 18.

[23] Michel Vinaver, "Essai sur un roman", Lettres Nouvelles, June/July, 1953,

> finish it, occurs most strongly in the final paragraph, that is the last point I got to and beyond which I could not go.[24]

Further on in his post-mortem he locates the cause of death.

> The manuscript of Mood ends, forever here. As I remember it the love I had for the original of Constance died a week or so before those last words were written. And that, perhaps, is the whole explanation.[25]

The success of those finished novels may be due to the organic unity that results from the union of manner and vision that characterizes Green's writing. It has often been remarked that his style is unmistakable, but it is not so frequently noticed that the style is consciously directed by the writer's view of life. Eudora Welty senses the inner harmony of each novel by Green, a harmony that is not dependent on or echoed in other novels by him.

> His novels so far are dissimilar enough to suggest that their whole, whenever he chooses to draw this line, which one hopes is a time out of sight, will have a meaning then to be looked at for the whole; yet it has always seemed that his whole meaning expressed will be more than the sum of its parts. These eight together make it plain that his focus, instantaneously seen to be sharp and clear, is also wide and clear; they show us the sweep of his sympathies and the drive and control of his feelings, and we know that there has been no stopping of him technically. His grasp of imaginative construction alone is altogether astonishing. He has not shown a sign of repeating himself, unless this could be said in some respects of Nothing and Doting, and

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[24] Henry Green, "An Unfinished Novel", London Magazine, April, 1959, p. 17.

[25] Ibid., p. 17.

> it was said; even so the repeat in itself is remarkable, as if Daniel had got out of the lions' den twice in a row.[26]

It is the purpose of this study to investigate the organic harmony of each of Green's novels, through a study of the various prose techniques that he uses to present his particular vision of life.

Other critics have commented on the harmony between Green's view and his techniques, but they have not closely analysed the connecting ties within each novel. In a brief but seminal paragraph, Miss Welty, compares the manner and vision of the work of Henry Green to that of William Faulkner.

> Each of these born romantic writers has back of an intensely personal and complex style an intimate, firm and uninhibiting knowledge of the complicated social structure he is part of and writes in, and an unquestioned fidelity to it, the ear for its speech, the eye for its landscape. Each takes over by poetic means his tract of the physical world. Each reflects on the fate of individual man set down very much alive in a dying society. They are not too far apart, perhaps, in their tragic conception of life, or in the unpredictable relationship they variously find and show between the tragic and the horrendous, the poetic and the absurd. Their styles are two living organisms growing in different clays wide apart.[27]

A few paragraphs later her article ends by commending the "excellence, delight and beauty" of Green's novels but there is no analysis of the roots of these qualities. An article by Robert Phelps tantalizingly

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[26] Eudora Welty, "Henry Green, A Novelist of the Imagination", Texas Quarterly, IV (1961), p. 255.

[27] Ibid., pp. 255 - 256.

called "The Vision of Henry Green"[28] only concentrates on two of Green's novels, Party-Going and Concluding. A reference in a footnote is made to Blindness and Living; Loving, Back, Caught, Doting and Nothing receive passing mention. One aspect of Green's vision is investigated.

> Over and over it dramatizes our attempts, largely by speech, to make contact with each other, and the hazard and failure for the most part sustained. Our imperfect apparatus for expressing ourselves--whether in exchanging commonplaces or making love; this, and our equally obstructing incapacity for understanding what is being expressed to us, are at the heart of Green's sense of human experience.[29]

But Green's vision embraces other features of human experience which find no place in this article. Because Green once said that,

> What I should like to read, and what I am trying to write now, is a novel with an absolute minimum of descriptive passages in it, or even of directions to the reader (that may be such as "She said angrily", etc.) and yet the narrative consisting almost entirely of dialogue sufficiently alive to create life in the reader.[30]

Phelps finds the descriptions of the juggler in Doting and the Banquet room in Nothing moving but "illicit". As these passages are not out of place but integral to an understanding of these novels in that they are reflections of Green's ideas contained in these novels, it appears that these novels and Green's statements about his art have not been fully comprehended.

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[28] Robert Phelps, "The Vision of Henry Green", The Hudson Review, V, No. 4. (Winter, 1953), pp. 614 - 620.

[29] Ibid., p. 616.

[30] Ibid., p. 619.

In a study like this it is customary to talk of a writer's development as though the writer's art, like wine or cheese, would naturally improve with age. But this kind of analogy is as inappropriate for Green's work, as indeed it may be for other writers. For if a writer is trying to represent life through the careful execution at different times of different forms the reader may state a preference for one particular pattern, but this should not prejudice his appreciation of the others. One may prefer a Gruyère to a Gouda but one may still recognize the intrinsic interdependence of form and flavour that constitutes the whole object. In the same way, in each of Green's novels because he selects and concentrates upon certain techniques that are necessary to his particular, albeit idiosyncratic, view of life it is possible to see each novel as "sui generis". This is not to say that the ideas, situations and characters in the nine novels are altogether separate, only that the way language is used and arranged and the emphasis that is given to certain of its components results in a finished work that has its own, distinctive character. Given Green's stringent self-criticism of his writing, even as an eleven-year old, it is not surprising to find that each novel is an integrated and final presentation.

It is too uncritical to classify automatically Green's first novel, Blindness, as juvenilia. True the characters are depicted within the bounds of Green's limited experience of that time but this is not to say that they are lacking in dimension. Green also broadens the perspective of the diary technique by deliberately using it to

present the superficial perceptions of a schoolboy who is sensitive to the best and the worst in literature and philosophy but who, through his unselfconsciousness and inexperience, is unable to examine in language the real nature of life around him. Through the suffering caused by the insane accident of his blindness, John Haye is forced to re-create, imaginatively through language the external world so that he can establish himself as part of it. The sounds, colours, textures and forms of that world are expressed in words which connect with the rhythms of that external world as well as with John's inner consciousness. In his own way Green counterpoints interior monologue with exterior dialogue to express the complexity of both human feelings and relationships in order to give life to not only the sensitive, maimed youth but also his mother, servants and friends.

In his second novel Living Green extends his purview to include people of a different class and situation and also alters the focus of his prose. He is able to present reality by juxtaposing scenes which reveal the perspectives of different consciousnesses and by arranging these scenes in groups he is also able to show how these consciousnesses are bound together in time and space. In this way he presents the multi-faceted nature of life and by including certain key descriptions and metaphors he is able to penetrate, on occasion, to the core of that nature. There is a more emphatic use of symbol and metaphor in Party-Going, Green's next novel. This lends more profound tones to his characters and their situations, who are already presented through their own thoughts and conversations. This, together

with pervading mythic and prophetic allusions that arise out of descriptions of the voyagers, their hotel and the station platform makes his style richer and less spare than that of Living and also his intention broader. It is too superficial to read Party-Going as a political polemic. Green's Mayfair clique is bent on pursuing its own pleasures. But then, so too are the "masses" who ostensibly provide with their labour the profits for the wealthy. All are human, and all are concerned with preserving in the face of inescapable mortality their own brand of contentment, whether it be an afternoon's seduction or a cup of tea behind chintz curtains.

The years of the Second World War provided the occasion for Green not only to examine his life up to those years in his autobiography Pack My Bag, but also to examine his work as an artist. Prior to 1939 he had published novels which were unique, for that time, in their form and content. His apparently mundane life style was only a mask for the other world of his novels. With the war-time disruption of the ordinary, everyday world Green had to face situations that were to affect his understanding about life so much that he was forced to search for ways to express, artistically, what he experienced. Caught is the novel that tries to express what was "real about Londo- of 1940" and Back presents more intensively the paranoia of those times but in both novels Green balances personal images with dialogue to explore what was happening. The distinction between the two novels is that in Caught, the central character, Richard Roe, maintains his sanity through the ordering power of these images while Charley Summers in Back is transfixed by the illusory order of his fancies.

Dialogue in Caught is used by Green to show the divorce between the world of private images which were closer to the true nature of events and the world of conversation which only distorted and even threatened that nature. In Back, though, the process is reversed for in this novel the private images only confuse the individual because they prevent him from making contact, by means of dialogue, with a living reality.

Loving which was published about the same time as Caught and Back is radically different. It has more in common with the earlier novel Party-Going and the later one Concluding. Like them it is more allusive and allegorical and like a Medieval morality play the tussle between love and hate is played out until love is finally triumphant. Perhaps Loving was meant as a kind of antidote to the solitary introspection that had dominated Caught, for though Loving is set in a country beyond the range of Hitler's bombs its characters are made admirable by their decision to abandon that neutrality, both politically and emotionally, and choose the redemptive path of action and love. The sense of separateness and dislocation that is presented in Caught through the way Green writes contrasting versions of what is said and what happens can be set against the unity of Loving's structure, a unity which is sustained by scenes that are interconnected by metaphor.

With characteristic versatility Green uses metaphor in Concluding but he uses it for a different purpose. In this allegorical novel metaphors are used to express the patterns of social order that exist within the world of the State Institute so that their true nature is

exposed. Their purpose is more didactic than structural though in their consistency they reinforce the ideas they contain. Having stretched the power of metaphor to its limits in Concluding Green does not abandon it in his final two novels Nothing and Doting but far greater prominence is given to dialogue. Far from this emphasis being an indication of a weakening of Green's control over language, it points instead, to Green's clear understanding of the multitudinous segments of human life and of how, at different times and on different occasions, they coalesce to express variously that life. In the final novels as with the earlier ones, the reader is left on his own, as he is in life, to infer meaning. The metaphors are used more economically perhaps but the prose is as carefully managed in Doting as it was in Living. The two novels have been described as disparate but each is as consciously constructed as the other though the means used are different.

Chapter I

BLINDNESS

Critics of Henry Green's work have experienced some difficulty in obtaining his first novel Blindness. Some, like Robert Weaver unequivocally state their ignorance about this novel.[1] Others, because the publishers have seen fit not to reprint it, accept this judgement, also unequivocally. Robert Ryf introduces his discussion of the novel by saying that it is "now accountably out of print."[2] Both J. Russell and A. Kingsley Weatherhead pay more attention to this first novel: Russell recognizes its value as an essay in the several techniques that Green will use in his later novels. So, for him, Blindness is rather like a young artist's sketchbook. It reveals a trained hand but, also, an immature perception. Russell judges the book more artful than artistic. Weatherhead, in developing his reading that John Haye and Joan Entwhistle are both attempting to find selfhood thinks the novel is flawed by Joan's acquiescence and Haye's easy achievement. But this judgement is made because the characters do not successfully conform to Weatherhead's idea of what is happening in the novel. Perhaps Green has other purposes for his characters.

Other aspects of Blindness are not discussed by commentators, and often those that are, are criticized in isolation and not related to the

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[1] Robert Weaver, "The Novels of Henry Green," The Canadian Forum, 30, No. 360. (January, 1951), pp. 227 - 230.

[2] Robert Ryf, Henry Green, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967).

whole novel. Beckman Cottrell has noted that Blindness

> "falls into almost equal parts of strait forward expository writing, interior monologue, and direct conversation."[3]

Thus the techniques of the novel are apparently neatly divided up, but no close examination has been made to show the connection between the techniques and the several ideas that are operating those techniques. If it is possible to reveal this connection a fuller understanding of the inner structure of the writing, the consistency of the themes and the architecture of the work as a whole may be possible.

When Blindness is read closely it is obvious that Beckman Cottrell's stylistic analysis is too pat. It makes no allowance for the intricate cross-currents of the prose that reveal the nature of the several characters in the novel. Admittedly the novel is divided formally, if a little self-consciously, into three sections labelled "Caterpillar", "Chrysalis" and "Butterfly", each of these sections being sub-divided. The diagram is clear but the detail and vitality is supplied by the variety of prose styles that Green uses. All of these are carefully worked out to reveal the feelings, thoughts and reactions of the individual characters at different stages of his or her life.

The "Caterpillar" phase is subtitled "Laugh," a word which characterizes not only the mood of the opening section but also the attitude of the principal player. Without the brief introductory chapter the novel would have no perspective. To take us within the

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[3] Beckman Cottrell, "Conversation Piece: Four Twentieth Century Dialogue Novelists", Diss. Columbia University, 1956, p. 51.

mind of his character Green uses the well-worn diary technique. John Haye, a pupil at the Public School of Noat, an oblique anagram for Eton, is shown as a sensitive, intelligent boy who is both self-conscious and conceited. The diary form allows the artificial blend of schoolboy jargon and lofty sentiments that is so natural to a youth of his family background and education. The adolescent world of irresponsible pranks and puerile insults, at this stage in the novel, looms larger than the real world of poverty and pain. The outer world is observed but it never invades John's consciousness and so the descriptions are detached and the judgements remote.

Therefore for most of the first section his language is lightly superficial. He "falls in love" with multicoloured ties[4] and a transparent cigarette case.[5] He reports in detail conversations with his fellow pupils who are critical of his and his friends' behaviour and punctuates those reports with fatuous phrases like "very interesting",[6] "such is fame".[7] Green reveals John's unswerving reverence for anyone whose name is known in the literary world in the following phrases

> Have just had a letter from the biggest swell I wrote to, saying that he will come down to the Society on 14 November. It really is too splendid: he is the most flaming tip-top swell who has written thousands of books, as well as

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[4] Henry Green, Blindness (London: J. M. Dent, 1926), p. 16.

[5] Ibid., p. 4.

[6] Ibid., p. 6.

[7] Ibid., p. 17.

> his drawings, which are very well known indeed. All these people are so nice and encouraging about the Society, which is splendid.[8]

The language is slangy and shows John's uncritical delight in associating with great and famous men. His reaction to a fight at a Labour meeting is equally unreflective.

> 16 November
> I now understand why men were brave in the war; it was because they were afraid of being cowards. that fear overcoming that of death. The crowd in Strand and having to go back into it again and have things thrown at one--it was terrifying at first for so great a coward as myself, but great fun when one got hotted up. The women were by far the worst. One old beldame screamed: "You dirty tykes, you dirty tykes!" continuously
>
> Later.--Another wonderful time. I went with Seymour up to the market-place of the town of Noat, outside the Town Rooms, and there we had another stormy meeting. I talked a very great deal this time; Bronsill and I went on the whole time to rather an excited crowd. Then he and I were dragged off and put on a balcony where the Press photographed us, and he addressed the crowd and I prompted him and hear-heared, etc. I would have spoken had there been time, but lunch arrived and we departed. It was too wonderful; it is tremendous fun being above a crowd, about 150 this time, and I wasn't a bit nervous. Nor was I terrified when the crowd became nasty again as on previous day; it is the most exhilarating thing I know--far better than hunting. Meanwhile, a master saw me and J. W. P. knows. What will happen?[9]

In fact nothing happens. The school masters at Eton are delighted at their young scholars' foray into the town. Having imagined that he

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[8] Ibid., p. 19.

[9] Ibid., pp. 22-23.

has tasted violence John writes another story "all about blood"[10] but even he has to admit that it is mediocre. If this incident is autobiographical, as are many of the details about the O.T.C., the straw hat and the great coat, the literary society, how different is the seventeen year old John Haye from the undergraduate Henry Green in the year of the General Strike who described an encounter with workers for whom there was no work.

> I hired a car. The strawberries were ripening at home and I thought I should be able to eat them in peace. But on the drive homewe had to pass through Reading and in that town at a crossroads was a crowd of about three thousand people watching a policeman with no traffic to direct. His face was white because they did not make a sound, no one so much as coughed in this unnatural silence of the strike, they only stared at him. We stopped, wondering if it would be safe to go by and that is why I know it was so quiet with their waiting, as I felt, for one man to throw a stone when all would have joined in. And was it their comment in bitterness at things as they found them or was it curiosity this silence that seemed on the surface to be so like the attitude I had adopted and which I thought then to be unique to my sort of education.[11]

The idiomatic style of the first section of Blindness servicably records the youth's encounters and impressions. This is a time of development. His essays into the world of literature, history, politics and philosophy, through his reading, are recorded and comments on his reading punctuate the exploration of his own consciousness. For example

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[10] Ibid., p. 23.

[11] Henry Green, Pack My Bag (London: The Hogarth Press, 1940), p. 234.

a detailed description of his six-penny straw hat and the delight with which he uses it to flout the conventions of his friends is rounded off by a short, correct sentence.

> The hat is a masterpiece, and being so has, of course, started a violent controversy. Those who consider it merely bounderism, and those who think it amusing, talk very seriously together and stop when I approach, while the faithful come in occasionally to tell me what the others have said.
>
> The most beautiful letter ever written is undoubtedly that of Charlotte Bronte's on her sister Emily's death.[12]

Two apparently disconnected comments are in fact both expressions of delight, the one of the personal world, so the reaction is closely examined, the other of the external world, which as yet has not been fully experienced, so there is no examination of his feelings about beauty and death. At this point in the novel his pains and fears, the sore teeth and the wet palliasses, are easily overcome by his knowledge that the vacations are inevitable and home is near. The "Caterpillar" may be clumsy, at times unpleasant, even arrogantly disdainful, but he has great dreams of flying that, by process of natural growth, will be achieved.

But even in his first novel, Green realized that dreams are rarely made real in the form we anticipate. John Haye's world is to be shattered unpredictably when he is made blind by a stray stone. In case the reader, as he meanders through the apparent everyday trivia of schoolboy

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[12] Henry Green, Blindness, p. 8.

life, forgets the novelist behind his creation Green includes several ironic and ominous details in the "Caterpillar" section.

A few days after John begins his diary he notes that,

> Rather a funny thing happened while fielding this afternoon. I had thrown myself down to stop a ball and I saw waving specs in my eyes for two minutes afterward.[13]

and he follows this note by recording that he can hear the boys at House prayers singing "For those in danger at the sea." A trivial occurrence but those two incidents are welded together and strangeness and fear are suggested, especially as John unconsciously substitutes in this well-known hymn the word "danger" for "peril". Peril and fear are two elements which are not present in the school but they will exist for John in the world outside school. This juxtaposition is not accidental. A few days later John expresses his dissatisfaction with the emphasis on athletic prowess at the school and the neglect of the intellectual, at the expense, he thinks, of developing the individual capacity to see clearly the nature of life beyond the self.

> I suppose I have been rather tiresome lately, but all except T. D. and possibly E. N. are so distressingly the athletic type, who sink their whole beings in the school and its affairs, and are blind and almost ignorant of any world outside their own.

The use of the word 'blind'[14] here is ironic within the context of the whole novel for later Green shows how John, through his physical

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[13] Ibid., p. 7.

[14] Ibid., p. 10.

blindness is forced to re-examine his perceptions of the external world. Through this forced intellectual reflection he is able to come to terms with his own needs and only after enduring this process is he more capable of achieving what he desires.

He has read about beauty, death and passion but his first encounter with a girl is stumbling and awkward.

> Mamma told me to go and find the young lady who ran the Clock Golf Competition and tell her to send in the names of the prize winners. The young ladies who ran things were all surprisingly alike, disastrously so, and there were many of them. I went up to a girl I was sure had run the Clock Golf, and I asked her if she had done so. No answer. Again I asked, and again no answer. Somehow I felt only more sure from her silence that she had run it, so I asked her yet again, and more eagerly. There was no answer, but there came a blush like a banner which rallied all her friends to her, to protect her from the depredations of this young man. After that I hid myself in the house. I know what the neighbourhood will make of my reputation now. Mamma laughed; I have never heard her laugh so much before.[15]

He blames his emotional clumsiness on the fact that he was so tired 'he could hardly see'.[16] A few days before his own accident he notices the connection in Dostoievsky's Crime and Punishment between perception induced by suffering. He writes,

> Am reading Crime and Punishment by Dostoievsky. What a book! I do not understand it yet. It is so weird and so big that it appals me. What an amazing man he was, with his epileptic fits which were much the same as visions really.[17]

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[15] Ibid., p. 12.

[16] Ibid., p. 12.

[17] Ibid., p. 33.

but until his own experience of pain he is, as yet, unable to see, or to write well.

Other evidence of Green's control over his character at this stage in the novel is John's obvious, though rather limited development. His reading progresses through novels, to history, politics and then art and philosophy so his reading experience progresses from an apprehension of knowledge from literary events, to real events, to an examination of the attitudes and ideas that affect human beings. Concurrent with this broadening through books is the development that occurs in him as he is given more authority, as his friends leave to go to University, and he is more alone, and as he is more successful in establishing the school art society. He becomes critical of his own writing remarking on those terribly involved sentences that are evident earlier in his diary[18] and is more conscious of the need to shape and manipulate language in order to express himself. He still relies heavily on the masters of literature and selects uncritically, passages that are over-indulgent. This translation of Gogol delights him,

> But surely this is most beautiful:
>
> The trills of a lark fall drop by drop down an unseen aery ladder, and the calls of the cranes, floating by in a long string, like the ringing notes of silver bugles, resound in the void of melodiously vibrating ether.[19]

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[18] Ibid., p. 23.

[19] Ibid., p. 25.

At this stage in his life he is growing more conscious of his artistic sense but ironically this consciousness prevents him from presenting real life. Shielded by the security of his privileged school and affluent home he does not perceive the uncertain complexity of life. His entry for January 26 remarks that the holidays were dull, the only enlivening occurrence being two deaths and one or two scandals in the village and the death of his mother's favourite dog.[20] This callous detachment is natural in a young man, yet the boy is capable of expressing the requisite empathy when the death occurs in literature. Later, in the same entry he is ecstatic in his praise of Gogol's Dead Souls.[21] Yet he is not capable of examining those feelings about real people. His own written response to the literary experience is flat.

> I am an absolute slave....He is wonderful,
> I have met nothing like it, - surely this
> is most beautiful.[22]

However, by the end of this phase in John's life, Green through the diary form has developed John to the point where he is beginning to examine the patterns and sounds of the external physical world, though his understanding of people is, quite naturally, shallow.

> This evening I went on the river. What is
> it that is so attractive in the sound of
> disturbed water? The contrast of sound to
> appearance, perhaps. Water looks so like a
> varnished surface that to see it break up,
> move and sound in moving is infinitely
> pleasing. Also it is exhilarating to see an
> unfortunate upset.[23]

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[20] Ibid., p. 24.

[21] Ibid., p. 25.

[22] Ibid., p. 25.

[23] Ibid., p. 32.

In this original way he writes about what he sees but he still relies on other writers, noticeably the Russians for his experience of suffering. Green ends the diary part of the novel on this ironic note. To this point he has revealed a boy who wants to be an artist but who is imprisoned by the harmony and control of his life and who is too detached from people to be interested in their ordinary experiences. This is reminiscent of Wilfred Owen's pre-1914 world. The secure home and education are the training ground for the literary sensibility but the raw material, the experience of harrowing, unpredictable pain is necessary for that sensibility to advance beyond the facile world of the literary circle. There is no world conflagration for John as there was for Wilfred Owen, only a small boy who throws a big stone at a railway carriage.

This is one incident that John cannot analyse, find a cause for, predict or control in the way that he coped with the several inconveniences of school life. The abrupt shock of this violent intrusion of the external world into John's is dramatized by another conventional novel technique, the letter from John's schoolfriend B. G. to Seymour that describes the accident that caused John's blindness. This device borrowed from the early days of novel writing is not used to elaborate character or fill in information. Its bare factual tone expressed the stark truth of accidental death and its position at this point in the novel allows Green to shift gear stylistically. The egocentric world of the adolescent where everything is external to the secure self is shattered, and the next section, "The Chrysalis", represents the stasis during which John's imaginative vision is forced to grow to replace his mutilated

physical sight. Because this growth is inner and unseen it cannot be examined by the diary technique. A diary can only contain the notes for a larger design. When the mind is capable of that larger design it requires a fuller, more connected form. As the external world has now forced itself into John's focus so it must be contained in the style.

The section "Chrysalis" is made up of three divisions titled respectively, "News", "Her, Him, Them" and "Picture Postcardism". Because John is now blinded, he feels compelled to describe his place in the world through his other senses. Actual dialogue is included because John must now listen and because he is, of necessity, again dependent on his step-mother her thoughts are given a place. She and his physical pain are the two constricting forces that ensure this period of stasis in John's life. John's altered situation then demands an alteration in prose techniques. New perspectives and reflections, details and rhythms influence the prose.

The first division, "News", begins with a description of John's room, which reflects his feelings of jaded helplessness.

> Outside it was raining, and through the leaded window panes a grey light came and was lost in the room. The afternoon was passing wearily, and the soft sound of the rain, never faster, never slower, tired. A big bed in one corner of the room, opposite a chest of drawers, and on it a few books and a pot of false flowers. In the grate a weary fire, hissing spitefully when a drop of rain found its way down the chimney. Below the bed a yellow wardrobe over which large grain marks circled aimlessly, on which there was a full-length glass. Beyond, the door, green, as were the thick embrasures of the two windows green, and the carpet, and the curtains.

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[24] Ibid., p. 39.

He feels as moribund as the hundreds of dead flies trapped behind the picture glass. Into this still, white room comes Emily Haye, the epitome of the clean, vigorous county woman who conceals her emotions with a bluff heartiness. That her insensitive remarks are concealing, compassionate feelings is revealed by the expression, by Green, of her interior thoughts. By including her fears and sense of inadequacy she becomes a sympathetic and realistic person and is no longer the jolly lady of the manor that John has described earlier.

Throughout this section, Green counterpoints internal and external dialogue to allow his characters to examine their concealed consciousness. External dialogue ceases when the emotion is too large to be contained in formal external communication. In addition the ordered flow of dialogue is contrasted with the short, breathless rhythms of the language John uses to control the dreadful knowledge that he will be blind all his life.

> "Dear boy, we must be practical. It may take a--
> a very long time indeed."
>
> "In fact, I shall be blind for life. Why didn't
> you tell me at once? No, no, of course I
> understand."
>
> So he was blind.
>
> She looks out of the window into the grey blur
> outside. Drops are having small races on the
> panes. The murmur fills the room with lazy
> sound. Now and then a drop falls from an eave
> to a sill, and sometimes a little cascade of
> drips patter down.
>
> His heart is thumping, and there is a tightness
> in his throat, that's all. She had not acutally
> said that he was blind. It wasn't he. All the
> same she hadn't actually said--but he was blind.
> Blind. Would it always be black? No, it couldn't.

> Poor Mamma, she must be upset about it all. What could be done? How dreadful if she started a scene while he was lying there in bed, helpless. But of course he wasn't blind. Besides, she hadn't actually said. What had she said? But then she hadn't actually said he wasn't. What was it? He felt hot in bed, lost. He put out a hand, met hers, and drew it away quickly. He must say something. What? (Blind? Yes, blind.) But ...
>
> "We must be practical, John darling, we must run this together."--Darling? She never used that. What was she saying? "...bicycles for two, tandems they're called, aren't they? Work together, let me do half the work like on a tandem bicycle. Your father and I went on a trip on one for our honeymoon, years ago now, when bicycles were the latest thing. I wish he was here now, he was a wonderful man, and he would have helped, and--and he would have known what to do."[25]

At this point his mother tries to draw him back from the horror by using clumsy metaphors, a few reproofs and a few more religious platitudes. Green uses hurried phrases as Mrs. Haye tries to pull John across the abyss and back into contact with the ordinary, the everyday reality. The moment of panic passes and at once she is garrulous and sentimental while John seeks in his mind to catalogue what he will miss.[26] As his mind makes connections and he is on firmer mental ground so the prose rhythm looses its tension. But the reality of his suffering is inescapable and so the prose is a reminder of the stifling waves of pain.

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[25] Ibid., p. 44.

[26] Ibid., p. 55.

> And now the darkness pressed down on him, and he was not ready. He was not sufficient in himself. He did not know. He had been wandering off on expeditions in a mental morass before, and now all chance of retreat was cut off. He must live on himself, on his own reserves of mental fat, which would be increased a trifle perhaps when Mamma or Nan read to him, as steam rollers go over roads, levelling all sense, razing all imagery to the ground with their stupidity. And when he learned Braille it would be too slow. And it terrifies, the darkness, it chokes. Where is he? Where? What's that? Nothing. No, he is lost. Ah, the wall, and he is still in bed and has hurt his hand in the blow he gave it. The bell should be here to the left--yes, here it is, how smoothly everything goes if you keep your head. His hand tastes salt, he must have skinned it against the wall.

Thus the rhythm of the prose corresponds to the involuntary surges of panic that threaten to obliterate John's words.

In this section there is a fine balance between the everyday and the horror and John is at the pivot. Green uses flat unemotional words and details to describe the horror.

> "Nurse, have I any eyes?"
>
> "How do you mean? No, I am afraid they were both taken out, they had to be."
>
> It had been a dull operation, and they were now in spirits on the mantelpiece of her room at home in the hospital. When she got back she was going to put them just where she could see them first thing every morning, with the toes and the kidney. She had had an awful trouble to get the eyes.[27]

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[27] Ibid., p. 58.

Yet it is only by language that John can maintain his sanity while coping with the insane accident that has deprived him of a vital part of his existence. This section ends with John's attempt to transpose the banal, ordinary nature of what has happened to him into a dramatic event. He imagines himself taking revenge on the small boy who threw the stone. He pictures the glaring headlines and the adulation but in the last lines he is reminded of the pain and the monotony of life. After a fanciful view of life he realises that his reality is not dramatic, or even of any sustaining interest to anyone but himself.

In the next chapter "Her, Him, Them" the writer turns from John's consciousness and enters Mrs. Haye's. This form is necessary to reveal Mrs. Haye's nature because she is the kind of woman who because she is bound by habitual and formal patterns of behaviour would not acknowledge her anxieties in the dialogue or diary form. In the earlier section the tension had been sustained through the patterning of the internal and external dialogue between John and his step-mother. In this section the conflict is lodged in one person, Mrs. Haye. Mrs. Haye is a woman whose life is regulated by external forms. Her social position at Barwood in rural England reinforces her beliefs that one has an appointed position in life and that one should fulfil that role. Her daily routine of supervising the servants, answering correspondence, taking decisions about meals, and the lives of her "parishioners" ensures that ordered traditional systems are maintained. Her butler, William, is a reassuring reminder of the permanence of this stable and changeless order, a world that would accept, without mockery the couplet,

> God bless the squire and his relations
> And keep us in our proper stations.

William'sonly lapse occurred when he crossed the boundary that separated the master and the servant by allowing his feelings to show. As Green said in his autobiography,[28] one did not marry servants, neither did one accept wreaths or messages of condolence. So in Mrs. Haye's world, if the emotions are held in by a tight rein, if one concentrates on an external order then one is able to regulate and manage the inner chaos that would otherwise threaten this serenity.

> She sat down and looked out of the windows in the bay. The big lawn was before her, they would begin to mow it soon. Dotted over it were blackbirds and thrushes looking for worms, and in the longer grass at the bottom she could see the cock pheasant being very cautious. They were pretty things to look at, but he and his two wives did eat the bulbs so. She would have to send for Brown to come down and kill them. And what good was it keeping up the shootin', now that all hope had gone of his ever holdin' a gun? But nothing must change. The lower border was really looking very fine, the daffodils were doing splendidly. It was just the same, the garden, and how well it looked now. He hadn't eaten his breakfast. No. Of course, once in a while a tree fell down and made a gap that would look awkward for a bit, but there were others growing and you became used to it. There went a pigeon, fine birds but a pest, they did more harm to the land than the rooks.[29]

The fine and the pestilent co-exist in the world but the pestilent must be obliterated. As Mrs. Haye walks purposefully round the house and gardens, in her mind John is connected with feelings and incidents that refuse to be tamed. Yet she manages to hold firm against the

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[28] Henry Green, Pack My Bag, p. 68.

[29] Henry Green, Blindness.

change, and concomitant disorder that threatens by keeping busy and by ordering her emotional responses in an accordance with a set form. For a long while she considers suitable replies to the inevitable letters of sympathy and, almost as a refrain, phrases like, "Something must be done",[30] "everything must go on just the same",[31] "she had a lot of things to do this morning, she would not let the thing come up and crush her"[32] recur through this section.

Life must be harmonious and useful. Barwood, the symbol of timeless order must be maintained, John must be kept busy, preferably married because the alternatives are too dreadful.

> Sell Barwood!--No, and he would appreciate still having it when he grew older. To be blind in one of those poky little surburban villas, with a wireless set, and with aeroplanes going overhead, and motor bikes and gramophones. No.[33]

But even Mrs. Haye, whose ordered sentences show that she is secure in her beliefs that "whatever happened the seasons went round"[34] so that one could find reassurance in the apparent order in the universe, at times finds that it is not sufficient to vigorously straighten pictures and open doors to allow sunlight on polished parquet floors.

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[30] Ibid., p. 69.

[31] Ibid., p. 71.

[32] Ibid., p. 68.

[33] Ibid., p. 70.

[34] Ibid., p. 76.

> She buried her head violently into a pot of dead roses. In her room Ruffles was sleeping fitfully in his basket. She picked up a paper, glanced at the headlines, then put it aside. She sat in her armchair and looked vacantly at Greylock over the fireplace. Along the mantel-board were ranged a few cards to charities, to funerals, and to weddings. She picked up the paper again and looked through the Society column, and then the deaths and marriages, and then threw it on to the floor. She blew her nose and put the handkerchief away in the pocket of her skirt. She rubbed her face slowly in her hands, when she stopped it was redder still. Then she sat for some time looking at nothing at all, thinking of nothing at all.[35]

Many years after this novel was written Green said

> I think Joyce and Kafka have said the last word on each of the two forms they developed. There's no one to follow them. They're like cats which have licked the plate clean. You've got to dream up another dish if you're to be a writer.[36]

and though in Blindness he is obviously experimenting with the technique of interior monologue, in his own way he allows the rhythm of the prose, and the inclusion of external details, to reflect the tension in Mrs. Haye's mind between the order of the external world and the guilt, anxiety and dread of the inner world.

The futility of Mrs. Haye's attempts to maintain timeless order in a transitory world is underlined by Green's rapid movement from her thoughts to John's.[37] Certain details given almost as asides establish

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[35] Ibid., p. 79.

[36] Terry Southern, "The Art of Fiction XXII: Henry Green", p. 75.

[37] Henry Green, Blindness, p. 80.

the tenor of this section. Blindness is now ordinary, babies only recently expected are now dying, so personal tragedy is soon absorbed by the passage of time and time is only a reality in the individual memory.

> Mrs. Haye had gone up to the village to console Mrs. Trench, whose week-old baby was dying. Herbert, leaning on the sill of the kitchen window, was making noises at Mrs. Lane while she toyed with a chopper, just out of his reach. Weston was lost in wonder, love and praise before the artichokes, he had a camera in his pocket and had taken a record of their splendour. Twenty years on and he would be showing it to his grandchildren, to prove how things did grow in the old days. Twenty years ago Pinch had seen better.[38]

In an interview with Harvey Breit in 1950 Green commented on how he planned his writing:

> "Ah yes," Mr. Green said with a touch of regret, albeit amiably, "the true life has nothing to do with sudden death and great tragedy, and as such, as a writer, I do not consider that the field of the novel is concerned with major (international) issues. Rightly or wrongly, having arrived at this decision--I particularly emphasize this, as I do not criticize any novelist's work which is not on my own lines--I consider that the novel should be concerned with the everyday mishaps of ordinary life."
>
> Mr. Green paused for breathing. "If that is so," he went on with unostentatious but inexorable logic, "it follows that I have to establish my characters in their situations in the first thirty pages, or eighth part of my novel. In English law a practitioner can't depart from his opening statement. I have to make my opening statement and for the remaining seven-eighths of the novel revolve around it, which may make me a minor writer, but which,

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[38] Ibid., p. 81.

> upon consideration, may be the modern outcome as compared to the Victorians and the great novelists of persecution."[39]

and though this novel was written much earlier in a few lines here the ideas are established that are to be sounded throughout this section. Obliquely he makes his opening statement about the nature of time and faces his character, John, with the problem of making himself a part of the reality that is exposed to time. John's only means of establishing contact is by apprehending the world through words.

> He felt himself sinking into a pit of darkness. At the top of the pit were figures, like dolls and like his friends, striking attitudes at a sun they had made for themselves, till sinking he lost sight of them, to find himself in the presence of other dolls in the light of a sun that others had made for them. Then it did not work, and he was back in the darkness, on the lawn again. Nothing seemed real.
>
> He said "tree" out loud and it was a word. He saw branches with vague substance blocked round them, he saw lawn, all green, and he built up a picture of lawn and tree, but there were gaps, and his brain reeled from the effort of filling them.[40]

So John approaches the idea that the only permanent reality is in the individual mind creating its own order out of its perceptions of the external world. As if to test the veracity of that idea he begins to collect those memories and if the description of the remembered fishing

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[39] Harvey Breit, Writer Observed, p. 105.

[40] Henry Green, Blindness, p. 82.

day[41] is compared with the actual one[42] one can see the growth in John's perceptual command over the external world, paradoxically now he is blind. The 'inner eye' of his solitude allows him to recollect not only the emotion of that day but also the shapes and colours of its existence.

As the earlier chapter in this section had shown how Mrs. Haye came to terms with the "fine" and the "pestilent" so, in this section John makes his own response, though his is a predominantly self-centred perception of the world as opposed to the emphasis on externals that sustains Mrs. Haye. In John's world the first duty is to the self, to the discovery of the nature of beauty and of its value to the self.[43] Whereas Mrs. Haye's first concern is to an ideal social order towards which everyone works. Therefore she is bitterly upset when the villagers oppose her liking for singing at matins on Christmas Day to revenge themselves against her closure of an ugly, dirty public pathway.

But the retreat into the self, and the arrogant detachment, and denial of responsibility for other selves can be as debilitating as trying to impose one's will over them. It leads John into composing a whimsical story about a Dutch tulip farmer who has illusions about how to create beauty. But fortunately for John's development as a

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[41] Ibid., pp. 83 - 84.

[42] Ibid., p. 14.

[43] Ibid., p. 86.

[44] Ibid., pp. 89-90.

writer the external world is inescapable. A short pasage of disembodied dialogue jars his fanciful contemplation. It is dialogue that carries a subtle undercurrent of references to death and loss so that after a brief interlude of mental escapism [45]

> Why couldn't there be something really romantic and laughable in life? With sentimentality and tup-penny realism. Something to wake one out of an existence like this, where day would follow day with nothing to break the monotony, where meal followed meal and where people sat still between meals letting troubles fall into their lap. Nothing stirred.[46]

- John is forced to face reality although as yet, he "only half-saw how pain fitted in with the scheme of things."

The third part of the "Chrysalis" section is headed "Picture Postcardism", a rather clumsy expression for the technique Green is using in this section. At this point in the novel we enter a world which is distinctly opposite to the world of John Haye's at Barwood. Joan Entwhistle's life is as ugly as her surname. Described in factual terms, she lives in squalor with her de-frocked, gin-soaked-father whose gradual disintegration was rapidly advanced by the discovery of his wife's affair with the postman. But Green rarely uses factual terms; we view Joan's life through her eyes. He uses the familiar technique of balancing description of the outside world with the character's perception of that world filtered through that character's consciousness.

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[45] Ibid., p. 95.

[46] Ibid., pp. 95 - 96.

But this time the technique is used to create an opposite effect. The external world around Joan is wild, dishevelled, chaotic but Joan's vitality, her affection for living creatures, her sympathetic response to the forces of life, even though she does not understand them, makes her happy. She can generate dreams and fancies but, unlike her father, she is not ensnared by them.[47] Memories of her mother's lessons, afternoon teas, schoolgirl secrets, apple trees, and visits to Barwood flash across her mind. Like the world of picture-postcards the images are clearly captured, ordered and definite, always sun-lit and highly-coloured but she knows the trap of those memories and that to dwell on them is to turn away from the present reality. She remembers the beauty of her father's roses,

> Climbing roses scrambled up and hung down in clusters. And little rose trees stood out on each side of the path, and red and white roses peeped out from the green leaves that hid the thorns.[48]

and not only are the thorns remembered but also the manure and the money that was necessary to maintain their beauty. Because Joan can see these two essential forces in life she can adapt to change, unlike her father who had an inflexible ideal about how to perform his duties as a vicar.[49] When he was unable to secure that ideal he could not cope with compromise and sought solace in dreams about his great book and in gin. There is no self-pity in Joan's memories even though like

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[47] Ibid., p. 120.

[48] Ibid., p. 129.

[49] Ibid., p. 132.

John her life has been blighted by the folly of others. Unlike him she passively comes to terms with her world.

> She had sat on the wall a good deal, asking why and how the world was here, and watching people go by. Silly to trouble about why the world was--it was, that was all.[50]

There is an interlude in the novel when Joan and John are drawn together because of their similar crippled state but they are too separate in attitudes and needs to make a complete unit. To survive John has to break out of his former state. His former friends are pursuing their own interests and while he is absorbed in self-pity he will only receive pity.

The final section of the novel, "Butterfly", subdivided into "Waiting", "Walking Out", "Finishing", and "Beginning Again" charts the course of John's journey outside himself. His growing self assurance from his meetings with Joan is reflected in his more fluid, lighter and affirmative sentences.

> There were so many things to do, all the senses to develop, old acquaintances of childhood to make friends with again. To sit still and be stifled by the blackness was wrong; he had done that long enough. The temptation was so great, the darkness pressed so close, and what sounds one heard could only at first be converted into terms of sight and not of sound. When a blackbird fled screaming he had only been able to see it as a smudge darting along, and he had tried in vain to visualise it exactly. Now he was beginning to see it as a signal to

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[50] Ibid., p. 138.

> the other birds that something was not right; it was the feeling that one has in the dark when something moves, and when one jumps to turn on the light, and the light leaps out through the night. Why translate into terms of seeing, for perhaps he would never see again, even in his dreams? They might be of sounds or of touch now. The deaf might dream of a soundless world, and how cold that would be. There was the story of the deaf old man who had forgotten that the breaking waves of the sea on the beach made sound. He must not go deaf; one clung so to what senses were left. But sight was not really necessary; the values of everything changed, that was all. There was so much in the wind, in the feel of the air, in the sounds that Nature lent one for a little, only to take away again. Or was there nothing in all these? Why did everyone and everything have to live on illusion, that Mummy was really near, and as the meaning of everything? But one could not let that go.[51]

As there are still questions to be asked, discoveries to be made there is still a purpose in life. John is also beginning to separate his illusions from reality and come to terms with those dreams.

> It was charming to think of Mummy being so close, but she wasn't. And June was so much more tangible. It was also charming to think of the trees as being in conspiracy with the birds to make life more endurable, but of course they weren't. One lived, that was all, and at times one lived more than at other times.[52]

His inquisitive, tentative inner monologue serves as a prelude to actual dialogue with Joan. The contrast in the pattern of these

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[51] Ibid., pp. 158 - 159.

[52] Ibid., p. 161.

forms underlines the division that still is present in John's mind between what he imagines and what is real. He even tries to shape Joan in his own image, wanting her to call herself June, a name with less prosaic associations than her actual name. He imagines that her naivety is refreshing but finally admits that he is bored by her ignorance. In addition the awkwardness of the dialogue reflects his stumbling attempts to communicate with someone other than himself.

This transition from his initial romancing to his later boredom with Joan is made plausible by the insertion at this point in the novel of Nanny's thoughts. We are reminded of this kind of education and care that John has experienced. He has been trained to fulfil an active and responsible role in society. As Joan has been taught to have no such aspirations she finds his passionate need to justify himself if not comical, then certainly incomprehensible. Green juxtaposes internal and external dialogue to expose this gulf and as the gulf widens there is more internal monologue.

> "I don't know. Father always calls him she. Father hates cats."
>
> She had told him this before.
>
> "An' Father's so nervy nowadays, you don't know what to do with him. It gets harder and harder to live there at all. Father spends so much money on--on small things we don't need. There often isn't enough to eat an'..."
>
> He heard a train snort in the distance like a dragon, and the wood round reared itself in tall crowding shapes and dark images. A voice droned complaint and he saw a little figure at the foot of an image throwing words at the things which hemmed her in.[53]

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[53] Ibid., p. 196.

Joan returns to the everyday satisfactions of preparing food, feeding chickens, tending her father and romancing about the new man on the milk-lorry content that "It will all turn out right in the end."[54] She makes no attempt to alter or reshape her life and, for her, this is sufficient. For John, it is not so. Having rejected this kind of passive, everyday existence John's life takes another direction. The speed of the change is dramatized by the description of his motor drive to London. The countryside, the dutiful servants, the village and its respectful tenants are left behind, irrevocably.

The final section that is a preparation for his moment of vision at the end of the novel, his epiphany, is told, predominantly through his perceptions. He is re-learning, re-encountering life not propped up by the compassion of a village-girl, or by the protection of his step-mother but on his own. Once he has made a personal affirmation, despite his disability, then he is ready to make his own way.

> But he was frightened at such joy. In a minute he felt it would burst out of him in a great wind and like a kite he would soar on it, and that the mist which lay between him and the world would be lifted by it also. Rising, rising up.
>
> He was rising through the mist, blown on a gust of love, lifting up, straining at a white light that he would bathe in.[55]

To bring John back from this visionary upsurge Green ends his novel with a final letter, this time from John to one of his school friends.

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[54] Ibid., p. 212.

[55] Ibid., pp. 253 - 254.

The letter is calm, assured and mature. He can praise another's writing and unselfconsciously discuss his own plans. The metamorphosis is complete.

The process of the metamorphosis has been closely recounted by using many different kinds of prose techniques. Perhaps this has resulted in the novel being too fragmented and disparate. At times, certain descriptions were too loaded or fanciful[56] and often, like John, Green is more taken up with the idea than the actuality.[57] In his next novel Living he does not experiment with such a variety of form and though separate consciousnesses are explored there is a fusion between those consciousnesses which does not occur in Blindness.

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[56] Ibid., pp. 98 - 99.

[57] Ibid., p. 202.

Chapter II

LIVING

Much of the interest roused at the time of the publication of Living, and subsequently, occurred because it concentrated its attention on factory workers in Birmingham. They were the predominant figures in a grey landscape and much has been made of the proletarian nature of this novel. The adjective, proletarian, which carries condescending and patronizing associations that Green would have found distasteful, is inappropriate to this novel for Green is doing more than celebrating the working class.

During an interview with Green, Terry Southern reminded Green of the usual critical response to Living.

> I recall that Living has been described as the "best proletarian novel ever written." Is there to your mind then a social-awareness responsibility for the writer or artist?[1]

Henry Green's response indicates his amusement at this label as well as his serious view about the writer's relationship to his subject.

> No, no. The writer must be disengaged or else he is writing politics. Look at the Soviet writers.
>
> I just wrote what I heard and saw, and, as I've told you, the workers in my factory thought it rotten. It was my very good friend Christopher Isherwood used that phrase you've just quoted and I don't know that he ever worked in a factory.[2]

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[1] Terry Southern, "The Art of Fiction XXII: Henry Green", p. 74.

[2] Ibid., p. 74.

The most striking aspect of this novel is how Green places what he 'heard and saw' within the temporal context. By 1929, the date of this novel's publication the philosophical theories of Bergson had found justification in the sciences and practical application in English literature by way of Proust. As a young man Henry Green had spent some months in France and was not only fluent in the language but, as an undergraduate had read[3] A la Recherche du Temps Perdu avidly. In his own novel Living he develops a closely-knit prose style that is aimed at both capturing the evanescent moment and relating it simultaneously with all other moments. This universality of existence far from diminishing the figures in the grey landscape, serves to give significance to the individual life, and without this interconnection life indeed would be "nasty, brutish and short". That the novel is not primarily about working-class life but about the process of living is probably why, after they had clubbed together to buy it, the foundry workers "didn't think much of it."[4]

The novel carries as its epigraph two lines that are reminiscent of a ballad.

> As these birds go where
> So where would this child go?

They are repeated later in the novel[5] and remind the reader of the natural pattern of growth, development and separation. They also remind

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[3] Henry Green, Pack My Bag, p. 211.

[4] Terry Southern, "The Art of Fiction XXII: Henry Green", p. 64.

[5] Henry Green, Living, p. 246.

us of the interrelationship between living creatures. In addition, the lines are phrased in the form of a question to make the listener aware that although the journey is unavoidable, the destination is uncertain. The inescapable process of living, then, involves growth, interconnection and separation and it is these ideas that Green gives flesh to in his novel. He writes in detail about the daily routine of the factory workers but the network of relationships that is framed by the industry is a microcosm. If the novel was read only as a study of working-class life, somehow separate from other lives it would be as anachronistic for a generation used to Osborne and Sillitoe as some of the publications of the Left Book Club.[6] But the patterns of living in this particular foundry in this particular city at this particular time are connected with the general process of life. Green is idiosyncratic in his use of scenes and images but he is trying, in prose, to capture certain timeless moments of existence that have been captured by other artists at other times. Several of his verbal pictures in Living share qualities that are evident, for example, in the Dutch paintings of the Seventeenth Century or the French painters of the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth centuries. Vermeer's Milkmaid, Pierre Bonnard's Table or Chagall's Artist Reclining present interludes of serenity in the individual life. The maid, the woman and the artist are still but reflective and surrounded by ordinary other vital objects, fruit, bread, wine, trees and farm animals. Similarly, Green writes a paragraph that presents his vision of how certain arrested moments of memory are

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[6] Julian Symons, The Thirties, (London: The Cresset Press, 1960), pp. 104 - 110.

timeless. As Lily is preparing the last meal for Joe and Craigan before she elopes with Bert, she is presented in such a way that she is, paradoxically, a detached and an integral part of the weary landscape she is trying to leave.

> Lily stood in hat and coat by kitchen window quickly cutting stairs of bread. When she had stack of these by her she reached to tin of beef that was by the loaf and in stretching she raised head and saw man in garden next theirs digging in his garden. Behind him was line of chimney pots, for next street to theirs in that direction was beneath, hidden by swell of gardens back of their street. This man, then, leant on his spade and was like another chimney pot, dark against dark low clouds in the sky. Here pigeon quickly turned rising in spirals, grey, when clock in the church tower struck the quarter and away, away the pigeon fell from this noise in a diagonal from where church was built and that man who leant on his spade. Like hatchets they came towards Lily, down at her till when they were close to window they stopped, each clapped his wings then flew away slowly all of them, to the left. She had drawn back to full height. Then again she looked at that man and he also had been watching the pigeon. He again began to dig but the clock striking had told her she had time yet and she wondered at him digging in that unfruitful earth and that he was out of work and most likely would be for most of the rest of his days. There he was digging land which was worn out.[7]

One obvious experimental technique in this novel, which Green thought later was affected,[8] was the omission of common articles. Green's purpose was "to make the book as taut and spare as possible to fit the

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[7] Henry Green, Living, p. 199.

[8] Terry Southern, "The Art of Fiction XXII: Henry Green", p. 73.

proletarian life I was then leading'[9] but this elliptical method also has the poetic effect of concentrating the mind on essential aspects of the moment.

Green uses other ways of connecting particular people and feelings to the general. The novel opens with lines that show Green's realisation that individuals are part of the main.

> Bridesley, Birmingham.
>
> Two o'clock. Thousands came back from dinner along streets.
>
> 'What we want is go, push,' said works manager to son of Mr. Dupret. 'What I say to them is--let's get on with it, let's get the stuff out.'
>
> Thousands came back to factories they worked in from their dinners.
>
> 'I'm always at them but they know me. They know I'm a father and mother to them. If they're in trouble they've but to come to me. And they turn out beautiful work, beautiful work. I'd do anything for 'em and they know it.'
>
> Noise of lathes working began again in this factory. Hundreds went along road outside, men and girls. Some turned in to Dupret factory.[10]

His novel will reveal, in detail, the lives of a mere handful of the enormous numbers of people that are living. By concentrating on their individual lives Green mitigates the insensitivity that is bred by an industrial society but he never becomes so absorbed by the individuals that he forgets that they, like all creatures, are inextricably, though

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[9] Ibid., p. 73.

[10] Henry Green, Living, p. 1.

often unwillingly connected with all other living things. This makes the individual vulnerable, not only through the life process but through the actions of others. So the lives of all Green's characters in Living are connected temporally and spatially. The individual exists within a fluid social context. But unlike Lawrence, Green did not see this as necessarily oppressive. He was not blind to the dirt, the noise the masses of people. He describes Lily's feelings as she looks down over the town,

> She lay, above town, with Jones. Autumn.
> Light from sky grew dark over town.
>
> She half opened eyelids from her eyes,
> showing whites. She saw in feeling. She
> saw in every house was woman with her child.
> In all streets, in clumps, were children.
>
> Here factories were and more there, in clumps.
> She saw in her feeling, she saw men working
> there, all the men, and girls and the 2 were
> divided, men from women. Racketing noise
> burst on her. They worked there with speed.
> And then over all town sound of hooters broke
> out. Men and women thickly came from, now
> together mixed, and they went like tongues
> along licking the streets.[11]

but she is not resentful of her identity with the others, only feels the urgent need to make her own pattern of life.

> And then in bed, after, rigid, she cried in
> her, I, I am I.
>
> I am I, why did I do work of this house, unloved
> work, why but they cannot find other woman to
> do this work.

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[11] Ibid., p. 108.

> Why may I not have children, feed them with my milk. Why may I not kiss their eyes, lick their skin, softness to softness, why not I? I have no man, my work is for others, not for mine.
>
> Why may I not work for mine?
>
> Why mayn't they laugh at my coming in to them. Why is there nothing that lives by me.[12]

The forceful repetition of the personal pronoun "I", the way the word "licking" is lifted from the earlier passage and translated from an unpleasant association to a pleasurable one, reveals this.

That the temporal order of life in the Universe was not linear but transitive and branching may have been adequately presented mathematically by Einstein, interpreted for the English speaking world by Sir Arthur Eddington[13], and examined philosophically by Henri Bergson[14] but to present these theories artistically in language, placed great demands on the writer. Writers like James Joyce and Virginia Woolf patterned their novels in ways to reflect these changing perspectives and Green's work has been likened to theirs.[15] The similarity, though, is in the desire to use time and space, change and interaction in different ways in novels, not in the particular techniques. Green

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[12] Ibid., p. 109.

[13] G. H. von Wright, Time, Change and Contradiction (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968).

[14] Ian W. Alexander, Bergson (London: Bowes & Bowes, 1957).

[15] Walter Allen, "An Artist of the Thirties", Folios of New Writing (Spring 1941), p. 149.

repeatedly disavows any conscious reflection of other writers' work in his novels -

> There's no "stream of consciousness" in any of my books that I can remember--I did not read Ulysses until Living was finished.[16]

- but in rendering the fluid, all-embracing nature of life in his own way there is always the danger that the novel will be so loose and fragmented that the larger design would be imperceptible.

To obviate these difficulties, Green sustains the unity of his novel in several ways. As has been discussed, time and again throughout his novel he pulls the reader back from the particular scene and the individual perception and makes him see the wider view. This alteration of focus occurs at moments of high intensity of feeling or to mark the passage of time together with his characters' absorption into it. Lily and Bert share time together at the cinema but their time is only part of all time:

> A great number were in cinema, many standing, battalions were in cinemas over all the country, young Mr. Dupret was in a cinema, over above up into the sky their feeling panted up supported by each other's feeling, away, away, Europe and America, mass on mass their feeling united supporting, renewed their sky.[17]

In each part of his novel Green is consciously working against this threat of fragmentation that is inherent when a writer is showing how

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[16] Terry Southern, "The Art of Fiction XXII: Henry Green", p. 73.

[17] Ibid., p. 59.

the individual life hangs in mobile suspension with other lives with which it comes in contact. He works within the traditionally numbered chapter divisions, a structure he abandons in some of his later novels.

The novel, Living, is contained within twenty-one chapters and each chapter has its own organic structure. The opening chapter is characterized by the snatches of conversation, remembered and actual, of the works manager, Mr. Bridges, and the foundry workers, Joe Gates and Tupe. Brief anecdotes about the workers' careless individuality are recounted but it is an individuality that flies in the face of uncertainty and fear. Already in this chapter, the undertones of rivalry, envy, and malice are heard and these will become more strident as the groups of characters act, interact and react upon each other. Because working men are used to expressing their thoughts unselfconsciously out loud, most of their comments are framed in dialogue form. Mr. Richard Dupret, on the other hand, separated from the men by position and accent expresses his thoughts in reflective prose passages. When he does engage in conversation with the factory workers his reference to the 'incidental beauty'[18] of their work and faces only causes confusion.

Thus, the opening section of Living is devoted to a description of Mr. Richard Dupret's first visit to the Birmingham factory. This occasion allows Green to introduce the main people in the novel and show their inter-relationship. But the introduction is not direct. Through anecdote, actual and reported dialogue, by juxtaposition of

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[18] Henry Green, Living, p. 7.

the different ways the characters have interpreted the events of the day the complex mosaic of life is built up. From the outset the people are individualized: Craigan's dignity and fine workmanship is noted, Jim Gates' weakness and Tupe's malice are established, Mr. Bridges' loyalty despite his wearisome responsibility is made clear, as is Jim Dale's unrequited love for Lily Gates. All are tied to the reluctant heir of the factory, Mr. Richard Dupret whose aesthetic sense is aroused by the presence of beauty in the practical but whose inexperience makes him irresolute, or as Mr. Bridges' aptly says, "He's good-intentioned but 'e's soft." As it is Mr. Dupret's ill-thought-out good intentions that break up the mosaic, one of the themes of the novel is also introduced.

The subsequent chapters of the novel are concerned with adding to the initial pieces. The picture of the lives is built up through the juxtaposition of different scenes that occur simultaneously. Each scene has its own particular form but it also picks up the tones and details of those surrounding it. For example, as Bert Jones, who later will cause change and unhappiness in Lily's life, and consequently those who depend upon her, is discussing the advantages of emigrating to Australia, Craigan's surrogate family, Lily and her father, are eating, and their neighbour Mrs. Eames is suckling her child and gossiping. The next day the men discuss the implications of Mr. Dupret's visit, while Lily admires babies and shops. Simultaneous moments are captured through conversation but they are not arrested moments for conversation sets up action, that results in retaliatory action. In this way Green shows not only the close-knit network of relationships that exists between people

who live and work and talk together but also how vulnerable those networks are, how easily fractured by action precipitated by the self, and by others beyond one's control.

In section three of Living the reality of the growing tension in the foundry is counterpointed by Lily's romanticized reaction to the movie. The prose that is used for the scenes in the factory is clear and forceful.

> In Dupret factory man had now been put on guard over the lavatory door. He had to clock men in and out.
>
> 'Seein' we're animals 'e's got to treat us as animals' Mr. Bentley cried very much excited. 'Put a man on at the lavatory door, it ain't decent, 7 minutes every day ain't long enough for a man to do what nature demands of 'is time, stop 'im a quarter 'our of 'is pay if 'e's a minute over why 'e ain't allowed to do it by law, I'm raisin' the question in the Club tonight, and if I was out o' work for 3 years I wouldn't take on a job of that description. It's plum against the laws of this land, checking men in and out o' lavatories and only 7 minutes for each man. Why in kennels even they don't do it.'[19]

While Lily's romantic reaction to the film is expressed in the inarticulate gasps and sibilants that mark her incomprehension of life's realities,

> She hummed tune band was now playing whey widdle o.
>
> 'It's 'ot in 'ere' he said.
>
> 'H. O. T. warm' she said.

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[19] Henry Green, Living, p. 28.

> 'Why they're playin' it again' she said. She looked at screen. She saw heroine's knickers again were coming down, now in young man's bedroom.
>
> ooeee she screamed.
>
> EEEEE the audience.
>
> The band played that tune. Tum tum ti tumpy tum. Dum dum di dumpy dum. She jumped her knees to time. Da da DID DEE --(it wasn't her knickers after all)-- did dee dee tum ta.[20]

Though these incidents about the time spent in the lavatory and the descent of a heroine's silken knickers may appear absurdly trivial, in fact, they precipitate actions that prove disastrous to the people in the novel. The mismanagement and apparent injustice of the suspension of Aaron Connolly and Bert Jones is the first incident that lets loose a whole series of complaints, resentments and rivalries that finally undermines the position of most of the workers. Lily's favourite ideas about life, that are fostered by travel posters and several visits to the movies, blind her to Bert Jones' weaknesses. It is only through the real experience of his betrayal that she realises the strength of Craigan's wisdom.

> 'Nothin' ever come of dreams like them kind,' he said. 'Nothin' dain't ever come of dreams, I could 'ave told yer but that wouldn't be of no use, you 'ad to find out of yourselves and so you 'ave,' he said.[21]

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[20] Ibid., pp. 27 - 28.

[21] Ibid., p. 245.

If Lily's world is afflicted by false dreams and absurd incidents it is no more or less so than the simultaneous world, presented in section four, where Mrs. Dupret, the factory owner's wife is arranging a social occasion for her son who is more absorbed in picking his nose. Though this world may appear ridiculous its interests and anxieties are significant because the forces that affect the Duprets' lives and personalities will inevitably reverberate through the lives of the workers in the factory. Mrs. Dupret thinly veils her want of interest in her son's description of the works, being more actively concerned in obtaining her handkerchief. Green focuses the reader's attention on the rings on her hand as it is raised to summon her servant to bring her handkerchief. In this way Green indirectly presents her lack of any sympathy or feeling of responsibility for the source of her wealth, the factory. Not only, then does Green juxtapose scenes to illustrate the absurd but substantial interdependence of human beings but by connecting details within those scenes he underlines that dependence.

In sections five and six of the novel, the idea that the process of living is an inescapable network of existences is further reinforced by the arrangement of the prose. Both sections open with an account of an accident to the older men, Craigan and Mr. Dupret and then develop by tracing the effects of the change in the order of relationships that these accidents occasion. The surface movement of life continues, the jokes, the dating, eating cold new potatoes, admiring apple trees, but the real movement comes at moments of crisis when the deep undercurrents of private anxieties and remembered humiliations come to the surface

in an apparently unrelated incident. Time and again Green reveals how the pressures of the inner thoughts leave their mark on the external world. Mr. Richard Dupret feels inadequate in his pursuit of Hannah Glossop so he asserts himself at his work. By assiduously taking over the running of the factory, now that his father is ill he reinforces his self-confidence.

> It was because, all of it, because she was so beautiful, he repeated to himself, so beautiful.
>
> After all I work, repeated he to himself, I work, here I am in London offices of Dupret & Son, general engineers.
>
> Why had they not brought the correspondence? He rang.
>
> 'Why hasn't Mr. Sewell brought in this morning's letters?'
>
> 'He hasn't come yet Mr. Dupret.'
>
> 'He hasn't come' he said echo echo to Miss Wilbraham. That dreadful night he thought. Mary had been late--that other with fellows twirling small moustaches round about her, she laughing--and Mary, when she had come, furious, he could not find why. May have been she'd bought new hat. Bother bother. And here was whole day stretching out in front. What had been her name? A--a--Anne--Anya--Nunk--HANNAH GLOSSOP.[22]

Because these sections trace the gradual shift in allegiances and alliances, Mr. Walters and Mr. Bridges combining against Mr. Tarver and Mr. Dupret the dominant tone of the prose is interrogatory and querulous.

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[22] Ibid., p. 60.

The network of relationships is being threatened by error, mismanagement and exploitation and personal relationships are being re-ordered in response to the changes. Because of this dis-orientation more mistakes[23] are made and people become more and more vulnerable.

As the shift of responsibility from age to youth occurs, the novel now concentrates more on the younger people, though they are not completely free from the influence of the old. Both Lily and Mr. Richard Dupret have, as yet, to be initiated into the ways of the world before they assume responsibility. Mr. Dupret witnesses the attempts to rouse his father from his moribund apathy and is shocked that his mother and the doctor would allow a prostitute to nourish some vitality in the old man. With the outraged decency of youth, he pronounces the adult world cynical and depraved. At the same time, Lily is hearing from Craigan of the fate of her Aunt Ellie who tried to better herself by running away with a groom and Lily is left to draw her own lessons from this story. But in case the reader thinks that the novel is concerned solely with the life of Lily and Mr. Dupret certain other passages in section seven indicate that they are only pieces in the process.

> Then, one morning in iron foundry, Arthur Jones began singing. He did not often sing. When he began the men looked up from work and at each other and stayed quiet. In machine shop, which was next iron foundry, they said it was Arthur singing and stayed quiet also. He sang all morning.

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[23] Ibid., p. 73.

He was Welsh and sang in Welsh. His voice had a great soft yell in it. It rose and rose and fell then rose again and, when the crane was quiet for a moment, then his voice came out from behind noise of the crane in passionate singing. Soon each one in this factory heard that Arthur had begun and, if he had 2 moments, came by iron foundry shop to listen. So all through the morning, as he went on, was a little group of men standing by door in the machine shop, always different men. His singing made all of them sad. Everything in iron foundries is black with the burnt sand and here was his silver voice yelling like bells. The black grimed men bent over their black boxes.

When he came to end of a song or something in his work kept him from singing, men would call out to him with names of English songs but he would not sing these. So his morning was going on. And Mr. Craigan was glad, work seemed light to him this morning who had only 3 months before he got old age pension, he ought to work at his voice he said of him in his mind and kept Joe Gates from humming tune of Arthur's songs.

Every one looked forward to Arthur's singing, each one was glad when he sang, only, this morning, Jim Dale had bitterness inside him like girders and when Arthur began singing his music was like acid to that man and it was like that girder was being melted and bitterness and anger decrystallised, up rising up in him till he was full and would have broken out-- when he put on coat and walked off and went into town and drank. Mr. Craigan did not know he was gone till he saw he did not come back.

Still Arthur sang and it might be months before he sang again. And no one else sang that day, but all listened to his singing. That night son had been born to him.[24]

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[24] Ibid., pp. 89 - 90.

While they are being moved into centre stage others are being made ready to take over from Lily and Bert. So the cycle continues; individual lives have their own momentum but their movement is circumscribed by their position and attachments. These principles govern the structure of the scenes in this section.

Section eight is made harmonious by different principles. It expresses the community of desires and dreams. Lily's energetic desire to assert her own vitality by raising her own children is expressed in words which read like an oration.

> Lord give me a child that I might wash him, feed him, give him life. Yes let him be a boy. Give him blue eyes, let him cling to me with his hands and never be loosed from me. Give him me to love that I'm always kissing him and working for him. I've had nothing of my own. Give him me and let him be mine, oh, oh give me a life to work for, and give me the love of him, and his father's.[25]

Mr. Richard Dupret, who is still picking his nose, petulantly voices his disillusionment.

> He wasn't, he said again in his mind, going back to business till old man thought better of it. Besides mother wanted him. And what picture she had made of him and herself and of father with that ridiculous harlot. To put her into bedroom where he lay and all of them waiting outside--disgusting, filthy, revolting. He'd made that plain to her and it seemed to be telling on her. She musn't do that again, or something like it. Pity was the old man did not get rush of blood to head and die of it, malicious old figure head.

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[25] Ibid., pp. 109 - 110.

> Doctors said was no hope for him now. He felt he could go up now to room and say 'die, old fool, die.' Trouble was of course he was not an old fool, but clever like the devil.[26]

In this section the scene moves from Lily's reverent assertion of herself, through the frustration of Dupret's dreams for himself, to Mr. Bridges' nightmarish anxieties. The external action is left for a while as the characters reflect and try to establish their sense of identity within the changing circumstances.

Though indeed 'we are such stuff as dreams are made on' the interludes of dreaming are brief and the harmony they allow the individual is short-lived. For in the process of living contamination is as unavoidable as death. The keynote in section nine is death. It opens with Hannah Glossop's irrational grief at the sudden, rather ridiculous death of a chauffeur. This incident is followed by Mr. Dupret's death. This is reported in a single line and though the young men see little significance in this event[27] the older men are aware that his passing will result in their positions being made less secure. By connecting their situation with other times and customs, Green, again, raises his characters above the particular.

> 'Aye,' Bridges was out of himself, 'aye and since I came 'ere I've built this side up stone by stone and made a job of it. Waller, of the O.K., said to me only a week ago standing where you are now, he said you turn

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[26] Ibid., p. 110 - 111.

[27] Ibid., p. 124.

> out better work here than I've seen in
> the trade. Now there's a man of experience,
> mayn't I take part of that on myself? No,
> it's now as I might be a 'orse or a dog
> turned off because their old man 'as died,
> or like an Indian widder woman that is
> burned inside 'er dead 'usband.'[28]

That Bridges' fears are justified is shown in the next scenes where Lily romances over travel posters and Mr. Richard Dupret indulges in house-party horse-play. Dupret's salvation, though, is that he can see the empty puerility of this 'good clean fun'. He has not yet experienced enough to feel confident in cutting himself off from that world where people "sublimated all passions, all beliefs"[29] in their games so like Jim Dale he must wait until Hannah's infatuation with Tom Tyler, which is a reflection of Lily's misplaced love for Bert Jones, has run its course.

So the next few sections are like multi-faceted mirrors. All the characters, from those at the country house party to those in the factory, to those in the terraced houses make mistakes, suffer disappointment and experience injustice, that is at best caused by ignorance, and at worst by malice. Visible actions, such as Bridges' suspension of Jones are shaped by invisible forces, for example the need Bridges feels to assert his flagging authority after his brief compulsory holiday. Throughout his novel Green examines the idea that human beings are the sum of all their individual experiences and that often memories of previous conversations and events affect their present actions. Thus in

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[28] Ibid., p. 127.

[29] Ibid., p. 138.

the individual the apparent barriers of time and space disintegrate. As has been discussed Green attempts this by juxtaposing simultaneous events but occasionally in this novel he uses connecting images to link his segments and his characters. He will use this technique more extensively in his later novels but it crops up in Living. Lily's escapist dreams are linked in her mind with images of tropical scenes.[30] Similarly Hannah's fatuous passion for Tom is expressed rhythmically and metaphorically as a journey through tropical regions.

> Miss Glossop was downcast. We have seen her feeling, when she thought of Tom Tyler, had been like a tropical ocean with an infinite variety of colour. As her boat came near dry land you could see coral reefs and the seaweed where in and out went bright fishes, as her thoughts turned to him so you could see all these in her eyes. Further out, in the deep sea, in her deeper feeling about him when he was away, now and again dolphins came up to feed on the surface of that ocean. And in her passage she disturbed shoals of flying fish. These were the orchestration of her feelings, so transparently her feelings lapped him and her thoughts, in shoals, fed on the top, or hung poised for two moments in the shallows.[31]

In a similar way, Richard Dupret's reflection on the loss of his affection for Hannah,

> When party went he satyed on over--was nothing for him to do in London, the business ran itself, nothing to do but sign cheques on Thursday and this was Tuesday.

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[30] Ibid., p. 160.

[31] Ibid., p. 167.

> He took boat and rowed on the river. What a new year, he thought in mind, what a new year, father dead and now Miss Glossop was over, that was done with!
>
> River was brown and flowed rapidly down to the sea. On either side the violet land under this grey sky. Trees on either side graciously inclined this way and that, leaning on his oars he watched these and rooks that out of the sky came peaceably down on fields.
>
> He thought in his mind here was end of another chapter, another episode done with (Miss Glossop had been rude to him whenever she could be rude).[32]

counterpoints an earlier description of Jim Dale's despair at Lily's indifference.

> Dale stared at Lily washing up. (She washed up now because this was not evening for going out with Bert Jones.)
>
> Mr. Craigan smoked pipe, already room was blurred by smoke from it and by steam from hot water in the sink. She swilled water over the plates and electric light caught in shining waves of water which rushed off plates as she held them, and then light caught on wet plates in moons. She dried these. One by one then she put them up into the rack on wall above her, and as she stretched up so her movements pulled all ways at his heart, so beautiful she seemed to him.[33]

Both Hannah and Lily's feelings are a result of an illusory understanding of other people so their images are far-fetched and fanciful. Dupret's and Jim Dale's are more prosaic but no less lovely, in fact only more so for being rooted in reality.

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[32] Ibid., p. 170.

[33] Ibid., p. 160.

These fluid images act as a prelude to the next few sections where the incidents and characters are in a state of flux. In the factory, the older men, Bridges, Walters and Craigan are being manoeuvred out of their positions by the inexperienced zeal of Richard Dupret and his aides Archer and Tarver. Lily is preparing to elope with Bert, unaware that he is lying to her about his attendance at night school and that he does not know where his parents are living, even though they plan to stay with them. Craigan, aware that his job is being threatened and that Lily is ignoring his practical advice that Joe Gates is consorting with Tupe, is losing the will to live. As the forces of change in the factory and in Craigan's home come to a head the two instigators, Richard Dupret and Lily, though unknown to each other, pass each other in the street.[34] In a distinctive scene, Henry Green brings together in time and space the two young people whose lives are inextricably connected. The events and feelings that affect Richard Dupret find reflection in his decisions and actions that, in turn, are mirrored in the lives of all the workers in the factory. Lily, by her familial relationship with Joe Gates and Craigan, and her love for Bert, is affected by them, who in their turn respond to the situation at work. Because the workers are put on short time due to Richard Dupret's plan to adopt a policy of quick production, despite its attendant risks of imperfect work, Joe is irritable. He vents his frustration on Lily by striking her, and this precipitates her decision to run away with Bert.

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[34] Ibid., p. 187.

Although Lily and Richard share this same moment their attitudes to their environment and this time in their lives are markedly separate. Richard, unsatisfied in love and solitary, sees only the struggle, pain and monotony of living. Lily, excited at the prospect of bettering herself, delights in the process of living, birth, work and death and, unlike Richard, is not afraid of being part of it. By connecting these two people in time and space Green is able to show two distinctly separate views of the one reality. But although the two are separated so clearly by birth and education, Dupret's thoughts on the cyclic inevitability of life show that though he and Lily are on different stages they are playing the same drama.

This scene is followed by two brief sections, the rhythms of which reflect the violent suddenness with which crucial changes occur. All the men in the factory within six months of their retirement are given their cards. Affected are Bridges, Craigan, Joe Gates and Tupe. The best and the worst are judged equally. Loyalty and excellence are no security against time. These, of course, are not new ideas but Green places them both in a new setting and in a new way. After the factual and rather impersonal prose of these sections, section seventeen presents the events lyrically. This whole segment of the novel is dominated by images of separation, flight and loss which are all component expressions of the passage of time. At a crucial moment in her life,[35] Lily watches a neighbour digging in his garden, hears a church clock strike and

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[35] Ibid., p. 199.

watches pigeons that are circling upwards in the sky fall back from the sound. In her mind, the man who has become a fixed landmark, depersonalized like the chimney pots is connected with the sterile environment from which Lily wants to escape. The striking clock reminds her that she still has time while the neighbour, is as devitalized as the land he is struggling to cultivate. As the clock strikes the pigeons fall away from the sound "like hatchets" and this simile, with its connecting associations of Father Time's sickle and the scissors of the three Fates, reminds Lily that unlike her neighbour she is at the time of her life when energy and hope have not been extinguished.

The following description of the mens' return from work, after several of them have been compulsorily retired, is couched in terms that reveal the unavoidable presence in life of loss, separation and death and the incipient menace of youth to age.

> Many talked still of how that morning
> nine men had been turned off for age.
> Laughing, and one man would shout to
> another ten yards in front of him in
> the crowd and some boys, separated from
> each other, threw balls of rolled paper
> at each other above the heads of these
> men. Day was dark and white paper balls
> were thrown above this dark crowd
> quickly moving to the gate and darkly
> Mr. Gates went with them by side of
> Mr. Tupe.[36]

Darkness surrounds the men who are soon to disappear from life while the young boys, still virile and active, toss white paper into the air.

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[36] Ibid., p. 200.

Two other images in this section, though different in detail serve the same end. As Jim Dale looks out over the city on a wet night his metaphor is framed by his factory experience but it allows him to express his feelings about the fluid and continuous vitality of life.

> Town beneath them was a deep blue, like the Gulf Stream, with channels which were the roads cutting it up, appearing, being hidden, and they the colour of steel when it has been machined. Above it factory chimneys were built, the nearest rose up almost to level of where they were in bedroom only way away, and others further away came not so high. Rain had fallen 90 minutes before and this wet was now drying off the roofs. But these still glowed with white cold that steel has when it has been machined, and the streets also.[37]

At the same time Lily preparing to leave her home is walking to the field where Bert first kissed her and passes a graveyard which is a tangible reminder of another kind of separation. As at the beginning of this section Lily, noticing the flight of pigeons, realises that the process of thought, like the pigeons, seems amorphous until one feeling or incident directs the flight and concentrates the action.

> When we think,--it might be flock of pigeons flying in the sky so many things go to make our thought, the number of pigeons, and they don't fly straight. Now one pigeon will fly away from the greater number, now another; sometimes half the flock will follow one, half the other till they join again. So she thought about tombstones and how sculptor made it pay showing so many spoiled ones in his window as it might be.[38]

But by fusing the metaphor of the pigeons with the striking clocks and the tombstones Green shows that although the individual thoughts

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[37] Ibid., p. 203.

[38] Ibid., pp. 205 - 206.

govern action, these thoughts and actions are still bounded by the limitations of time.

Lily makes her flight away from the apparent constrictions of Craigan's house and the next sections of the novel are shaped by the flow of her expressions and feelings. These are interrupted by brief passages of dialogue with Bert and in this way Green balances the dramatic view that Lily has of this significant period in her life with the comedy of Bert's embarrassed discomfort at finding himself for a long while in a corridorless train. This is the first of several instances in his novels where Green juggles the sincere with the banal. Lily's serious desires to better herself and make a child and to communicate these hopes to Bert are thwarted by the fact that he wants to go to the lavatory and the intrusion into the compartment of a brass band. As the fruitless quest for Bert's parents is pursued among streets no less squalid than those Lily has left - indeed because they are strange they appear more grotesque - the sentences become shorter, the particular details more unpersonal, and finally Lily is abandoned in the dark forbidding streets.

Her paroxysm of grief is assuaged by Craigan, when she returns and the darkness and pain of the previous night vanish.

> Then, as after rain so the sky shines and again birds rise up into sky and turn there with still movements so her sorrow folded wings, so gently crying she sank deeper into the bed and was quieted. He still kept hand over her eyes, but she was quieted.[39]

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[39] Ibid., p. 239.

Green then allows Lily to recount her experience in dialogue, the experience which has earlier been told in tense prose. Dialogue as Green knew was only one, often inadequate, way to communicate. In this instance it has a purgative effect in that it allows Lily to select from the events of the previous night those incidents with which she can cope. She even invents a confessional farewell from Bert to compensate for the humiliation of his betrayal. Also in her conversation with Mrs. Eames she realises that though words are spoken there is no communication. Both are absorbed by their own anxieties, Lily about her reputation, Mrs. Eames about her new baby, and Lily realises ultimately how solitary each person is.

> She thought we got no one but ourselves,
> you learn that, yes, you do.[40]

However neither this section nor the novel ends at this point. Living is a study of the tangled interconnections of life. Through its prose patterns it shows how individual lives are shaped by other people's hopes, anxieties, expectations and inadequacies but, Green is not a mechanist. His factory workers are not as D. H. Lawrence saw them going.

> back and forth, to work,
> back and forth to work,
> like fearful corpse-like fishes hooked and
> being played
> by some malignant fisherman on an unseen shore
> where he does not choose to land them yet,
> hooked fishes of the factory world.[41]

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[40] Ibid., p. 248.

[41] D. H. Lawrence, "City Life" in The Complete Poems of D. H. Lawrence; V. de Sola Pinto and W. Roberts (eds.), (New York: Viking Press, 1964), p. 632.

they are still capable of learning from experience, of exercising choice and of submitting to love. The process of life may be inescapable but how each one engages in the process depends on one's values. Lily needs the sustaining love of the family, Craigan, Jim and even Joe, her father. Gradually the family is reunited, Joe returns from jail, Jim from his newly-acquired lodgings and Craigan, restored, acknowledges that 'we are imprisoned by the person whom we love.'[42] Only this force can counteract the despair that is occasioned by the certain reality of our all-significant consciousness being obliterated by death. The two forces, love and despair collide in reflective prose in the final section. As Joe is wandering through the yard of Prescott's foundry looking for Jim he sees three coffin-shaped pieces of metal sunk in the ground to commemorate the deaths of three foundry men. One in particular he remembers and he is amused at the grotesque indignity of death.

> With Alf the management had tried to make the men cast with molten metal Alf had suicided in, but of course the men didn't have that, they dug his coffin for him here, like had been done for those other 2 and poured into it the metal he was in. (The great heat there would have utterly done away with him.) There he was in that lump of metal, 30 ton to a penny, but then likely as not he'd risen in dross to top of the metal, and like dross does when you ain't casting, it's stuck to the sides of the ladle or gone back to the bottom as they poured the metal out. So Alf had got out of

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[42] Henry Green, Living, p. 250.

> it after all, though in different shape to what he'd gone in he thought and Joe chuckled. An' that's about all that man ever was, or any on 'em,--dirt, he said in mind.[43]

Joe, contaminated by Tupe's evil and his own self-disgust sees man as merely dirt. Bridges, bitterly disillusioned at his treatment by the Duprets echoes Joe's despondency.

> 'Yes,' said Bridges '10 years at the O.K. gas plant, 15 years with his father, but 'e 'ad no more use for me more'n a bit of shit on 'is shoe.'[44]

But the two voices of despair are clumsily silenced by Craigan who throughout his life has deliberately tried to extinguish the horror with love. He maintains this philosophy even as he approaches death himself and knows that there is nothing more.

> Mr. Craigan lay in bed in his house. He thought in mind. He thought in mind how he had gone to work when he was 8. He had worked on till no one would give him work. He thought what had he got out of 57 years' work? Nothing. He thought of Lily. He thought what was there now for him? Nothing, nothing, He lay.[45]

The novel, though, does not end on this note. There is yet to be a final celebration of the perpetuity of living. Craigan is dying, but his values are perpetuated by Lily. Her pleasure in walking and talking, in friendship and children and her passionate need to share

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[43] Ibid., p. 252.

[44] Ibid., p. 259.

[45] Ibid., p. 267.

this quickening joy of life is expressed in the final lines.

> Suddenly with loud raucous cry she rushed at the baby, and with clatter of wings all the pigeon lifted and flew away, she rushed at baby to kiss it. Mrs. Eames hid her son's face in her hand, laughing:
>
> 'You're too young, that's too old for you' she said.[46]

Green's first two novels, Blindness and Living end on this affirmative note. It is hardly surprising that at this stage in his life Green should feel optimistic about the opportunities the young adult has to control and shape his life after he has emerged from the self-conscious dependence of adolescence. His later novels, though, have a broader perspective and the optimism is less exuberant.

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[46] Ibid., p. 269.

Chapter III

PARTY-GOING

Henry Green's third novel, Party-Going, appeared ten years after the second novel Living and the characters and setting were as different as the techniques used to execute the piece. The imaginative conception of time and space is not the controlling power in Party-Going. In fact, more attention is focused on the characters and their manners because they are restricted in time and space. The novel has been described as a "comedy of manners"[1] but if the purpose of such a mode is a correction of social absurdities then, though the absurdities exist in Green's Party-Going, the possibility of correction is never made evident, for the struggle for satisfaction, political, social and sexual is as perpetual as life. As with most of Green's novels critical reaction was varied, though most of them agreed in one way or another, with one of its original reviewers that it was an "odd book"[2] or said like A. Kingsley Weatherhead that there was "an absence of logic in Party-Going or an open defiance of it."[3] This finding ignores the logic that is provided not only by the metaphors, but by the particular narrative techniques and the prophetic associations of several allusions and objects.

The action of the novel takes place one afternoon in Victoria Station during the 1930's. A group of wealthy and not so wealthy, but nevertheless cultivated, people gather on the station platform to embark on a Riviera holiday. This is to be financed by a Mr. Max Adey,

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[1] Bruce Bain, "Henry Green: The Man and His Work", World Review, May 1949, p. 57.

[2] David Garnett, rev. of Party-Going by Henry Green. New Statesman and Nation, 7 October 1939, p. 489.

[3] A. Kingsley Weatherhead, A Reading of Henry Green, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1961), p. 54.

a selfish, callous young man, whose extreme wealth makes these traits allowable. One of the others in the group is Miss Julia Wray, as yet insulated from discomfort and cruelty by her social position in life. Her uncle is the Director of the railway, an influential and lucrative position similar, no doubt, to that held by other members of her family. In this instance her security and that of her friends is assured by her uncle, as the station master keeps a concerned and watchful eye over his employer's niece. Hypnotised by Max's flattering attention, Julia has joined the Riviera party. As long as she does not have to compete with Amabel's sensuality, she is acceptably chaste and her ingenuousness is charming. If any anxieties threaten her she easily disengages her mind from the present reality by way of remembering her charms. These fanciful toys open the door to childhood security and shut out disappointment, sexual dissatisfaction and death. Ironically these very toys-the little wooden pistol, the red and yellow egg that contained three little elephants, and the top[4]- that all have associative stories about mummys and nannies are also representative of the elements in life that Julia shuns. The spinning top is like life in that it requires a certain amount of skill to set it in motion for lack of skill, as well as accident, can make it topple over. Julia says that "there's no story at all about my top. I've just always had it, that's all,"[5] and these sentences are an apt summary of her life. The implications

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[4] Party-Going, p. 109.

[5] Ibid., p. 113.

of the pistol and the egg are more obvious. The pistol had been buried and retrieved but though she had it still it was 'stained' and had partly disintegrated. Similarly, in Julia's world, violence in speech and action had been rendered impotent by the codes of behaviour that the upper classes demanded. There were certain things one didn't do and certain things one didn't say. Several times in the novel Alex has to be reminded of these norms.

> "She's too ill to be moved," Miss Henderson said.
>
> "Well, then leave her here then as you said at first. I take back what I said about those two old ghouls though they do sit like vultures round the dying..."
>
> "Alex!"
>
> "All right, I'm sorry...."
>
> "No, Alex, it's not enough."
>
> "All right...."
>
> "Not enough to just say you're sorry every time."
>
> "Well then," he said, raising his voice, "What do you want to do?"[6]

The sexual connotations of the egg are similarly explicit. As long as Julia has the egg intact with her she feels safe.[7] She avoids the too ardent embraces of Max, for most of the afternoon, and even at the end of the novel her maidenly hope is that she can lure Max into her world of juvenile fantasy.[8] Green, by mentioning these apparently

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[6] Ibid., p. 233.

[7] Ibid., p. 110.

[8] Ibid., p. 255.

insignificant toys at several points in the novel and by calling them "charms", is exercising the technique of using symbols that reflect his ideas. Julia and her charms represent those who want to escape wordliness and sensuality by trying to ignore its presence. Embassy Dick, and Amabel, on the other hand, represent this world and Green gives them the final words in the novel, as they have in life. They are confident that they will enjoy social and sexual satisfaction for they have no need of "charms"; only Julia is self-deluded.

Max and Amabel have no such delusions. Both, made invincible by their wealth and beauty, make their own rules and play their own games. They are separate from the genteel world of the Hignams and the Hendersons whose conversation and actions throughout the book dwell on what is proper and correct though Max particularly wants to be endorsed by this kind of respectability; otherwise, why would he subsidize this group of people. The source of Max's wealth is never disclosed but his name suggests he is not from an established British lineage and his artificial furnishings[9] are of dubious taste.[10] Yet he is readily accepted into a world that pays much attention to names and forms and appearances because of his obvious financial talents. Amabel, whose name suggests her trade shares Max's taste[11] and mores but not his acceptability. Quite naturally she is regarded as a threat by the other women in the group who envy her beauty and self-possession.

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[9] Ibid., p. 32.

[10] Ibid., p. 133.

[11] Ibid., p. 133.

Another dependent in the group is Miss Evelyn Henderson, who is the busy, capable product of a thorough and sensible British girls' school education. She is competent at reading timetables, finding luggage and controlling peoples' manners but she is bewildered and rather annoyed by the presence of suffering and death. The Hignams are so respectably married that Robert Hignam has been rendered ineffectual by his wife. He has learned to quietly exclude her incessantly trivial chatter and allow her the satisfaction of managing him. Green repeats their conversation in such a way that the sad comedy of their marriage is immediately obvious.[12] For the rest of the novel Robert is either sent on futile tasks or tries to forget his emasculation by spending more and more time in the bar. A younger version of the Hignams are the practically engaged couple Miss Angela Crevy and Mr. Robin Adams. Bolstered by the slavish attention of Robin, Angela Crevy is not as insecure as Julia neither is she as ingenuous. She is prepared to give herself to Robin but only in her own time and only in exchange for a respectable position.[13] Nevertheless she is intrigued by Amabel's unconventional way of life and rather flattered when Amabel deigns to pay her some attention. She is not shocked by Amabel, as Julia is, but then she is not competing for Max in the same way that Julia is.

Alex Alexander completes the group of Max's coterie and his attitude towards the well-groomed, well-brought-up, upper-middle-class

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[12] Ibid., pp. 20 - 21.

[13] Ibid., p. 197.

girls like Julia and Angela is equivocal. As he is mixing drinks for these women, after Amabel's arrival at the hotel, he realises the debilitating effect they have on him.[14] Alex's name which is faintly narcissistic indicates his self-absorption. He begins his journey to the station by musing, in a literary fashion, on the state of the weather and his position in the world,[15] but his reflections are interrupted by the necessity of coping with the mundane details of life like finding the station, arriving at a destination on time, and paying the taxi-driver. Alex is unable to cope, successfully, with any of these operations and consequently feels 'haunted' by the fear of being late[16] and is hounded by the taxi-driver who wants to be paid. This sense of persecution pervades Alex's life and he is constantly trying to secure his personal comfort[17] and in this way shut out the irritations and anxieties of everyday living. When the steel doors of the hotel are closed so that the waiting crowds will not try to share in the privileged comfort of the hotel occupants, Alex is alarmed and unrealistically thinks that he can solve the problems of the moment by simply going home.[18] He is tolerated by the group because he contributes

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[14] Ibid., p. 196.

[15] Ibid., p. 37.

[16] Ibid., p. 39.

[17] Ibid., p. 54.

[18] Ibid., p. 63.

lively gossip, acts as a messenger boy and pays attention to the women when they require it. Angela especially, uses him to promote jealousy in Robin and though Alex enjoys the verbal sexual play he is reluctant to take the game any further. As Angela and he prepare to enter the bedroom together, in front of an outraged Robin, he exclaims,

> "No, look here, Angela," Alex said, determined now to escape, "what about that hotel detective?"

and later, when they are alone,

> "You aren't going to do something awful, are you?" he said, because after all he did not know her well enough to say he would stand for no further baiting of Mr. Adams.[19]

The women in the group regard him as harmless[20] and though his rather bitter outbursts are frowned upon, these are explained by his unfortunate family circumstances, which are patronizingly described by the self-satisfied Claire Hignam.[21] For, after all, Angela Crevy had coolly pointed out[22] why the women felt safe with a man "who was not supposed to care about girls."[23]

These, then, are the people who are bound together by wealth and education and position and by the need to fill the hours between waking

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[19] Ibid., p. 120.

[20] Ibid., p. 239.

[21] Ibid., pp. 237 - 238.

[22] Ibid., pp. 117 - 118.

[23] Ibid., p. 191.

and sleeping with some kind of activity. Their time is spent making arrangements for their physical comforts, gossiping, going on journeys, visiting friends and relatives. This particular afternoon they are forced to remain in a suite of hotel rooms by the fog that has delayed the departure of the boat train but the restrictions of time and space do not much alter the pattern of their lives. The pattern of their lives is apparently as distinct from the surging, working crowd on the station platform, as their physical appearance is. The colour of their bathed and scented bodies, the material and cut of their clothes makes them easily identifiable. With a pointed simile, Green expresses the distinctiveness of the wealthy.

> Like two lilies in a pond, romantically part of it but infinitely remote, surrounded, supported, floating in it if you will, but projected by being different on to another plane, though there was so much water you could not see these flowers or were liable to miss them, stood Miss Crevy and her young man, apparently serene, envied for their obviously easy circumstances and Angela coveted for her looks by all those water beetles if you like, by those people standing round.[24]

The nameless and amorphous crowd whose labour surrounds and supports the privileged few is depicted in 'low green and mustard colours'[25] and the women, unlike Angela are pallid and noisily good humoured. Alex Alexander's role in the Mayfair group is to fetch and carry and to be amusing but Green assigns him another role, that of being the

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[24] Ibid., p. 27.

[25] Ibid., p. 28.

mouthpiece for the author's comments on the virtues of wealth. One may not be able to buy one's way into the kingdom of Heaven but one can buy the comforts which make the waiting so much more dignified.

> That is what it is to be rich, he thought,
> if you are held up, if you have to wait
> then you can do it after a bath in your
> dressing-gown and if you have to die then
> not as any bird tumbling dead from its
> branch down for the foxes, light and stiff,
> but here in bed, here inside, with doctors
> to tell you it is all right and with relations
> to ask if it hurts. Again no standing, no
> being pressed together, no worry since it did
> not matter if one went or stayed.[26]

Death may be the great leveller but some have to be less levelled than others.

In Party-Going, Green is tackling larger groups of people than in his previous novels. To prevent the novel from being divided into two class-divided halves, and to reinforce the idea that this novel is about the human predicament and not merely a satire about the wealthy classes, Green uses the two groups, those in the hotel and those on the platform, to counter-point, contrast and complement each other. The two groups, the charmed circle of the privileged in the hotel and the indistinct masses on the platform are waiting for the fog to lift so that they can be about their business. However, both groups are similar in the devices they affect to mark the passage of time spent in waiting. The wealthy drink alcohol, gossip about their friends, and make love.[27] The servants drink tea, gossip about their masters and flirt. The

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[26] Ibid., p. 195.

[27] Ibid., pp. 202 - 203.

difference is in intensity rather than in kind. As the time wears on, in both groups, the satisfactions of community and physical comfort are less and less sustaining. In Party-Going, as in Living, Green, on occasion, inserts a passage that on the surface appears merely descriptive but in which the details are so phrased that they draw the reader beyond the superficial. As night combines with the fog toward the end of the afternoon Max's group are becoming more anxious and less well-behaved[28] and the masses are equally tired of being nice to each other. For a while they had encouraged each other by talking and singing but finally 'having tried everything, desolation overtook them.'[29] In metaphoric passages that are reminiscent of Hamlet's disgust[30] with the inevitability of one's physical decay,[31] and Shakespeare's "bare, ruined choirs," Green presents a society that is devoid of the consolations of a life after death but which can experience only the dubious and uncertain joys of living.

> They were like ruins in the wet, places
> that is where life has been, palaces,
> abbeys, cathedrals, throne rooms, pantries,
> cast aside and tumbled down with no
> immediate life and with what used to be in
> them lost rather than hidden now the roof
> has fallen in. Ruins that is not of their
> suburban homes for they had hearts, and
> feelings to dream, and hearts to make up
> what they did not like into other things.
> But ruins, for life in such circumstances
> was only possible because it would not last,
> only endurable because it had broken down

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[28] Ibid., pp. 202 - 203.

[29] Ibid., p. 201.

[30] William Shakespeare, Hamlet, ed. George Lyman Kittredge, (Toronto: Ginn and Company, 1967), p. 149.

[31] Party-Going, p. 201.

> and as it lasted and became more desolate and wet so, as it seemed more likely to be permanent, at least for an evening, they grew restive.[32]

The desolation of this picture of human beings caught by existence and waiting between birth and death is only alleviated by the succeeding paragraphs which touch on the comforts that make this life at all viable: the manservant, Thompson's, memory of the girl whose "kiss had blessed him";[33] each waiting passenger building his "little room(s)"[34] around him with his luggage; the old lady making an adventure out of the whole dismal experience by brewing tea on her "Primus".[35] Despite the evident futility of the situation the need of human beings to order their sojourn is irrepressible.[36]

These passages are clear examples of how different Green's prose techniques are in this novel from those in his previous ones. In Blindness the separate nature of each character is mirrored by the tension between their external and internal expression. In this way the many facets of each individual are revealed and the novelist shows how these facets are developed through the individual's experience and connection with others. The emphasis in this novel is on how distinct

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[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid., p. 202.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid., pp. 201 - 202.

and self-contained individuals are. In Living, life is seen as an "inextricable tangle",[37] a view he recorded in his autobiography, but there is also an attempt to make some pattern from the tangle. Therefore, in the way he arranges his prose and selects his details in this novel Henry Green shows people's interdependency socially, professionally and emotionally. That certain feelings and responses, desires and fears are universal is established in Living by the synchronic pattern of the prose. In this way also, the temporal and spatial interdependency of life is shown. Green, by structuring his novel in this way displays life without preaching and reveals life, without argument. Both novels, Living and Blindness end on an affirmative note, the second novel no less exuberant than the first.

The mood of Party-Going is more funereal. This tone is sounded through the use of extended metaphors, the recurrence of certain images and symbols and is sustained by the detached narratorial style of the author. In this novel there is little sense of unfolding time. All the incidents are connected by the frequent use of the word "meantime" and thus the static nature of events is underlined. Similarly, there is little sense of the perceptible and imperceptible development in people's personalities or relationships. Most people in the novel are static, entrapped by the fog, their own characters and circumstances and life, itself.

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[37] Henry Green, Pack My Bag, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1940), p. 246.

Ostensibly the novel is about the bored and idle rich, a class of people Green knew intimately at Oxford, as he described in Pack My Bag.

> The money snobbery was acute. Several undergraduates had incomes of up to three thousand pounds a year and they were sought after for their cars and the parties they gave. Without exception the rich of that generation were the most unpunctual people I have ever met. They behaved like stage favourites and when you were invited to a meal it was usual to be kept waiting three-quarters of an hour before the host, languid with money, deigned to come in.[38]

Max Adey, in Party-Going, who is undecided about whether he should bother to join his guests on the Riviera holiday, is an example of these "stage favourites". Henry Green's position as cousin of the Earl of Hardwicke, nephew to Lord Leaconfield, and husband to Lord Biddulph's sister,[39] placed him in an advantaged situation from which to view English upper-class life in the 1930's. His work on the Board of Directors of his father's business extended this perspective as did his contrasting experience of working on the shop floor. That it took him seven years to write Party-Going is indicative of his conscious struggle to use his experiences artistically and not autobiographically. His novel is, in part, a brilliant pillory of their easy, purposeless lives. But the purposelessness of their lives is not exclusive to their class. To assume that it is, is to ignore key passages in the novel. The growing presence of an all-pervading

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[38] Ibid., pp. 205 - 206.

[39] Nigel Dennis, "The Double Life of Henry Green", Life, 4 August 1952, p. 89.

menace which could, at best, culminate in social disruption or at worst, in painful and ignominious death and thus make a mockery of any sense of purpose was becoming more evident to people in England during the uncertain years of the 1930's. Green, in another metaphorically suggestive paragraph indicates this reality.

> Night was coming up and it came out of the sea. Over harbours, up the river, by factories, bringing lights in windows and lamps on the streets until it met this fog where it lay and poured more darkness in.
>
> Fog burdened with night began to roll into this station striking cold through thin leather up into their feet where in thousands they stood and waited. Coils of it reached down like women's long hair reached down and caught their throats and veiled here and there what they could see, like lovers' glances. A hundred cold suns switched on above found out these coils where, before the night joined in, they had been smudges and looking up at two of them above was like she was looking down at you from under long strands hanging down from her forehead only that light was cold and these curls tore at your lungs.[40]

The "she" in this passage is Julia, who at the end of the previous section was wistfully imagining that her group in the luxury suite of the Station Hotel were atop an ivory tower and she, like Sleeping Beauty,[41] needed only Max's chaste and princely kiss to awake her to perpetual happiness. Green then extends the fairy-tale association to point out the danger of such fancies that only serve to blinker perceptions of reality. The above passage is reminiscent of the story

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[40] Ibid., p. 199.

[41] Ibid., p. 198.

of Rapunzel, who by letting down her braids was able to allow the prince access to her tower prison. But those same braids, when used by the witch, her guardian, resulted in blindness and years of desolation for the prince. By using these mythic allusions and metaphoric words which point out the two-edged nature of life, the "light" that can be "cold", Green shows how comfortless life can be especially to those who, like Julia, only remember certain parts of a childhood fairy-tale. This section of the novel that has opened with such an ominous prelude continues with a careful description of the attempts of the crowd to alleviate their existence, but their final lapse into desolation and silence comes rapidly. The people on the platform are waiting hopefully, under the broad Departure sign, but that this departure is linked in Green's mind with death is obvious from the similies Green uses here and the subjects of conversation that his characters dwell upon. The man-servants of Julia and Max are described as they wait for the fog to lift.

> But at one point no movement showed where,
> like any churchyard, gravestone luggage
> waited with mourners, its servants and owners,
> squatted in between.[42]

Robert Hignam's man who is searching for Julia's luggage moves through the crowds, who are described in this way:-

> They were like the dead resurrected in
> their clothes under this cold veiled light
> and in an antiseptic air. He dodged about
> asking any man he saw if he was Miss Julia
> Wray's, so much as to say, "I be the grave-
> digger, would I bury you again?"[43]

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[42] Ibid., p. 200.

[43] Ibid., pp. 203 - 204.

Thompson and Edwards are suspicious of Hignam's man, as they are of everyone around them. Their tension is reflected in their discussion about Miss Fellowes' illness and their healthy scepticism about doctors.

> "He's killed any number of them," he said, "when they've been carried in," and as he talked of death his speech relapsed into some dialect of his own, "any bloody number of 'em," he went on, "as've been took bad on the bloody Continent and 'ave said well if they were going to be sick they'd be sick in their own native land and so left it too late, appendicitis and all," he said.[44]

If these vague references to suspect and murderous doctors, to people 'took bad on the bloody Continent' and an earlier remark about Thompson's 'jew's harp' are added to Edwards' solemn statement that

> 'Death's a bloody awful thing,.... but it isn't as easy as all that, it takes time to die.'[45]

the undercurrents of anxiety in an era that was witnessing the rise of Nazi power, and its commitment to eradicate any race that threatened its superiority, are clearly detected.

This section of the novel closes with this anxiety striking similar chords in the conversation between Claire Hignam and Evelyn Henderson. Their subject is not death in general, or deaths on the Continent but the annoying possibility of death among their own number, namely Miss Fellowes, who is Claire's aunt. Miss Fellowes, an affectionate aunt,

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[44] Ibid., p. 205.

[45] Ibid.

had come to the station to bid 'bon voyage' to her niece but had been diverted by the need to clean and dispose of a dead pigeon that had fallen at her feet. The bird's abrupt death so upset her that she had taken a few drinks to steady herself but had only succeeded in becoming drunk. This indiscretion, combined with her frailty and her strange insistence on carrying the bird around with her, had resulted in her becoming very ill, much to the annoyance of the 'voyageurs' who were faced with the responsibility of finding out the cause of her malady and effecting a cure. Nothing they attempted seemed to arrest the illness and at this point in the novel Evelyn connects Miss Fellowes' illness with the bird.

> I think what we are both afraid of....
> is that parcel she had and what was inside
> it.[46]

That the character of Miss May Fellowes and the contents of her parcel is significant in this novel is recognized by most critical writers. William York Tindall confessed that the significance of the pigeon eluded him.

> Another reading might almost fix the relationship of artichoke, station, and bird that baffles and delights me, but "almost" is the important word. In enterprises of this kind we confront the penultimate at last, and if, avoiding it by some dodge, we could attain our goal, and comprehend the incomprehensible, what else could we do? After all, we are but romantics, eager to lose ourselves in a mystery, in spite of our nostalgia for Lancelot Andrewes.[47]

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[46] Ibid., p. 211.

[47] William York Tindall, Forces in Modern British Literature, 1885 - 1956, (New York: Knoff, 1956), p. 95.

John Russell judges that all the birds, the pigeons, sea gulls and doves in the novel 'symbolize yearning and self-delusion',[48] but turns most of his critical attention to an analysis of the bamboo forests and artichokes that occur in the memories of Julia and Robert. A. Kingsley Weatherhead remarks that Claire and Evelyn's fear of the pigeon is indicative of their own sexual impotence,[49] though Claire Hignam is clearly more potent than her husband, and then he continues by supposing that the pigeon and Auntie May's obsession with it, is an attempt by the older lady to cling to youth.

> Naturally she seeks to protract her usefulness; hence she clings to the bird, clinging thereby to life itself.[50]

This rather contorted reading of a symbol of which, admittedly Professor Weatherhead says "the meaning .... is not absolutely clear,"[51] is based on the assumption that the main business of this novel is the "departure" of young people for maturity. This assumption is not proven by the novel, as the characters show no development or change in their natures. Julia is as deluded at the beginning as at the end. Max and Amabel as self-indulgent, Robin, Alex and Robert as emasculated, Claire and Evelyn as well-behaved; and even Auntie May recovers. A more recent

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[48] John Russell, p. 108.

[49] A. Kingsley Weatherhead, p. 45.

[50] Ibid., p. 47.

[51] Ibid., p. 46.

article by Keith Odom, that investigates the scope and significance of birds in all Henry Green's novels, thinks that Miss Fellowes and her pigeon, rather like the Ancient Mariner and his albatross, bears "the sins of her society .... though she is both unknowing and unrecognized."[52]

Several times and on several occasions Green has been classified as enigmatic in his personality and style and nowhere, is he more so than in some of the metaphors and symbols he uses in this novel. Party-Going opens with a closely detailed description of how a pigeon, blinded by the fog, flies into an iron balustrade and falls dead at Miss Fellowes' feet and how this elderly lady copes with this encounter.[53] The suddenness of the event, Miss Fellowes' assumption of responsibility, the fact that the "bird" becomes "her dead pigeon" and the mystery surrounding its inexplicable appearance suggest that this encounter is to take on greater significance in the novel. Nor is the incident left there. The whole first section is devoted to how Miss Fellowes discharges her assumed responsibility and is recounted in language that has associations of prophecy. Miss Fellowes carries the pigeon reverentially to the Ladies' Room and there washes it and wraps it in a brown paper parcel. The subtle associations of Green's words suggest that this ritual must be performed despite the presence of reluctant and suspicious onlookers who are nevertheless necessary witnesses to this absolution.

> For Miss Fellowes, as they soon saw, had
> drawn up her sleeves and on the now dirty

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[52] Keith Odom, "Symbolism and Diversion: Birds in the Novels of Henry Green", Descant, VI, (Winter 1962), p. 39.

[53] Party-Going, p. 7.

> water with a thin wreath or two of blood, feathers puffed up and its head sideways, drowned along one wing, lay her dead pigeon. Air just above it was dizzy with a little steam, for she was doing what she felt must be done with hot water, turning her fingers to the colour of its legs and blood.[54]

Those watching, are the two nannies erect and stiff in their starched grey uniforms, are already suggestive of a kind of Greek chorus, and later are specifically referred to in this way. These women together with the lavatory attendant, who is described as the 'guardian' of this place, are silent, the former out of loyalty to the family they have served, and the latter because of the tip she has received, as Miss Fellowes bathes this dirty, broken, verminous, blood-stained creature.

Peripheral to this action but connected with it by association is the arrival of the members of Max's party. The two separate groups meet and for a while Miss Fellowes is relieved of the dead bird when Robin Adams drops it ignominiously into a wastepaper basket. Immediately the bird is detached from her, Miss Fellowes feels better. As Angela and Robin go away, Miss Fellowes retrieves the bird, partly because her nausea and vertigo had gone. This is part of her reason. What else motivated her action? This is the enigma. It is a comic but disturbingly associative opening through which the whole tone of the novel is set. In Green's previous novels there is little comedy. The incongruous and the absurd are not seen as amusing. In this novel,

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[54] Ibid., p. 10.

however, the comedy raises laughter which verges on a scream. The picture of Miss Fellowes' washing a dead pigeon in a Station lavatory wash-basin, watched disapprovingly by two servants and a menial is ludicrous, but when it becomes suggestive of other rituals and other times the scene is more ominous. It is possible that the pigeon represents the verminous and broken end of physical life that awaits everyone, and which is so cogently expressed later in the novel.[55] Miss Fellowes is perhaps an annoying relict of a generation that observed the passage of all life with reverence and felt a sense of duty to living creatures, even though this responsibility and awareness of death could be restrictive, even damaging as it was to Miss Fellowes. For as long as she carries the pigeon she is ill. Max's Mayfair group are far less reverential of life. Their overt sexual games being essentially unproductive are played self-indulgently and merely to pass the time. The elderly Miss Fellowes and her decaying pigeon are reminders not only of duty and responsibility but also of inevitable age and death. These reminders are naturally distasteful to the well-fed, bathed and fashionably dressed young travellers. Julia, hearing that Miss Fellowes has recovered, goes to visit her.

> Julia had never thought of her as being old. She had been brought up with Claire and so had always known Miss Fellowes who had in consequence seemed ageless to her in that her appearance had not altered much in all those years. And now she saw her all at once as very old and for the last time that day she heard the authentic threatening knock

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[55] Ibid., p. 201.

> of doom she listened for so much when things were not going right. But it was impossible for anything to upset her now they were really going.[56]

So, for the moment, Julia because she has a purpose, can forget the "threatening knock of doom". Even Miss Fellowes adopts means of mollifying "authentic doom". She covers the bird with brown paper and hides the faintness it induces under a mask of politeness.[57]

As Green well knew, the devastations of time and the depredations of people upon each other were obscured, in English society especially, by acceptable codes of polite exchange. The Hignams, Miss Henderson and Miss Crevy and even Max determinedly regulate their thoughts and conversation with these acceptable forms.[58] The recurrent references to Embassy Richard hinge upon the question of the correct way in which his invitation, or non-invitation, should have been handled and how he should have conducted himself in the ensuing correspondence. In the minds of this group at least the sole concern of the Prince Royal and Ambassador is the matter of an Embassy official who gate-crashed a party, not the steady build up of armanents in Germany, the disappearance of racial groups or the duplicities at the Conference tables. The privileged group in the Station Hotel argue about correct forms of

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[56] Ibid., p. 244.

[57] Ibid., p. 11.

[58] Ibid., pp. 78 - 79.

behaviour,[59] secure the correct things to eat and drink and try, politely, to conceal the fact of Miss Fellowes' drunkenness. Peripheral to this activity, the police, described in language that makes them reminiscent of Hitler's storm-troopers,[60] march in to control the crowd in the station, and the huge steel doors of the hotel slam shut to exclude the masses from extra food and shelter.

Time and again, throughout Party-Going, Max's group attempts to establish formal order in a world that is increasingly disordered.[61] Early in the novel Miss Fellowes is unable to secure tea in the ugly, chromium self-service restaurant,[62] and though she could entirely ignore at[63] will anything unpleasant or what she called rude behaviour, her unconventional decision to order whiskey instead of tea causes consternation in the nannies, who comment on the changing order of life. Later as Robert Hignam is looking for Miss Fellowes and is pushing his way through the oppressive mass of people who are trying to eat, to detach himself from this sweaty reality his mind connects with the 'romance' he used to feel when he was a child forcing his way through a bamboo patch.[64] Another way of avoiding the reality of his

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[59] Ibid., pp. 55 - 69.

[60] Ibid., p. 53.

[61] Ibid., p. 174.

[62] Ibid., p. 125.

[63] Ibid., p. 24.

[64] Ibid., p. 47.

dislike for Max is by being polite. This welding of escapist images with polite sentences both of which are bound by events and metaphors which are more menacing occurs frequently in this novel and in this way Green is able to create the picture of this group of people bound together only by a dependence on Max's wealth and their own acceptable respectability in manner, language and dress.

That this unity is precarious is made obvious by other metaphors in the novel. Not only are Angela Crevy and her devoted Robin likened to two exquisite lilies in the dull-colored pond of humanity but the whole group as they gather on the platform cling together like survivors on a raft who gather support from their familiarity in a situation that is oppressive.

Frequently in the novel the mass of people, who by their labour and purchasing power support this group, and who also have the power, if accepted restraints are removed, of overwhelming this Mayfair raft, are described in images that reveal the potentially uncontrollable nature of their power. As the London crowds prepare to go home they are seen as massed but controlled.

> Now they came out in ones and threes and now a flood was coming out and spreading into streets round; but while traffic might be going in any direction there was no one on foot who was not making his way home and that meant for most by way of the station.
>
> As pavements swelled out under this dark flood so that if you had been ensconced in that pall of fog looking down below at twenty foot deep of night illuminated by street lamps, these crowded pavements would have looked to you as if for all the world they might have been conduits.[65]

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[65] Ibid., p. 14.

As they wait patiently for the fog to lift and the trains to start running again they are seen by Julia, sympathetically

> "Oh, my dear!" she said, "poor Thompson." As those people smoked below, or it might have been the damp off their clothes evaporating rather than their cigarettes, it did seem like November sun striking through mist rising off water. Or, so she thought, like those illustrations you saw in weekly papers, of corpuscles in blood, for here and there a narrow stream of people shoved and moved in lines three deep and where they did this they were like veins.[66]

At this point she feels like a Queen elevated by night above respectful crowds and is shocked by Alex's comparison that their view is like that from a gibbet. As the crowd's patience is strained and it becomes more restive, the image of sun-lit mist rising from a still body of water gives way to one which is less placid.

> And as she watched she saw this crowd was in some way different. It could not be larger as there was no more room, but in one section under her window it seemed to be swaying like branches rock in a light wind and, paying greater attention, she seemed to hear a continuous murmur coming from it.[67]

The 'huge witch roar'[68] of the crowd shatters the serenity of Max and Amabels' sleep and when they break into the hotel Julia is certain that, like flood water, they will desecrate and contaminate anything they contact.

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[66] Ibid., pp. 87 - 88.

[67] Ibid., p. 99.

[68] Ibid., p. 227.

By using similar imagery in describing the crowds and in describing the pain that is experienced by Miss Fellowes Green subtly shows how easily this surge of humanity could overwhelm a class when it is no longer defended by wealth and position. Green describes at length Miss Fellowes' tipsy hallucinations and though these are comic they are also menacing.

> She would try not to turn her eyes down to where rising waves broke over rocks as the nearer that black mass advanced so fast the sea rose and ate up what little was left between her and those wild waters. Each time this scene was repeated she felt so frightened, and then it was menacing and she throbbed unbearably, it was all forced into her head; it was so menacing she thought each time the pressure was such her eyes would be forced out of her head to let her blood out. And then when she thought she must be overwhelmed, or break, this storm would go back and those waters and her blood recede, that moon would go out above her head, and a sweet tide washed down from scalp to toes and she could rest.[69]

This long image is followed by a brief remark by the station master that the crowd is estimated at thirty thousand strong. Later in the novel as the crowd becomes more restive the descriptions of Miss Fellowes' visions of menacing, stormy water and the physical description of the crowd are more closely fused.[70] The mock comedy of the Wagnerian rhythms that Green applies to the description of an old lady drunkenly retching only heighten the tension that is experienced by the Mayfair clique.

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[69] Ibid., pp. 75 - 76.

[70] Ibid., pp. 86 - 87.

> In terror she watched the seas rise to get at her, so menacing her blood throbbed unbearably, and again it was all forced into her head but this had happened so often she felt she had experienced the worst of it. But now with a roll of drums and then a most frightful crash lightning came out of that cloud and played upon the sea, and this was repeated, and then again, each time nearer till she knew she was worse than she had ever been. One last crash which she knew to be unbearable and she burst and exploded into complete insensibility. She vomited.[71]

Other techniques that Green uses also point out that, as Garnett thought, one can "foresee much" in this novel. Appropriately, Garnett used a word associated with prophecy for, throughout Party-Going, Green uses the language of allegory to describe the congregation of these travellers, their innumerable quests in search of each other and of their luggage.

> So this stranger on his mission went into rooms at a venture, tried windows and found them locked, and then went out again until he came to one room where two maids leant out of an open casement towards their knight standing on his friend's shoulder from the station floor ten foot beneath. His bowler hat lay next his friend's feet and in a cross neatly on the crown of it lay his pair of gloves.[72]

and though the individuals soon lapse into the brutal language and coarse conventions of their class, for a while "they have not been so charmed for ages". Even their movements up flights of stairs take on the sense of being ritual ascents.[73] Robert Hignam's constant

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[71] Ibid., p. 87.

[72] Ibid., p. 177.

[73] Ibid., p. 63.

repetition of his strange encounter with Miss Fellowes in the tea-room[74] is reminiscent of the repetitive incantations that one used to raise spirits. Julia uses the same method to try to raise in Max the memory of their relationship before it was eradicated by Amabel's enchantment. But Julia's spell of memories[75] does not have the force of the high priestess of the group.[76] Her evocation of ivory towers and dreaming worlds is soon overcast by the coiling fog and the desolate crowd;[77] in the same way, her superficial, vacuous world could disintegrate under the realistic pressures of the crowd.

In order to detach himself from this group of people, with whom he was so familiar, and to present them in this fabulous light Green uses a technique which, in addition, lends touches of high comedy to his prose. At certain crucial moments in Party-Going rather like a separate but benign god he comments on the situations and follies of his characters. After all the members of Max's party have arrived at the station, Green interposes a few words.

> So now at last all of this party is in one place, and, even if they have not yet all of them come across each other, their baggage is collected in the Registration Hall. Where, earlier, hundreds had made their way to this station

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[74] Ibid., p. 65.

[75] Ibid., p. 198.

[76] Ibid., p. 182.

[77] Ibid., pp. 199 - 201.

> thousands were coming in now, it was the end of a day for them, the beginning of a time for our party.[78]

He moves in and out of his characters minds in an easy ominiscent way, pausing now and then to reveal thoughts of which even his characters are unaware. In this way, Max's position as a "nouveau riche" is made clear[79] and how he consolidated his position.

> Max was dark and excessively handsome, one of those rich young men who when still younger had been taken up by an older woman, richer than himself. Money always goes to money, the poor always marry someone poorer than themselves, but it is only the rich who rule worlds such as we describe and no small part of Max's attraction lay in his having started so well with someone even richer than himself.[80]

Several paragraphs later, as a prelude to Amabel's entrance Green writes a few paragraphs that analyse the motives behind the so-called friendships among the very wealthy. These paragraphs are reminiscent of Fielding's or Thackeray's asides,

> They avoided all discussions on taste and were not encumbered by possessions; what they had was theirs in law but was never personal to them. If their houses were burned down they had only to go to the same man they all thought best to get another built, if they lost anything or even if it was mislaid the few shops they went to would be glad to lend whatever it might be, up to elephants or rhinos, until what had been missed could be replaced.

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[78] Ibid., p. 39.

[79] Ibid., p. 32.

[80] Ibid., p. 84.

> This rule applied to everything they had except themselves, being so rich they could not be bought, so they laid more store than most on mutual relationships. Rich people cling together because the less well off embarrass them and there are not so many available who are rich for one rich man who drops out to be easily replaced.[81]

At another point in the novel Green inserts extra information to mock Julia's condescending sympathy for the crowds far below her. She is enjoying their "boisterous good-humored song", but she does not understand the words. If she did, her enjoyment would be lessened for it is about the rape of a girl like herself.

> They were now like sheep with golden tenor voices, so she was thinking, happily singing their troubles away and being good companions. What she could not tell was that those who were singing were Welshmen up for a match, and what they sang in Welsh was of the rape of a Druid's silly daughter under one of Snowdon's wilder mountains. She thought only they knew what it meant, but it sounded light-hearted.[82]

In this passage also, is fused the detached ironic tone that is so typical of Green's authorial role in this novel, and the metaphorical, and prophetic suggestions of his prose. Both these elements dominate this novel. Elizabeth Bowen once commented on the "hallucinatory"[83] quality of Green's writing and this comment is especially applicable to Party-Going with its evocative symbols, incantatory phrases, prophetic

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[81] Ibid., pp. 133 - 135.

[82] Ibid., p. 152.

[83] Bruce Bain, Writer Observed, p. 109.

associations, mythic allusions and metaphorical pasages. However, these techniques are necessary for Green to prophesy the disintegration of not only a class, but a whole philosophical attitude. In the years after the novel was published the European world, like the people on the station platform, was going to be in ruins and many thousands of people would discover what it meant to be

> "so crowded together they were beginning to be pressed against each other, so close that every breath had been inside another past that lipstick or those cracked lips, those even teeth, loose dentures, down into other lungs, so weary, so desolate and cold that no amount of "charms" or "chintz curtains" could shut out oblivion.[84]

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[84] Ibid., p. 201.

Chapter IV

CAUGHT

"There's always something you can't describe,
and it's not the blitz alone that's true of."[1]

After the completion of Party-Going in 1939, Henry Green had reached the limits of his present experience and forms of expression. His novels Blindness, Living and Party-Going had crystallized, in various ways, his experience to that date. The 'rising anguish'[2] of the twelve months before the declaration of war in 1939 induced in Green, and indeed in most people in England, anger, frustration and fear about a future that was bound to be radically altered for the worst. Green partially quenched his fears, or at least came to terms with them, by writing his autobiography, Pack My Bag. As this work is a collection of personal reminiscences and not a formal artistic presentation it is not the purpose of this study to discuss it. Its value lies in the recollections of Green's childhood, school and student days, and his early years in the family firm, that are recorded together with certain comments about how language can be used to create life from life.[3] Of more interest is the way those comments find physical expression in his novels and his shorter pieces of writing.

During the first few years of World War II, some of these pieces appeared in Folios of New Writing and New Writing and Daylight.[4] The

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[1] Henry Green, Caught (London: The Hogarth Press, 1943), p. 180.

[2] Henry Green, "Before the Great Fire", London Magazine, VII, (1960).

[3] Henry Green, Pack My Bag, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1939), p. 238.

[4] These are listed at the end of this study in the bibliography of Henry Green's writings.

names of these magazines indicate their intention. Everyone in England, was being exposed to violent "new" experiences and writers, especially, were finding that existing modes of expression were inadequate to cope with their own responses. As early as 1941 Green, in an article that discussed the unique style both personal and literary, of Charles M. Doughty,[5] drew a comparison between the development in perspective and form afforded Doughty by his solitary observations in the Arabian Desert and mentioned the possibility of similar solitary journeys within England during the war years.

> Now that we are at war, is not the advantage for writers, and for those who read them, that they will be forced, by the need they have to fight, to go out into territories, it may well be at home, which they would never otherwise have visited, and that they will be forced, by way of their own selves, towards a style which, by the impact of a life strange to them and by their honest acceptance of this, will be pure as Doughty's was, so that they will reach each one his own style that shall be his monument?[6]

That Green was striving for "his own style" that would be his "monument" is obvious in his short sketches written in the 1940's. These are explorations of his own feelings about war and his participation in it as a member of the Auxiliary Fire Service in London during the Blitz. These, though, are in the nature of a reconnaissance before the more detailed survey of Caught.

In an account that was published a decade after his experiences in the Auxiliary Fire Service Green wrote in a factual and anecdotal

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[5] Henry Green, "Apologia", Folios of New Writing, (Autumn, 1941), pp. 44 - 51.

[6] Ibid., pp. 50 - 51.

way about those uneasy, anxious months before the declaration of war and his training for Auxiliary Fire Service. He summarized several anecdotes by saying

> So what then did we learn? How much the London Fire Brigade hated us, certainly this was explained, almost apologetically, over and over again. How to put out fires? Hardly. Nothing? No, not that. We just all of us began to live another life in which we had an entirely different way of living.[7]

The form of "Before the Great Fire", though, provided only a two-dimensional presentation of that "other life", that "different way of living". Green could deduce that "We are here on earth only, if strong enough, to look life in the face,"[8] but he was not creating that life in the mind of his reader, he was merely telling a story. In "Mr. Jonas" he attempted more.

This story describes how a man, a Mr. Jonas, was rescued from under the blazing rubble of bombed building. The man's name,perhaps intentionally,echoes the name of the Biblical Jonah and so does his situation. A piece of humanity is salvaged from a dark void that is, moments later, a blazing inferno. The man emerges unscathed, silent, and passes into oblivion, out of Green's life. Nevertheless he has, for a while, been an incongruous part of the writer's experience and in order to make some sort of sense out of this encounter the writer tries to recreate it through language. He uses several techniques

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[7] Henry Green, "Before the Great Fire", London Magazine, 1959, pp. 24 - 25.

[8] Ibid., p. 24.

to achieve this. The flames and the smoke, a pervading part of that experience, are described in imagistic language.

> What I saw, a pile of wreckage like vast blocks of slate, the slabs of wet masonry piled high across this passage, was hidden by a fresh cloud of steam and smoke, warm, limitless dirty cotton wool, disabling in that it tight bandaged the eyes. Each billow, and steam rolls unevenly in air, islanding a man in the way that he can, to others, be isolated asleep in blankets. Nor did the light of a torch do more than make my sudden blindness visible to me in a white shine below the waist. There was nothing for it but to go on towards voices out in front, but climbing, slipping up, while unrolling the hose, I felt that I was not a participant, that all this must have been imagined, until, in another instant, a puff of wind, perhaps something in the wreckage which was alight below the surface, left me out in the clear as though in, and among, the wet indigo reflecting planes of shattered tombs deep in a tumulus the men coughing ahead had just finished blasting.[9]

The associative images of hospitals and graveyards conjure, in the reader's mind, the sense of violent, inescapable and immemorial danger, that was the pervasive feeling at the time. In addition to these images Green analyses, in a more didactic way, his feelings at that time.

> Accustomed, as all were, to sights of this kind, there was not one amongst us who did not now feel withdrawn into himself, as though he had come upon a place foreign to him but which he was aware he had to visit, as if it were a region the conditions in which he knew would be something between living and dying, not, that is, a web of dreams, but rather such a frontier of hopes

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[9] Ibid., pp. 13 - 14.

> or mostly fears as it may be in the destiny
> of each, or almost all, to find, betwixt
> coma and the giving up of living.[10]

Green is the central character in this story and he explains his sensations. He records snatches of direct conversation in order to catch the reader's attention and to show that dialogue is inadequate in carrying the feelings that co-exist with the events. In total, then, the story engages the reader's attention because the incident is sufficiently strange and the descriptions evocative. However, due to the lack of characterization and the unadulterated intrusions of the author, the story lacks dimension.

That Green was aware of this was evidenced by a collection grouped under the title "The Lull". These seven different pieces are seven different ways that Green looks at the reality of the time. That his preoccupation is with attempts to communicate that reality, and not to explain it, is obvious from the prefatory note to his novel Caught which is the culmination of the exploratory passages in "The Lull".

> This book is about the Auxiliary Fire Service which saved London in her night blitzes, and bears no relation, or resemblance, to the National Fire Service, or any individual of that Service, which took over when raids on London had ended.
>
> The characters, while founded on the reality of that time, are not drawn from life. They are all imaginary men and women. In this book only 1940 in London is real. It is the effect of that time that I have written into the fiction of Caught.[11]

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[10] Ibid., pp. 11 - 12.

[11] Henry Green, Caught, p. 4.

Certain intimations of that reality occur in the seven parts of "The Lull". The first, that records casual conversation in a bar, records not only conversation but also the undercurrents of the hostility as well as the indifference that accompanies surface exchanges. Green begins this piece by explaining, in asides, the undetected meanings that are behind certain phrases but then he abandons this technique and allows the dialogue to carry its own communication. The second piece is an essay in how three anecdotes can be as boring as one and the interest in this extract comes not from the fireman's horrendous stories about his aunt, but from his mate's reaction to his failure to stimulate their interest. Familiarity, with their mate and his incredible stories, breeds indifference. Unfamiliarity can arouse interest and this is the theme of the third observation. In the fourth extract this idea becomes more than an observation. The story of the barrage balloon is told dramatically but it is not as eloquent as the silence that follows the conscientious objector's inhuman doubts about the fireman's duty to serve in the war. The fifth piece reveals not an eloquent silence but how conversation obstructs communication. Far more is revealed in the girl's French song than in her talk. In the final sections of "The Lull" one man keeps his perspective amid the tension of the waiting and the bombing by remembering how he defended his allotment against a crow, while another goes insane by living perpetually within the reality of the Blitz. As this fireman sits on the fire station roof surrounded by illusory flames and saving non-existent people he is seen as the quintessential representative of the insanity of a situation that

expects feeble, ill-prepared men to dutifully combat a holocaust.

Though these pieces seem quite disparate there is a unity in the fact that most of the characters are London firemen who share the anxiety of waiting for the Blitz, and the malaise that results from living in a threatened and disjointed society. These tensions extinguish any chance of real contact, by means of language, between individual human beings. It is these feelings and ideas that are welded into an even closer harmony in Caught. Green began this novel by saying that "only 1940 in London" was "real" and that his purpose was to write into his fiction the "effect" of that time. To do this his story had to be communicated in such a way that the effect arouse out of the way he put words together. Authorial asides and extraneous, unrelated detail would only block that communication. To create "the reality of that time" Green had to find ways of expressing the feeling of individual isolation each Auxiliary Fire Service man felt within the whole senseless endeavour, as well as the mutual dependency that was the only, admittedly frail, support against the surrounding destruction. However, the insular nature of the Auxiliary Fire Service life bred, not only support, but also hostility and suspicion that was nourished by the fact that England was under attack. In this absence of trust and presence of fear communication by language was automatically, often wilfully, misinterpreted. As Green said spoken words "were no means of communication now".[12]

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[12] Henry Green, Caught, p. 14.

Indeed, they were more often the means of persecution. Together with this sense of persecution that was present at this time, both externally from Hitler's bombers and internally from the rivalries within the hierarchy of the Auxiliary Fire Service, was the overwhelming human need to find cause and lay blame for these events so that some kind of order could be made out of that experience as time and again it was obvious "how different the real thing was to what we thought it was going to be".[13]

There are two fundamental ideas in this novel. Firstly, that there is a disparity between our conception of life and our position in it and the reality of our experiences and actions within life. Secondly, that the imagination plays a crucial role in narrowing the distance between our conceptions and the reality. They are expressed in the life, not only of Richard Roe but in and among the lives of all the characters. All the characters in Caught are engaged in the struggle to express their true reactions and feelings but fail either through their lack of confidence, or lack of vocabulary, or through the misunderstanding, or mis-application of the words they do employ. At times in the novel, only through the individual's imagination can the author express his character's real feelings and intentions. To underline the contrast between the individual's imaginative perception of events and their actual, physical expression Green uses imagistic language to describe the individual's way of ordering events and bare, factual language to record these events.

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[13] Ibid., p. 175.

The reader is left to determine which way is more "real". Time and again in this novel, the characters are "caught" within this struggle to articulate and thus control, for themselves and for others, their own responses to their surrounding reality.

The novel opens with Richard Roe, the almost anonymous protagonist, adjusting not only to personal bereavement but also to the separation from his home, his work and his son that is necessitated by the war and his decision to join the Auxiliary Fire Service. As these physical breaks are unavoidable he tries to retain some mental contact by making what could be a final leave both perfect and memorable for him and his son. But his stumbling inadequacy in making any kind of contact with his son mars the day. Gesture, action and speech fail so all that is left, for Roe, is to recreate in his imagination another time that he and his son shared. This time, when Christopher was abducted by the sister of the man who was later to be Roe's superior in the Auxiliary Fire Service, was also crucial in their lives. The distinction between the father's imaginative contact with his son's experience and his ineffectual verbal communications is clearly marked by Green's use of parenthesis. The language contained within parentheses is richly sensuous. Roe makes "his own pictures"[14] of what happened because he was out when the boy was returned and could not ask the right questions to try to probe Christopher's experience.

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[14] Ibid., p. 17.

Christopher's Aunt Dy was too "vague"[15] and "prosaic"[16]. Although she says later that "the real thing is the picture you carry in your eye afterwards, surely? It can't be what you can't remember, can it?"[17] She lacks the ability and desire to use words that will group these pictures into some kind of articulated order.

That all that is left of most individuals' reality is a series of "pictures" the essence of which can only be conveyed in images that connect with the individual imagination, is part of what Green "learned" in the Auxiliary Fire Service,

> All his period of training meant to Roe afterwards was flashes of a kind, scenes such as those when below the single arc lamp, an instructor's bulbous eyes followed the girl's criss-crossing legs, under silk stockings her skin a sheath of magnolia petals beneath the blue white light. Magnolia and rose was what it meant to him, the country house in which he had been born, and in which he was to spend his next leave with Christopher.[18]

In addition, he began to understand how the individual can be caught in the web of his own memories. As Roe comes to the end of another leave, Green uses this metaphor to indicate the captive power of these images.

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[15] Ibid., p. 17.

[16] Ibid., p. 180.

[17] Ibid., p. 179.

[18] Ibid., p. 29.

> In this way the time for father and son passed quickly. Neither was much with the other, the one picking up the thread where the war had unravelled it, the other beginning to spin his own, to create his first tangled memories, to bind himself to life for the first time.[19]

In the same way he had used the metaphor of the veil of mist[20] to characterize the first leave. But it is not only Roe who, after the declaration of war, seeks reassurance of his own existence by ensuring that memory is piled upon memory. Throughout London, as each individual feels more vulnerable and futile, the search for reassurance becomes more frenetic.

> As they were driven to create memories to compare, and thus to compensate for the loss each had suffered, he saw them hungrily seeking another man, oh they were sorry for men and they pitied themselves, for yet another man with whom they could spend last hours, to whom they could murmur darling, darling, darling it will be you always; the phrase till death do us part being, for them, the short ride next morning to a railway station; the active death, for them, to be left alone on a platform; the I-have-given-all-before-we-die, their dying breath.[21]

The rhythm of Green's prose indicates how unsatisfactory are these hurried and insincere encounters. The reality is as barren as the

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[19] Ibid., pp. 33 - 34.

[20] Ibid., pp. 8 - 9.

[21] Ibid., p. 63.

language used to express it. In contrast, in the next section Roe's memory of his relationship with his wife abounds in pictures.

> The afternoon, it had been before tea, was
> hot, swallows darted low at the level of her
> thighs, a blackbird, against three blooms
> bent to the height of its yellow beak,
> seemed enchanted by terror into immobility
> as the two of them halted, brought to a full
> stop at the corner round which this
> impertinence caught them fast. He turned
> to her and she seemed his in her white clothes,
> with a cry the blackbird had flown and in her
> eyes as, speechless, she turned, still a
> stranger, to look at him, he thought he saw
> the hot, lazy luxuriance of a rose, the heavy,
> weightless luxuriance of a rose, the curling
> disclosure of the heart of a rose that, as a
> hornet, was his for its honey, for the asking,
> open for him to pierce inside, this heavy
> creamy girl turned woman.[22]

This dream-like use of prose which Green uses to probe and analyse what is real for his main character Roe, is also used to reveal the workings of Pye's mind as he anticipates the visit to his sister in the insane asylum and later, his interview with her psychiatrist.[23] His imaginings are not contained in parentheses, as are Roe's, for he does not, like Roe, use his imagination to recreate the reality of the event, only to fabricate his own world which is fancifully removed from reality. Both Pye and Roe are bound together in the manic nature of the times. Both are from very different backgrounds but both are dependent on each other. Pye, officially, is in charge of Roe and personally he is bound to him because of his

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[22] Ibid., p. 64.

[23] Ibid., pp. 137 - 141.

sister's abduction of Roe's son. This dependency is further complicated by the fact that Pye, because of his incestuous encounter with his sister may have been responsible for the emotional disturbance that caused the abduction. Because "matters" are often "simpler but more horrible than he had dreamed"[24] Pye tries to reject those more horrible aspects of reality by fastening on illusory experiences. When the memories conjured by the psychiatrist's questions reveal to him that his long ago first sexual act was with his sister and not with his neighbour's daughter he tries to obliterate those memories by filling his mind with fanciful pictures.

> Pye began to observe a girl. She was fair, that was all he could see for some time, and her tweed shoulders above the back of the seat. But, as this double-decker swayed and banked, and she, the lily, let her lovely head and neck incline with it, he caught sight of one protuberant, half-transparent eye, sideways, blue, hedged with long lashes that might have been scythes to mow his upstanding corn. And a straight, grave nose, curved like a goose neck at the nostril. Elated at his release from the asylum, he asked himself what he would not give to have this puss mouth jam off his cheek by a river bank on such an evening as the weather today seemed to promise after the first long winter of war, and to see her quietness overflow into laughter, into the pleased shrieks of Mrs. Lane's little girl and, so much more to his taste, the protests later and ever fainter, oh the gorgeous, up now on her dignity, bit of fancy lump of grub.[25]

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[24] Ibid., p. 87.

[25] Ibid., p. 142.

Mrs. Howells in a similar way makes up an imaginary account of her confrontation with her son-in-law Ted, to hid her painful inadequacy in coping with the real meeting. She claimed to Piper that she faced Ted with his unfaithfulness and neglect and witnessed his contrition. In fact she spent most of her time talking to everyone but Ted. All she received from Ted was a cup of tea, and even on that he made a profit out of her. Pye's and Mary Howell's tragedy is that their memories and imaginations only lead them into an unreal, hallucinatory world. Their imaginations do not help them to sanely re-order their experiences so they are trapped within their fancies, unable to express or communicate their real feelings. Their plight is all the more tragic because Pye, at least, was aware of the cancerous nature of these private fancies .

> "What have you done, boy?" he asked, in his official tones. He got no reply.
>
> "You'd better tell," he said, meaning it was better to have it out and not, like him, be suckling on an ulcer the sickly, sore-covered infant of his fears.[26]

Richard Roe shares many of Pye's experiences and fears, but he can "tell". His command of language allows him to arrange his experiences and articulate his feelings so that although the total chaos of the experience is not extinguished, parts of it are made manageable by the individual. At the close of the novel, as at the beginning, only language that is sensuous is sufficient to recreate the total reality

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[26] Ibid., p. 169.

of Roe's experience of fighting the dockside fire. In the final pages of Caught, the language of fact records time, place and dimension but the language of poetry is needed to transmit the human feelings and perceptions that absorb these external and abstract states.

> "Well, when we got round those buildings I told you about, they were great open sheds really, for keeping the weather off the more expensive timber, we were right on top of the blaze. It was acres of timber storage alight about two hundred yards in front, out in the open, like a huge wood fire on a flat hearth, only a thousand times bigger."
>
> (It had not been like that at all. What he had seen was a broken, torn-up dark mosaic aglow with rose where square after square of timber had been burned down to embers, while beyond the distant yellow flames toyed joyfully with the next black stacks which softly merged into the pink of that night.)[27]

Factual dialogue is used to convey information to the unsympathetic Dy, but her prosaic,[28] rather than poetic understanding of life causes all real communication between herself and Roe to cease and he is reduced to cursing her.

> He was silent for once. He felt his rage rise.
>
> "So Pye committed suicide?" she asked, although Richard had written to tell her weeks before.
>
> "In the gas oven," he said. "But he had the sense to turn off the automatic burners in the boiler first. Or we should all have been blown up."
>
> He waited, watching his anger. Then he heard the verdict.

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[27] Ibid., p. 180.

[28] Ibid., p. 180.

> "I can't help it," she said, "I shall always hate him, and his beastly sister."
>
> This was too much for the state he was in. He let go.
>
> "God damn you," he shouted, releasing everything, "you get on my bloody nerves, all you bloody women with all your talk."
>
> It was as though he had gone for her with a hatchet. She went off without a word, rigid.[29]

In this explosive way, Roe gives vent to his frustration at the awful inability of one person to communicate his reality to another. This inescapable human predicament is, of course felt most intensely by writers whose business it is to present reality through the tenuous medium of language; for as Green writes,

> "there's always something you can't describe, and its not the blitz alone that's true of."[30]

In Pack My Bag, Green had seen life as an "inextricable tangle",[31] and in Living he had found one way of establishing a healthy order on that tangle. By 1939, the tangle appeared less healthy and more constricting. Individuals were seen as less able, unlike Lily, to find their personal satisfaction through companionship, love, eating and talking because wartime disrupted and destroyed those personal bonds and made a mockery of any attempts to build a permanent and ordered personal world. Men and women were exposed to emotional as well as physical malnutrition. As the times were "out of joint" so

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[29] Ibid., p. 196.

[30] Ibid., p. 180.

[31] Henry Green, Pack My Bag, p.

too were any attempts to talk freely. Wartime only served to aggravate the inherent difficulty that people have of making real contact, verbally, with each other. So in Caught conversation between the characters, far from opening channels of contact only generates doubt, suspicion, misapprehension, mis-judgement and betrayal.

The feelings of guilt and betrayal that are experienced by Green's characters in Caught make them appear at first sight similar to those in Kafka's work. Their bleak and helpless situation is apparent at the beginning of the novel. As the fireman congregate

> They were mute in a vast asphalted space.
> The store towered above, pile after dark
> pile which, gradually, light after light
> went darker than the night that was falling
> and which he dreaded.[32]

and, later, in the pub human beings are described in the same way as animals, to suggest that they will share a similar, degrading fate.

> They expected a gigantic raid any minute.
> The conversation of hanging, civilian faces
> in bowler hats up at the counter seemed
> mostly of the pet they had had put away that
> very morning, in accordance with instructions
> issued against gas attack. Or, if they had
> drowned the dog themselves, then they would
> ask each other whether the dustmen would
> reject a bin in which there was a body. One
> hairless dewlap with mastiff's eyes spoke up.
> He said every dustcart was commandeered to
> remove human carcasses that same night.[33]

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[32] Henry Green, Caught, p. 37.

[33] Ibid., pp. 37 - 38.

As the novel develops, though, it is apparent that, unlike Kafka's, Green's characters are not all caught in a paralysis of will outside the community and therefore unable to come to terms with their desires and fears. Richard Roe, especially, through his imaginative power understands his world and his position in it. He, like most of Green's characters, is contained within the alliances and dependencies that are necessary to sustain the individual. His sense of guilt and betrayal comes not from being outside of the social context but from having to bear the responsibility of his own inadequacy within it. Roe joined the Auxiliary Fire Service to overcome his fears about heights and fires. This he thought he had accomplished but after months of training and waiting "behind those windows" he was suddenly "pitchforked into chaos"[34] where orders, rules and training were futile. One's only strength lay in a mutual dependancy[35] that was so onerous to maintain[36] and that could lead one to cause, often inadvertently, injury and death to one's fellow man. Green wrote later that "We are here on earth only, if strong enough to look life in the face"[37] and some men, like Roe could recognize that this was "the meaning of it all".[38] Other men, like Pye, through their failure to express

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[34] Ibid., p. 182.

[35] Ibid., pp.182 - 183.

[36] Ibid., p. 186.

[37] Henry Green, Before the Great Fire,

[38] Henry Green, Caught, p. 194.

themselves and their situation in real terms could find no meaning and, therefore, ended their own lives.

This sombre, therapeutic idea about the role of imaginative language in the life of the individual has been expressed in Caught by contrasting the imaginative recreation of life with the fanciful. Another technique that Green employs that also has not been used before is humour. Humour usually occurs when the imagination reorders events so that the incongruous is brought to the fore, so this technique easily finds a place in a novel where the role of the imagination is being examined.

In Party-Going the brittle exchanges between the fashionable women could produce a wry smile but some scenes in Caught cause spontaneous laughter. Piper's sycophantic murmurings throughout Pye's lecture to the new recruits is one such scene. It is only later that one is aware of the more sinister aspects of Piper's use of language. At another time[39] Green uses words that are reminiscent of childhood to show how eager and anxious to please Roe is as a new recruit even though, as is usually the case, his haste and anxiety were all to no purpose. The humour of the substation's first attempt to cope with an actual fire is conveyed in swift, explosive colours.

> Regardless of what they had been taught, both crews dashed in.
>
> The staircarpet was white, and the walls. The banisters pink. He saw yellow curtains. He was out of breath. He found he had been

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[39] Ibid., p. 36.

> shouting, "Where is it?" Then, in the way two dolphins will breast a wave and curve, Chopper and Pye hurled themselves down-stairs past these lads coming up. He had a flash of their two set, dead-white faces. The crews turned round. They followed them out, three stairs, black now, at a time, right to the next front door, also ready open.
>
> They had been in the wrong house.[40]

The regular firemen seize this opportunity to make fun of Pye's unit and he vents his embarassment by forcing the men to perform five mock turn-outs in three hours.

As often occurs in Green's work when he does use humour it points both to the incongruities of life and to its horrors. Piper's sycophancy, bred of weakness and envy leads him to undermine Pye's position through sly innuendoes. Roe's well-intentioned conversations are misinterpreted by Pye because of his feelings of guilt and inferiority towards Roe. The mistake about which house was on fire is only the first of several miscalculations that make Pye more and more insecure. This insecurity leads, finally, to his suicide. In other scenes the horror is contiguous with the humour. Pye's nimble evasions[41] of the psychiatrist's questions and his obtuseness in the face of the psychiatrist's patience are delightful but all too swiftly Pye is confronted with his responsibility for his sister's sickness and only silence can record his mental battle to reject this memory.

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[40] Ibid., p. 79.

[41] Ibid., pp. 138 - 139.

In another scene Shiner, unaware that the boy in front of him is Roe's son, Christopher is less than deferential

> Shiner was lying on his shoulders, feet in the air, exercising leg muscles bicycling above his head. As soon as he saw Christopher he said good morning.
>
> "I'm quite well thank you," Christopher replied.
>
> "Then everything in the garden's conga," Shiner said. Christopher watched. Not a word more passed until Shiner completed his exercises. Then he began, "'ow did you come to blow in, mate?"
>
> He got no reply. He lay, immensely broad and long, staring at Christopher who stared back.
>
> "You wouldn't be lookin' for much by any chance? Or anyone?"
>
> Christopher did not say a word.
>
> "Then wee wee off," Shiner said.[42]

Green uses a grotesque image to reveal the child's view of the adult world and to shift the tone from amusing to horrible.

> On Sundays the men were now allowed to use their beds. Christopher turned to another voice under electric light which said, "You wouldn't be Roe's kid by any chance, would yer?" He saw Piper, old and unshaven, laid out with bare feet sticking from his trousers. He stared fascinated at the twisted broken toes, armed with nails like doll's trowels. He did not realise that the smell came from those stained feet.[43]

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[42] Ibid., pp. 144 - 145.

[43] Ibid., p. 146.

The humour of this meeting of two worlds, the grubby, vulgar world of the men in the fire-station and the groomed and polite world of Dy and Christopher, is overshadowed by the fact that their visit results in the whole station learning of Christopher's abduction by Pye's sister.

In several of his novels, and particularly in Loving, women serve to combat the fears and guilts that possess man but in Caught the women have no such grace and are, therefore, described in arid images. Early in the novel Green describes the frantic coupling[44] that occurs when, in the midst of possible death, it is necessary to establish one's vitality. Isle and Prudence provide only part-time relief for the firemen and Roe's memories of his wife that are evocative of luxuriant roses are contrasted with the harsh images that surround Prudence.

> Back in his present, he heard a tap of high heels. Looking up, he saw Prudence, dressed in green as of dark olive like to the colour of that cod's head. She smiled, but did not stop. Still under the influence of his memories, he thought how sharp she appeared against the black wall with AMBULANCE painted in grey letters three foot high.[45]

Even Prudence is finally sickened by Isle's barren relationship with the firemen and breaks with Pye because she doesn't want to be like Isle.[46] All the sexual relationships in Caught are desolate. Even the hardened regular fireman Chopper retches violently at the soldier's lustful indifference to the twisted, dying bodies around

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[44] Ibid., p. 49.

[45] Ibid., pp. 64 - 65.

[46] Ibid., p. 43.

him as he begs for a shilling to pay for "another go".[47] The images usedto describe Roe and Hilly's relationship though less brutal are as bleak.

> At that instant, in great haste, on leave, and for only the second time, Richard tumbled into bed with Hilly. The relief he experienced when their bodies met was like the crack, on a snow silent day, of a branch that breaks to fall under a weight of snow, as his hands went like two owls in daylight over the hills, moors, and wooded valleys, over the fat white winter of her body.[48]

Their union is one of convenience, and even Roe begins to despise himself for continuing this false and rather boring affair.[49] The wintry, desert images are in direct opposition to those Green uses when he is drawing Roe back to the harmony of his memories and his home in the country. Usually the two worlds are kept separate but occasionally they are juxtaposed to point out the futility of Roe's attempts to introduce the qualities of one into the other.[50] Roe survives because he has these two worlds and because he can articulate, imaginatively the distinctiveness of each. For Pye there was no other world, either imaginatively in his mind or in the reality of his home and his solution was suicide not imaginative re-examination.

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[47] Ibid., p. 100.

[48] Ibid., p. 117.

[49] Ibid., p. 130.

[50] Ibid., p. 69.

Chapter V

BACK

Samuel Beckett, in one of his dialogues with Georges Duthuit discussed the creative problem of finding "the expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express."[1] So, despite this frustration with language as a means of expression, the writer has the obsessive obligation to continue to try to find ways even if the paradigm that emerges is only an expression of that frustration. The final, raging words[2] of Richard Roe in Caught are a testimony to the difficulty of saying anything completely meaningful to another person. In Roe's world there was no love or purpose. All the relationships were incestuous or meretricious and though Roe, through his educated imagination, was able to use language that salved his own sanity there was no such relief for other, less able, men. In Caught Green had juggled descriptions of the real and the imagined perception of events and brought images into play to examine the essential qualities of his main character Roe's experience. But that experience had been primarily of a man who had managed to keep himself detached. In Back this kind of solipsism is not only seen as unhealthy but it also dictates the structure of the novel.

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[1] S. Beckett and G. Duthuit, "Three Dialogues", Transition forty-nine, No. 5, (1949).

[2] Henry Green, Caught, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1943), p. 196.

The central figure in Back is Charley Summers, a soldier who, having been maimed, and interned in a prisoner-of-war camp, is repatriated. He is given a ludicrous and very uncomfortable pink tweed suit and a job as the production manager of an engineering firm. His situation is not unique, neither is his response to it. In expressing this situation and response Green makes use of a particular symbol, instead of the several that have occurred in other novels, to render the inner life of Charley Summers. Once when asked about the use of symbolism in fiction Green replied.

> You can't escape it can you? What after all is one to do with oneself in print? Does the reader feel a dread of anything? Do they all feel a dread for different things? Do they all love differently? Surely the only way to cover all these readers is to use what is called symbolism.[3]

Like any individual Green has his own private symbols but when they are expressed within his novels they assume a particular meaning. Certain birds and flowers assume different meanings in different novels. Green realized that the individual lives as much by his own symbols that have arisen from his personal associations and memories, as by any externally imposed plan. In Back, Green is representing not only Charley's journey back from a military to a civilian existence but also his mental journey out of the isolation of

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[3] Terry Southern, "The Art of Fiction", Paris Review, V, (Summer 1958), p. 75.

a mind damaged by the suffering and dislocation occasioned by war.[4] For the sake of his reason he has cut out certain memories from his mind and fastened on others which are less real but more soothing. This mental escapism, though, only serves to distort a world that appears already strange.

Charley returns from the war to find that Rose, the girl he loved even though she was another man's wife, has died. She had been his point of reference during the war. She represented everything that was of value and significance for him and now that he feels cast into a meaningless and hostile world he fixes his mind on the image that is conjured by her name, Rose. This fixation on the image would ultimately destroy Charley. The sound of the word "rose" whether applied to the flower, the woman or even the transitive verb, paralyses Charley's will and perverts his judgement. Classical writers such as Pindar and Ovid recognized that the beautiful and the terrible often co-exist within the one object and that a renunciation or denial was necessary before the individual could break the Medusa-like power of the image. In a similar way Green charts the journey of a lonely, crippled discharged soldier away from the transfixed isolation of his mind.

The prose patterns within the novel are shaped by this idea. At the beginning of the novel, as the obsession has full control over

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[4] Henry Green, Back (London: The Hogarth Press, 1946), p. 186.

Charley the language is permeated with images. It is only by denying the power of Rose over him, that Charley can break the spell of the image. Only by making actual communication through dialogue with other living people even though that dialogue is at first faltering, mistaken and even foolish does he begin to establish any real meaning for himself. So in this novel, unlike Caught, it is dialogue that makes contact with reality, not images. And though at the end of this novel Charley Summer's recovery is only partial he has accepted Nancy's selfless tenderness in place of what was, in fact, the exploitation of his feelings by Rose. In his mind the two women are fused and his progress along the journey back from an alien and hostile world is expressed in images that are lodged in the present reality rather than the dead illusion.[5]

Even this partial recovery is no mean achievement considering Charley's position at the beginning of the novel. His injury, his imprisonment, his loss of Rose, have all increased his vulnerability and his feeling of separation from other people. His alienation is further aggravated by the fact that these very people have also endured the dislocation and depersonalization that results from the wartime necessity of mobilizing large numbers of people. Most individuals, consequently, have found themselves at the mercy of organizations that have no names, only initial letters, and unless they adjust to these anonymous structures, as Mr. Grant, and to some

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[5] Ibid., p. 208.

extent Mr. Middlewitch do, they will become deranged like Mrs. Grant, or unbalanced like Charley. For individuals who follow the life patterns laid down by S.E.V.E. or S.E.C.O.,[6] H.R.O.N. or B.D.S., C.E.G.S. or M.A.P. there is a security in these established and encompassing organizations and even Charley, at times, feels more at ease within the world of "ref. CM/105/127 our ref. 1017/2/1826",[7] because it can be indexed and contained. Despite this security, though, he also senses that by immersing himself within the routine and the non-human he is sealing himself off from "the sole promise there (is) in being alive".[8] This feeling is shared, even, by Mr. Corker Mead, who thrives on the intrigues and power struggles that obsess those caught up in these impersonal organizations. This delight in company politics is probably a compensation for the minimal delight he enjoys with his goitred wife. In spite of this he holds out the promise of a raise to Charley if he will "marry and settle down"[9] for he knows that only in this way will Charley find reconnection with real life. Corker Mead's quarrel[10] with his wife and Nancy's common-sense remark that

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[6] Ibid., p. 38 and p. 39.

[7] Ibid., p. 43.

[8] Ibid., p. 44.

[9] Ibid., p. 189.

[10] Ibid., p. 190.

"you can't bring up a family with nothing but good wishes, can you?"[11] indicates that Green is not a "happily-ever-after" novelist, notwithstanding the final words of Loving. What is necessary for Charley Summers, as with Charley Raunce, is revitalizing contact with other people;and marriage and family is one, if hazardous, connection.

At the beginning of the novel Charley's only point of contact is the dead Rose. His grief at the removal from his life of the warmth, vitality and joy that she epitomized is lyrically expressed. Images of her living and her dead body are transposed to emphasize that grief.

> For Rose had died while he was in France, he said over and over under his breath. She was dead, and he did not hear until he was a prisoner. She had died, and this sort of sad garden was where they had put her without him, and, as he looked about while he leaned on the gate, he felt she must surely have come as a stranger when her time came, that if a person's nature is at all alive after he or she has gone, then she could never have imagined herself here nailed into a box, in total darkness, briar roots pushing down to the red hair of which she had been so proud and fond. He could not even remember her ever saying that she had been in this churchyard, which was now the one place one could pay a call on Rose, whom he could call to mind, though never all over at one time, or at all clearly, crying, dear Rose, laughing, mad Rose, holding her baby, or, oh Rose, best of all in bed, her glorious locks abounding.[12]

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[11] Ibid., p. 191.

[12] Ibid., pp. 6 - 7.

Charley repeats over and over, without break, the same words and phrases as if to exorcise Rose's power but everywhere there are reminders. He is reminded of his quest when his cheek is brushed by a rose, but the futility of his quest is emphasized by the raindrops that fall from the rose petals onto his eyes as he tries to discern the names on the headstones. With what seems like irony Rose's husband, Jim, greets Charley with the ritualized words of the marriage service which are painful reminders, for Charley, of his own guilty memories and prevent him from appreciating Jim's kindliness. Another attempt to reach out to those previous memories is similarly futile. As he searches the face of Rose's child[13] he can recognize no expression of himself even though he thinks that he has fathered the child. All that is left, then, of his pre-war experiences are "sharp letters, cut in marble beyond a bunch of live roses tied to a string."[14] To maintain what is left of his reason, the part of his life spent in Germany has to be erased, so having discovered there is nothing and no-one he can resurrect for himself from the pre-war days of his life Charley finds himself adrift in a world that has no recognizable landmarks.

By having Mr. Grant analyse his wife's mental instability in these terms

> "Well, once you begin to lose the picture
> of this or the other in your mind's eye,
> it's hard to determine where things'll
> stop," Mr. Grant continued. "I knew a

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[13] Ibid., p. 12.

[14] Ibid., p. 12.

> man once, in the ordinary run of business,
> who started to misremember in that fashion.
> Wasn't long before he's lost all his
> connections. Even came to it they had to
> shut him away.[15]

Green shows how loss of the capacity to remember reality through images can result in the mind being unhinged. Losing the image can be as destructive as being transfixed by it. Those who can adjust to the abnormal times can survive. For it is part of Green's contention in this novel that the times are abnormal not the people. Those who cannot learn to live with the separation from family and friends, those who cannot come to terms with the pervading sense of disintegration, retreat into their private world of harmonious, illusory memories. Those like the bereaved Mrs. Grant, and the solitary and silent Charley are the most vulnerable.

Charley's rehabilitation, then, is Green's concern in this novel; and part of that rehabilitation is learning to sort out, in the mind, what exists and what does not, who is sincere and who is not, what is real and what is false. Hence, the several misjudgments and misinterpretations of people and situations that Charley has to go through before he can accept as valid his own reactions. Several years after the publication of Back Green said, in a radio broadcast, that

> It is only by an aggregate of words
> over a period followed by an action,
> that we obtain, in life, a glimmering
> of what is going on in someone, or
> even in ourselves.[16]

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[15] Ibid., p. 14.

[16] Henry Green, "A Novelist to His Readers", The Listener, 9 November 1950, p. 506.

and this is the process that Charley Summers has to undergo in order to come to grips with himself or the world around him. Often the words spoken are brutal and vulgar, as are those of Middlewitch[17] when he describes their food or their increased potency, despite the loss of one of their limbs, but they are far less destructive than Charley's private, illusory memories.

At this stage Middlewitch's voice seems to come from across a void. Charley does not engage in dialogue with him. In fact, he scarcely hears what Middlewitch says; and his verbal connection with Mrs. Frazier, his landlady, is as tenuous. She echoes Middlewitch's advice to Charley,

> "But you want to brisk yourself up," Mrs. Frazier went on. "There were plenty like it after the last war. Sat about and moped. Of course it was understandable, but then most things are, and when all's said and done that's no credit to anyone, to mope," she said. "Yes, it draws sympathy, going on like that does, but not for long. There's the rub. Well I mean no one can be expected to put up with it, not for ever. You want to go out and find yourself a nice young lady. There you are."[18]

but again the conversation is one-sided. When Charley does talk he reveals that his mind is still fixed on Rose.[19] Any living people he only acknowledges as being threatening. He is suspicious that

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[17] Ibid., pp. 29 - 30.

[18] Ibid., p. 34.

[19] Ibid., pp. 31 - 35.

Mr. Grant, Mr. Middlewitch and Mrs. Frazier are all acquainted for being unable to find connection himself, he is antagonistic towards those who have. Because the pre-war pattern of his life has disintegrated, he is afraid of any resemblances or relationships that might introduce him to a new pattern which would inevitably destroy the security provided by the old. Although the mention of the word Rose no longer raises painful memories, his experience of pain has made him afraid of new people and new experiences.

However the desire to find pattern and meaning in life is unquenchable, and natural. That there is a cyclic pattern to existence that involves isolation, catalytic action, refinement and alteration is neatly expressed in Charley's description of the parabolam process.[20] In this, a natural property is extracted from bird droppings and subjected to a technical process that crystallizes its essential elements. These elements are then deposited on ordinary natural plants, laurel leaves. These leaves, the final part of the cycle, are then washed and the water and chemicals obtained are used to harden metal. Green makes explicit the link between this natural, cyclic pattern and human beings by showing how girl's names are also taken from natural leaves and flowers. This passage also shows that Charley can easily express, in words, an engineering process but is unable to use words that will release him from his past memories or that will allow him to understand his own nature. He dreads the feelings aroused by

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[20] Ibid., p. 41.

Miss Pitter,[21] preferring dead memories to living contact.

When he finally goes to the address Mr. Grant had given him the dead and the living are fused in Nancy Whitmore. She is, in fact, Rose's half-sister, hence Mr. Grant's concern for her, and although she bears little actual resemblance to Rose, in Charley's mind she is Rose re-incarnated. In order to live fully with his delusion, he goes so far as to imagine that Rose has not died, but in fact has become a prostitute. Obsessed by this idea he filters everything she says through his own entrapped mind so that his version of reality is biased beyond apprehension. In consequence the external world, to Charley appears imponderably menacing. Throughout this section of the novel, Green, with wry amusement, displays how easily language obscures rather than elucidates meaning. There is so often a dark chasm between what is meant, what is spoken and what is heard and what is understood. Most people interpret other people's words according to their own experience and preoccupations. In the same way, Charley, haunted by his memories of Rose and the feelings of guilt and loss evoked by those memories, in the insecurity and solitude of his own mind makes a strange, distorted pattern of meaning from the conversations of people around him. Once he fastens on the idea that Nancy is really Rose "become a tart",[22] the words others use seem to fall into place. But his pattern only obscures and does not reveal the truth. Nancy

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[21] Ibid., p. 43.

[22] Ibid., p.

is not a whore, but a chaste and compassionate woman. Her qualities are vital, not spurious; and she, the illegitimate daughter, is far more loving than the legitimate. Charles, as yet, is unable to distinguish between the genuine and the false because he is unconnected to others, unable to talk spontaneously with them or to understand their easy, everyday chatter. This kind of paralysis, though, is not confined to Charley alone. He is only part of a general malaise that exists.

> "You're not yourself, Charley, old man," Mr. Phillips said. "And I'm thinking there's the little lady we should apologize to," he added. "My dear, this is the war. Everything's been a long time. Why only the other day in my paper I read where a doctor man gave as his opinion that we were none of us normal. There you are."[23]

Until this point in the novel the images associated with Rose and the world she represented have trapped Charley. He has made no real contact, through dialogue, with those around him. He is still afraid of his present feelings, preferring to dwell on those of the past, rather than hazarding involvement with actual people. On the battlefield, and in the prison camp he has witnessed the murderous forms involvement with other humans can take; so much so that he cannot believe that human relationships can also be constructive.

Into his own story of a man, unable to make contact through language with other people, Green inserts another literary piece.[24]

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[23] Ibid., p. 89.

[24] Ibid., pp. 92 - 104.

This story, from the Souvenirs of Madame de Crequy, is told through the more traditional narrative technique of one person telling, in a fairy-tale fashion, the story of one Sophie Septimanie de Richelieu. Though the techniques in Back and the Souvenirs of Madame de Crequy are different there is a close similarity between the content of both stories. Both have as their main character a person who fuses, at the unconscious level, the memory of a dead lover onto the presence of an existing one. Sophie, amid the political intrigues and social and family pressures of court life finds that the only way to preserve her happiness is to fasten her love onto a young man who reminds her of the lover she could not have. Similarly, Charley amid the political anxiety of war-time England and the concomitant disruptions to family and social life finds peace in lodging his lost dreams and desires within the physical reality of Nancy. In addition, by reading about Sophie's story, Charley enjoys "his first good night's rest for weeks". To underline his point that the language and ideas of literature are closer to the truth than any other type of expression Green follows this story-within-a story with a business letter[25] where the truth is deliberately disguised behind its apparently clear and unemotional sentences. In the business world it is necessary to quickly distinguish between what is said and what is meant and the meanings there are very different from the meanings

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[25] Ibid., pp. 105 - 106.

in the de Crequy story. Though in order to survive and be happy Charley has to learn to comprehend both.

The amusing artifice that Charley undergoes to establish Nancy's identity, not through her words, or her actions but through samples of her handwriting further indicates his confused attempts to probe to the truth. Trying to preserve the anonymity of the letters he cuts them up and in so doing removes another barrier between himself and his present reality. After this action, for the first time he is able to talk with Jim, Rose's husband, about the facts of her marriage, the birthof her son, her dreams and her death.[26] Also for the first time he feels ashamed of his previous relationship with Rose. So his acquiescence in Jim's easy seduction of Dot is his way of making recompense. This release from shame and the recognition that Rose is dead allows him, finally, to engage in a near-to-normal discussion with Nancy about everyday things, like cats and coupons, teacups and kittens. Just as his analysis of his emotional situation has been untrue to the facts, so too has his highly-prized filing system.[27] Both have represented attempts to collect, analyse and interpret an erroneous reality. At last Charley is after the success of using ordinary words to touch his present reality, able to consign Rose to the world of make believe.

> "Rose?" he said. "Her? Oh,
> She was just a tale."[28]

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[26] Ibid., p. 127.

[27] Ibid., p. 147.

[28] Ibid., p. 151.

Having turned his back on Rose he is able to accept Nancy, to appreciate her compassion and her strength. She too, has been alone, frightened and bereaved[29] but by caring for those[30] who are living, with the full knowledge that they will eventually die, she makes connection and is content. The security that her love provides gives Charley the courage to begin to reach out, through language, to those times which had been a barrier to his full rehabilitation.

> Then he did tell her something. It had suddenly come on the tip of his tongue.
>
> "I had a mouse out there," he said.
>
> She had a quick inkling of this. "And the guards took it away from you?" she asked, as if to a child. But he did not notice.
>
> "No, I had it in a cage I made," he said.
>
> "You don't hold it against my puss?" she enquired. She was anxious.
>
> "Never even crossed my mind," he answered.
>
> Mrs. Grant came down, soon after. And for the rest of the time, before he went to catch his train, he sat in a peaceable daze, while the two women lovingly talked of Mr. Grant.[31]

Instead of being petrified by false images of beauty and horror he is able to turn away from them and be restored by the genuine and

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[29] Ibid., p. 200.

[30] Ibid., pp. 166 - 167.

[31] Ibid., p. 199.

complete harmony of love with a roseate Nancy.

> And because the lamp was lit, the pink shade seemed to spill a light of roses over her in all their summer colours, her hands that lay along her legs were red, her stomach gold, her breasts the colour of cream roses, and her neck white roses for the bride. She had shut her eyes to let him have his fill, but it was too much, for he burst into tears again, he buried his face in her side just below the ribs, and bawled like a child. "Rose," he called out, not knowing he did so, "Rose."
>
> "There," Nancy said, "there," pressed his head with her hands. His tears wetter her. The salt water ran down between her legs. And she knew what she had taken on. It was no more or less, really, than she had expected.[32]

The image of the rose begins and ends the novel but in the beginning there was a "gun beneath the rose" and all the flowers were "frosted" and fell in "wreaths", their colour and scent extinguished for ever. They were ugly reminders of life's treachery, disease and death. By looking at life through the distorted glass of these images Charley was shut in a silent and fearsome world. Unlike Richard Roe in Caught, the images did nothing to clarify reality or to place Charley within its context. Only dialogue could do this and Green, in his last two novels was to concentrate on this idea which was to alter profoundly his style.

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[32] Ibid., p. 208.

Chapter VI

LOVING

Henry Green's fifth novel, Loving, caught the imagination of critics, reviewers and public alike. It has always been his most popular novel and has received more attention in the journals than any of his other works.[1] Perhaps the Western World in 1945, the year of Loving's publication was ready for a novel that began "Once upon a day" and ended "they were married and lived happily ever after." After the experience of the Second World War a fairy tale would seem in order to restore one's sanity. For although this apparently simple adult fairy tale was peopled with butlers and cooks, maids and pantry boys instead of kings and queens, princes and princesses it still elicited childhood memories of "Beauty and the Beast" and "Rumplestiltskin". Loving, though is more than a sentimental evocation of childhood associations of "life below stairs" and fairy stories.

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[1] Four articles in English have been devoted to this particular novel, and one in French. The novel, itself, has been translated into French and Japanese.

Thomas Churchill, "Loving: A Comic Novel", Critique, (Spring/Summer 1961).

Barbara Davidson, "The World of Loving", Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature, II, (Winter 1961), pp. 65 - 70.

Earle Labor, "Henry Green's Web of Loving", Critique, IV, (Fall/Winter 1960), pp. 29 - 40.

Anthony Quinton, "A French View of Loving", London Magazine, April 1959, pp. 25 - 35.

Michel Vinaver, "Essai sur un Roman", Lettres Nouvelles, (Juin/Juillet 1953), pp. 550 - 565.

The simplicity of the story is deceptive for unless the idea behind Loving is perceived it is possible to misjudge Green's characters and misinterpret the scenes and pictures he makes. Such a misreading was published in Critique in 1960.[2] Labor took an unambigucus stand in his opening paragraph

> From the outset, this much should be made clear: Charley Raunce is not the central character in Loving; he and Edith do not go to live happily ever after in England at the end of the novel; and Loving has very little to do with love.[3]

and continued by clearly pointing out how the community of the servants disintegrated after Eldon's death and how the "shifty, unpredictable, grasping"[4] Charley Raunce worked his way to power. This disintegration is mirrored in the upper social strata, in the lives of Mrs. Tennant and her daughter-in-law, Violet. Violet's clandestine affair with Captain Jack Davenport, while her husband is away on active duty increases the possibility of threat to the orderly life in the castle. It is true that the forces of anxiety, distrust and suspicion are present in the novel but instead of recognizing that Charley Raunce's nature develops under the curative and creative force of Edith's love, Mr. Labor sees the relationship between Charley Raunce and the housemaid Edith as "fraught with misunderstanding, duplicity, perversion, frustration and pure, undefiled eroticism."[5]

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[2] Labor, op. cit.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid., p. 31.

[5] Ibid., p. 34.

The love of an eighteen year old girl for a dyspepsic forty year old man may not be the stuff of which commercial dreams are made but within the limited horizons of Edith's life - or of any servant-girl's life - a competent man professionally and sexually, was a more than attractive alternative to the calf-love of a pantry boy or the clumsy admiration of an Irish lamp-man. Also it is a little unfair, if not a little confusing, to describe their relationship as "pure, undefiled eroticism". Pure and undefiled it is, after Raunce has proposed. He will not allow Edith to bring him his morning cup of tea,[6] nor parade around holding against herself Mrs. Jack's black negligee[7] for at this point in the novel he wants to build their relationship on dignity and trust and so tempers and controls his desire. Mr. Labor denies that this control is present in their relationship or that the love in Loving is a restorative power,

> Loving, by its nature all-consuming, hardly allows for such distractions as responsibility and patriotism.[8]

but this statement contradicts the facts. Charley Raunce, admires his mother's decision to stay in England and endure the German bombing when she might have escaped to Ireland to live with Charley. He is made to feel guilty by her action and decides to return to England.

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[6] Henry Green, Loving, London: The Hogarth Press, 1945, pp. 201 - 202.

[7] Ibid., p. 199.

[8] Labor, op. cit., p. 34.

Strengthened by Edith's constant care for his health[9] and the feeling of responsibility she generates in him,

> "I didn't realize I could love anyone the way I love you. I thought I'd lived too long."
>
> "You thought you'd lived too long?" and she laughed in her throat.
>
> I can't properly see myself these days, Raunce went on looking sideways past her at the red eye of a deer's stuffed head. "Why I'm altogether changed," he said.[10]

he decides to sacrifice the false security of the life of exile in Ireland for the more genuine connection of life in England. Mr. Labor thought that Charley, towards the end of the novel was dying of a "surfeit of loving."[11] Instead of this, Charley, until he began to love was dying from a surfeit of self-interested neutrality. As he says, "Its too bloody neutral this country is"[12] and in his own mind Irish neutrality and his own part in it is debilitating, "No she reckons we're 'iding ourselves away in this neutral country".[13] While he stays in Ireland and sustains himself by peculation from indifferent masters and lecherous assaults on the housemaids, he has no dignity or identity.

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[9] Loving, p. 141.

[10] Loving, pp. 162 - 163.

[11] Labor, p. 38.

[12] Loving, p. 219.

[13] Loving, p. 221.

He even has assumed automatically another man's name.[14] But through Edith's capacity to love him and his capacity to respond to this he is able to break out of the isolation of his separate and selfish world. It is not a coincidence that this was the first novel by Henry Green that was set outside England, in a neutral country during the Second World War, or that the characters were English servants isolated in an English owned castle in Irish territory. For this neutrality and isolation serve as the circumference to the novel. Within the enclave it bounds is played out a brief, but intricate and intriguing mid-twentieth century Morality play. The setting of the novel is significant as well as the way that Green, through a subtle interplay of scenes and symbols, characters and conversations, reveals in a masterly way how the human being needs the regenerative force of love, with its attendant cohorts of sacrifice and responsibility to counteract the disintegrative powers of self-absorption. In this novel there are no capsulated comments by the author. Green's prose in this novel is indeed a 'web of insinuations', delicate but patterned by the conscious principle of the restorative powers of love. Green told of the seminal situation that gave rise to the novel and the definition of satisfaction, though tinged with eroticism, contains all the elements of harmony that human beings require.

> I got the idea of Loving from a manservant in the Fire Service during the war. He was serving with me in the ranks and he told me

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[14] Gunther Anders, Kafka, London: Bowes and Bowes, 1960, p. 20.

> he had once asked the elderly butler who was over him what the old boy most liked in the world. The reply was: "Lying in bed on a summer morning, with the window open, listening to the church bells, eating buttered toast with cunty fingers." I saw the book in a flash.[15]

A passage in Loving which, in a different way, tells of the satisfactory harmony of two selves in the face of the surrounding darkness of life, provides an example of how Green draws the essence from that anecdote.

> The room had grown immeasurably dark from the storm massed outside. Their two bodies flowed into one as he put his arms around her. The shape they made was crowned with his head, on top of a white sharp curved neck, dominating and cruel over the blur that was her mass of hair.[16]

The manservant's anecdote gave Green the 'chance to set something living'[17] and the way he vivifies the situation is of especial interest. In his earlier novels certain scenes highlighted his ideas, in this novel he uses his scenes in a different way. He connects apparently disconnected scenes and in this way the metaphorical union of apparent opposites makes reality clearer. Perhaps this technique is why Henry Green is held in such esteem by fellow writers especially poets and critics. W. H. Auden described Green as "the best English novelist alive"[18] and John Lehmann, in his autobiography recorded his excitement

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[15] Terry Southern, "The Art of Fiction", Paris Review, V, (Summer 1958), p. 70.

[16] Loving, p. 200.

[17] Southern, p. 70.

[18] G. S. Fraser, Modern Writer and His World, Harmondsworth, England: Pelican Books Ltd., 1964.

at receiving Green's third novel,[19] and in an editorial for the London Magazine described his work in this way.

> Each of the seven novels presented a different world - different not only in its setting and range of characters, but in the way the author's highly individual technical experiments were developed; and yet no one of them could be mistaken for a moment for the work of anyone else. He is by instinct a poet, and in their emphasis on metaphor and symbol and pre-eminent concern with the rhythmic structure of the prose, his novels are more like poems than the verse of many so-called poets.[20]

It is only necessary, to examine a few pages of Loving, to show the concrete control he has over his material. Green uses a few paragraphs to connect three incidents.[21] The weather-vane is broken; Edith faints in Raunce's arms after she and Raunce find a live mouse caught in the mechanism that connects the weather-vane to the map in the study, and Edith thinks she hears a scream that echoes her own; then Mrs. Welch describes how little Albert has throttled one of the peacocks. These incidents, on one level, advance the story. Raunce finds yet another way of supplementing his private income and his own suit with Edith is also advanced. The maggotty carcase of the peacock in, and out of, Mrs. Welch's kitchen provides further occasion for disruption, accusation and counter-accusation.

These incidents, also, reverberate on other levels. Mrs. Jack's momentary loss of control and destruction of the weather-vane that is

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[19] John Lehmann, The Whispering Gallery, New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1954, p. 329.

[20] John Lehmann, "A Foreword", London Magazine, April 1959, pp. 7, 9.

[21] Loving, pp. 42 - 64.

pointing to Clancarty where she and Captain Davenport made love signifies the tension that exists under her apparently calm demeanour. In a correct, well-bred way, she has buried her feelings and therefore has felt ashamed, if not rather repelled by them. This is how she regarded love before her illicit meetings with Captain Davenport at his 'dig' at Clancarty,

> She strode up to that arrow and gave it a wild tug presumably to drag the pointer away from those now disgusting people lying there in a position, only before she had known Dermot, she had once or twice laughed at her husband.[22]

In her view, then, sexual union, the climax of love, is disgusting and rather ridiculous. Cut off from enjoying love Mrs. Jack retreats into immaturity and irresponsibility. When she is faced with the crisis of her discovered adultery she sends for Nanny and then flees to England, leaving her children behind in the castle.

In contrast, yet closely connected is the next incident. Raunce investigates the cause of the break in the weather-vane, encounters Kate and Edith, who are described as always with fertile, evocative words,

> Against deep blue tiles, Kate with her doll's face and fair hair was rearranging a scarlet bathrobe on the chromium towel horse.[23]

and then, with Edith, finds the trapped mouse. The associations of

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[22] Ibid., p. 44.

[23] Ibid., p. 45.

this incident are intriguing; the mechanism that governs direction is halted by a live creature, just as the hierarchy of self-interest in the castle is disturbed by the vitality of Kate and Edith. Also, is Edith horrified at the mouse or does she scream because a live thing is in pain? Possibly the latter, as she faints when she hears the thin scream, the dying cry of a suffering creature; and Edith is one who cherishes life. She, herself, is the girl who is loving, and causes others to love and to value love.

The scene then shifts to the afternoon conversation between Miss Burch and Mrs. Welch. Miss Burch's suspicions that Raunce, and possibly Edith, are disturbing influences in the castle are confirmed when she finds that Edith has fainted into Raunce's arms. Because she repressed her love for the dead butler, Eldon, she is irritated at history not repeating itself and treats roughly the insensible Edith. Here is a shift in attitudes to love. The generation succeeding Eldon and Miss Burch do not control their feelings to suit their masters. Also in this scene there are other signs of a shift in attitudes. Symbols of prestige and power are not going to be revered merely because they exist. And if they threaten they will be destroyed violently. The incident seems trivial. Little Albert strangles a peacock that hits him. Yet even Mrs. Welch despite her scolding, rather admires this action that is connected, in her mind, with the action of Hitler and his storm troopers. In "not 'alf an hour after he got in", the boy, who has crossed the class barriers as an evacuee from wartime London, has destroyed, with ease, the privileged futile bird that threatened him.

In a few more hours he is revealing the secrets of life to the two sheltered daughters of the castle. With the vivid perception of the working-class child he sees the inevitable struggle for power, position, and sex that concerns all living things.

Instead of connecting three incidents, now in one Green plays in full the elaborate chords of his ideas. In balanced, connected harmonies Nanny Swift's sadly romantic, illusory story about the doves is heard together with the vigorous sounds of the doves fighting, killing and coupling in their leaning dove-cote and the voices of Raunce, Edith and Kate as they pursue position and love. So ring upon concentric ring of incident, symbol, association and metaphor engages the reader. The enclosing ring is provided by the setting, the pseudo-gothic Irish castle run by English landlords and their servants during the 1939 - 45 war. The setting is important for without it the characters would not be so imprisoned in their situation or so dependent on each other for financial and social nourishment.

The castle, with its shut-off rooms, its strutting peacocks, its preserved Old Masters and antique treasures represents an order that has atrophied. The rigid hierarchy of power that had existed when Eldon was alive is now undermined by the Tennants' indifference and Raunce's activities. Here are suggestions of the disruption in the established pattern of political power in England in the late 1930's and early 1940's. This disruption had already been examined by Green in Party-Going. The indifferent detachment of the wealthy, privileged ruling groups towards their responsibilities, both economic and political and the social

disruptions caused by the Second World War led to the establishment in 1945 of a new government, a Labour government in England. Admittedly, the leaders were still from the upper ranks of English society but the mandate was from the Raunces and the young Alberts whose feeling of moral responsibility for their families and their countries demanded a change in political power.

So the political associations suggested by the setting are connected with England, not Ireland. This novel is not an examination of absentee landlords drawing rents from the Irish peasantry, despite the irony of the name Tennant. The Tennants and their castle are being sustained by English servants and the analogy of the castle and its inhabitants is an analogy on one level with the political situation in England. The location of the castle in Ireland is important only in so far as it reinforces the isolation of those in the castle from the rest of the world. In this isolation the struggle for power and love, the clash of loyalties and self-interest is played out.

Then, on the personal level, by setting the novel in Ireland, an unknown, unpredictable country as far as the English are concerned, Green is able to reflect externally the internal uncertainties and misapprehensions that arise within the castle from the loss of trust and love, that is represented symbolically by the loss of the ring. The two Irishmen who are introduced into the novel are the mute, inglorious Paddy and the comic, yet sinister Mr. Mathewson from the Irish Regina Assurance. Paddy, the lampman and keeper of the peacocks has not always been inglorious. Around him are still traces of a lost dignity.

> Over a corn bin on which he had packed last autumn's ferns lay Paddy snoring between these windows, a web strung from one lock of hair back onto the sill above and which rose and fell as he breathed. Caught in the reflection of spring sunlight this cobweb looked to be made of gold .... It might have been almost that O'Connors dreams were held by hairs of gold binding his head beneath a vaulted roof on which the floor of cobbles reflected an old king's molten treasure from the bog.[24]

and there is the promise that this dignity will be restored by Kate who witnesses and envies the love that Edith and Raunce enjoy and seeks to share in that private and fruitful world by devoting herself to Paddy.

Mr. Mathewson is also connected with this theme. He precipitates the final crisis. His comic lisp disarms Edith and Raunce until he has the information he needs. Then his questions are precise. His interrogation and the disturbing initial letters of his Company set in motion the flurried search for the ring. This search generates the disorder and mistrust which is countermanded by young Albert's attempts to protect Edith and assume the blame himself, and the final recovery of the ring, this emblem of wealth, when Edith, by her loving handling of the children, wins their confidence and is given the ring by them as a gift.

Thus, on several levels, the Irish setting adds to the novel. The neutrality of the country provides a threatening vacuum of power that could be filled by insurgent rebels, the I.R.A., or invading armies,

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[24] Ibid., pp. 51 - 52.

the Germans. Green uses this situation to allow Raunce's development. Raunce assumes the moral responsibility for protecting the inhabitants of the castle. Through his genuine concern for the safety of the others he attains the dignity of a hero. Young Albert also responds to the threat in an unselfish way, by offering to enlist as an air-gunner. Neutrality, then, politically and morally, is both dangerous and corrosive. Charley and Edith marry and return to England, and in all probability they do "live happily ever after" because human beings need activity and responsibility. Loving not neutrality generates these qualities and this is a novel about loving. Although there are under-current suggestions of political irresponsibility, absentee tenantry and alterations of the balance of power these are only eddies in the mainstream of the novel. The mainstream is that the failure to love and be loved results in immaturity, selfishness, greed and loneliness. Henry Green may be old-fashioned in building a novel around the apparently simple idea that the loneliness of the individual can be alleviated only through love and that love can replenish and regenerate man, yet the complex and subtle way he charts his idea demonstrates that this idea, when it is worked out in individual lives, is not simple.

All the characters in Loving exist in the state of loving or partly loving. The book opens with the dying words of Eldon that are spoken in a comfortless room. The one word he clings to as his life fades is the name "Ellen". In case the reader has not picked up the implications of this word, in a later conversation between Miss Burch and Miss Swift he is tacitly reminded of the curative powers of love. Miss Swift, the children's nanny, well knows how loving and being

loved can sustain life.[25]

The man who manoeuvres into Eldon's position is, apparently, untouched by love. His lecherous cravings for the nubile house-maids, his salacious advice to young Bert, the pantry boy, make him an unattractive prospect for redemption. He assumes control over the lesser servants by allowing them to steal the whiskey and eggs; and, by hunting down the little red and black account books, he plans to manipulate his employers to his own advantage. The force of his victory over Mrs. Tennant, when she reluctantly allows him to be accorded the position of butler is gently delineated by his destruction of the daffodil.

> He carried this head away in cupped hand from above thick pile carpet in black and white squares through onto linoleum which was bordered with a purple key pattern on white until, when he had shut that green door to open his kingdom, he punted the daffodil ahead like a rugger ball. It fell limp on the oiled parquet a yard beyond his pointed shoes.[26]

The opening skirmish has been successful. At the next meal he occupies the late Eldon's chair and the coup is complete. The capitulation of the last stronghold, Miss Burch, is engineered by Mrs. Tennant who wants peace of mind at the lowest price and Raunce provides the easy solution. In Miss Burch's words it seems as though "the wicked indeed, shall flourish like the bay tree". By describing Raunce's movements as "like

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[25] Ibid., p. 120.

[26] Ibid., p. 71.

an eel into a drainpipe"[27] and his appearance as demonic,

> ....they bowed and scraped at each other against the equal danger. Then again they were gone with a beat of wings and in their room stood Charley Raunce, the skin of his pale face altered by refraction to red morocco leather.[28]

this dyspepsic, middle-aged lecher seems irredeemable. Yet as the novel develops Raunce responds first to Edith's beauty and then to her gentleness; and his selfishness is tempered by exposure to these qualities.

The loss of Mrs. Tennant's ring, and Mrs. Jack's infidelity create an atmosphere of distrust. The equilibrium of power and authority is unbalanced by this loss of confidence and Raunce steps in to restore the balance. He assumes the responsibility that Mrs. Tennant and Mrs. Jack abandon when they leave for England. Now the leader of this beleaguered group of servants, rather than their exploiter, he is prepared to defend the ladies. With dignity, and even with touches of humor, he is prepared to face any threat. This concern for the rest of the people in the castle has been cultivated by his love for Edith. Just as he is no longer indulgent towards Bert or arrogant towards Miss Burch so his indecent cravings are now governed by an honest formality. Now he is committed, in love, to Edith there are to be certain rules in their relationship. No longer is she to bring his early morning tea. Green uses light images to imply the freedom that is necessary in love.

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[27] Ibid., p. 12.

[28] Ibid., p. 52.

> "Let him be", Edith said again: the wind
> blew a sickle of black hair down the
> opening of her dress.
>
> "Oh this wind", she added. And it drove
> the girl's dresses onto them like statues
> as they lifted rectangles of white
> cartridge paper....[29]

But this freedom is connected with sacrifice, responsibility and trust. So, forsaking all others and abandoning the sterility and decay of the castle, despite the security it seems to offer, Charley escapes with Edith to marriage and England.

Mrs. Jack has given Edith a scarf emblazoned with the words, "I love you". This is one of the many tenuous details Green uses to show Edith as the loving force in the novel. Her love, at once maternal and sensuous, touches everyone. Tenderly she comforts the grieving Miss Burch who has watched the man she loved die, speaking another woman's name. Although Edith tantalizes young Albert she is aware that his love is "calf-love" and wants to be attached to the more secure and mature love of Charley Raunce. Aware of the attractions of her body, she is unashamed of them, taking a delight in tempting her suitors but allowing none but one to touch. She is at once fascinated and shocked by Mrs. Jack's easy morality. Green's descriptions of the moments when Edith, and Kate, are released from their work are lyrical.

> Edie turned at this to face Kate and put a hand
> along her cheek. She was naked to the waist.
> In that light from the window overgrown with
> ivy her detached skin shone like the flower
> of white lilac under leaves.

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[29] Ibid., p. 131.

> The sky drew a line of white round her mass
> of dark hair falling to shoulders which
> paled to blue lilac.[30]

Woman's curative and creative powers are personified in Edith. Her love transforms and restores Charley and stops him from decaying into self-pitying loneliness. It is woman that creates and maintains life and by quietly juxtaposing a line of dialogue with a description of a scene Green expresses this idea.

> "The little bitches I'll show 'em", he said
> and suddenly opened. They were wheeling,
> wheeling in each other's arms headless at the
> far end where they had drawn up one of the
> white blinds. Above from a rather low ceiling
> five great chandeliers swept one after the
> other almost to the waxed parquet floor
> reflecting in their hundred thousand drops
> the single sparkle of distant day, again and
> again red velvet panelled walls, and two girls,
> minute in purple dancing multiplied to eternity
> in these trembling pears of glass.[31]

The vitality and grace of the girls is eternal and will counteract selfishness and violence.

In one way or another the capacity and need to love transforms the servants. Kate, witnessing Edith's love for Raunce, searches for love herself and cherishes Paddy, tending and ordering his unruliness. Miss Burch admits that she had never had such a "good girl as Edith"[32] and agrees with Miss Swift that affection can succeed when medicines fail. Young Albert prefers self-sacrifice to self-pity when he realizes

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[30] Ibid., p. 22.

[31] Ibid., p. 62.

[32] Ibid., p. 123.

Edith is to marry Raunce and even Mrs. Welch is made charming by the arrival of her nephew.

Only the masters are unregenerate. Green portrays with devastating skill Mrs. Tennant's indifferent, callous attitude to people outside her immediate family. Although of the same class as Mrs. Haye in Blindness, she is allowed no expression of her interior thoughts to make her motives more acceptable. She is revealed through her dialogue and the associations of the language used to describe her actions and desires. In this way she is a more fully developed version of Richard Dupret's mother in Living and as incapable of analysing her feelings and actions as Mrs. Dupret. The first time Mrs. Tennant is presented it is obvious that she is more concerned about the loss of her gardening glove than the dying moments of her butler. Mrs. Tennant and Mrs. Jack are not concerned with those around them. Mrs. Tennant is annoyed by the presence of the servants, though she enjoys the comforts they provide. She refuses to assume the responsibilities associated with privilege. It is more important for her to have her hair "washed in blue and waved and curled"[33] than to pay Raunce an adequate wage. Through apparently casual juxtaposition Green contrasts the Tennant ladies with their maids. Kate and Edith are described lyrically while they watch,

> .... Mrs. Tennant and her daughter-in-law starting for a walk. The dogs raced about in the terrace yapping which made the six

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[33] Ibid., p. 11.

> peacocks present scream. The two women
> set off negligent and well-dressed behind
> their bounding pets to get an appetite
> for tea.[34]

Both women are self-absorbed. Mrs. Jack's emotions, because they have been repressed, are destructive and Mrs. Tennant only maintains the castle for her heirs. She is conscious of her own comforts, her gloves, matching blotting paper, jewels and visits to the hair-dressers but careless of her servants' humanity. Both these women are incapable of loving in the devoted and sensual way that Edith can: one protected by her wealthy widowed position, no longer needs to concern herself with other people, and the other, disgusted by her own sexuality, retreats into silent frigidity.

This juxtaposition of scenes bounded by an isolated setting, that is no way casual, is the technical principle that allows Green to spin his "web of loving", but the implications of the web are not menacing and restrictive as Mr. Labor seeks to establish; in fact they are directly opposite. The "web" provides the secure form for the individual spider that is necessary to sustain him. Similarly, the love that develops between Raunce and Edith brings forth also the desire for decency, responsibility and self-negation. About the same time as Green was working on this novel W. H. Auden published a poem that, after a lengthy analysis of the destructive forces that were let loose on September 1st, 1939, concluded with the easy and rather empty line,

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[34] Ibid., p. 22.

"we must love one another or die".[35] Henry Green's novel Loving, with its cryptic, finely textured scenes that reveal ordinary human beings who are extraordinarily, and often simultaneously, humorous, pathetic, endearing, iniquitous and heroic in their responses to each other and the absurd situations in which they find themselves, reveals how loving, not love, is a force that holds the balance between bestiality and impersonality. The novel's laconic, gerundive title indicates that love, to be vital has to be a process and that involved in that process is the recognition of the form and harmony that should result from a loving relationship. Green achieves this through the close-knit structure of scenes which are bound together by connecting details, symbols and metaphors that take the reader beyond the immediate. As has been discussed this technique can be sustained over several pages of his novel, as well as being contained in one sentence.

> Edith laid her lovely head on Raunce's nearest shoulder and above them, above the great shadows laid by trees those white birds wheeled in a sky of eggshell blue and pink with a remote sound of applause as, circling, they clapped their stretched, starched wings in flight.[36]

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[35] W. H. Auden, "September 1, 1939" in A Little Treasury of Modern Poetry, Oscar Williams (ed.), New York: Charles Scribners & Sons, 1952, p. 458.

[36] Loving, p. 188.

Chapter VII

CONCLUDING

> Oh! Blessed rage for order, pale Ramon,
> The maker's rage to order words of the sea,
> Words of the fragrant portals, dimly-starr'd,
> And of ourselves and of our origins,
> In ghostlier demarcations, keener sounds.[1]

In Caught and Back Green had examined the plight of the individual caught in the vortex of uncontrollable experience. Richard Roe in Caught was part of the anxiety and guilt of war-time England but he was able to maintain himself intact through his capacity to make an order out of the chaos by recreating his world through his imagination. This provided his sanctuary. Charley Summer's mind, in Back, was entrapped by distorted fancies and could only be released through Nancy's capacity for love that ordered her life. Love was, similarly, a regenerative force in Loving. Green had cast the ideas of his novels in different molds but hope for the individual seemed to lie in finding personal harmony in an impersonal life through the healing powers of the imagination and through love. In Concluding, published in 1948, Green is less sure that the solutions he offered in these three earlier novels are viable. Love in Concluding has lost its power. It is lodged now in the mind of a half-crazed thirty-five year old woman and in the frail body of an old man. There is no place for tenderness, unselfishness, or grace in the education of the state servants that is supplied by the Institute. These qualities of love have been banished to the forests or distorted

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[1] Wallace Stevens, Collected Poems, (New York: Knopf, 1955), p. 128.

by subterranean societies. The virtues of self-reliance and independence have been similarly exiled. Mr. Rock, the single expression of all these qualities lives on the edge of the state-controlled Institution. He is confined by poverty and the constant dread that his own home and his own granddaughter will be summarily removed from him, despite the fact that as a young man his scientific theories greatly benefited the state. This contribution has been recognized and so his presence is suffered although if it is possible to remove him under guise of law, this will be done. Sebastian Birt objects to Rock's independent thoughts and actions. After all Birt is a well-educated State employee and knows well that the real powers of decision over the individual exist beyond and above him. Power resides in the hands of the Chief Directors and the Heads of Commissions and in the Secretariats. It is transmitted through Directives and his re-charged by reports and accounts of behaviour that are sent along by its lesser servants. Passive obedience to these Directives will receive the ultimate reward of a place in a Home of Repose.[2] Those who are less than obedient will be rewarded with penury and unemployment. Birt resents Rock's position but is comforted by the knowledge that he will gain nothing by it.

> "He's not of this world, Liz," Sebastian objected.
>
> "He's forgotten more of her twists and turns than you'll ever learn," she said. "There."

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[2] Henry Green, Concluding, p. 101.

"I know, but so rash."

"Careful Seb, you can go too far, you know."

"I'm worried about this election. You understand what he is. He'll refuse what they offer, he'll simply disdain the whole thing."

"After what he's done for everyone in this country, I'd say he had a right to do as he liked," she announced, for her own purposes ignoring the fact that she had pressed her grandfather to a certain course only the night before.

"And I insist you can't, my dear girl. Noone can, these days."[3]

Sebastian Birt, the economics lecturer, at the Institute is a fine example of the new breed of State produced servants. He distrusts individual rights and pleasures because he has no way of finding a place for these areas of behaviour in a bureaucratic society. There is no place for the individual to create his own order in life because the pattern has been established by the State and anyone who refuses to accept that pattern is "not of this world" and is a threat to it. The individual is at fault, not the State system. The reason why Birt is such a willing servant of the State is that his capacity to examine his own nature, and his own situation, or his own rights and pleasures has been extinguished by the type of education he has received. He has been trained to teach economics and the only language he knows is the language of economics. He is quite at home in his lecturer's role but outside that role is insecure and unhappy because he has no other

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[3] Ibid., p. 46.

words that can examine his experience. Whenever he is called upon to make a response, or to think independently about a new situation he adopts language styles used by others. Sometimes he sounds like Miss Edge,[4] other times like a music-hall cockney.[5] He even imitates Mr. Rock.[6] In areas of human behaviour that are not covered by economics textbooks, or by clearly defined State Directives he is puzzled and rather ashamed by his feelings. There are no State Directives on sexual behaviour so he conducts a surreptitious, though pleasurable, relationship with Elizabeth. He feels he has no right to the pleasure he gains in her company or to the occasions it gives him to begin to think for himself. It is so much easier, and safer, not to disturb the order laid down by the State.

> "Consider for a moment our whole position here," he said. "A complete community related in itself, its output being what is, of course, the unlimited demand for State Servants, fed by an inexhaustible supply of keen young girls. Staffed, as well, by men and women who are only too well aware they can be replaced almost at a stroke of the pen by the State, from which there is virtually no appeal. In fact, we have here a sad bevy of teachers lying wide open to be reinvigorated, as it would be called, by new blood of which, worse luck, there is only too plentiful a supply in the Pool."[7]

The greatest danger, to the State and all its comfortable servants, would be "individual tensions" that could be caused by people thinking,

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[4] Ibid., p.

[5] Ibid., p.

[6] Ibid., p.

[7] Ibid., p. 117.

questioning, discussing the situation they are in. Birt, recognizes that these tensions exist but, for him, they are harmful and should be consigned to the "periphery of outer darkness".[8] It is nicely ironic that Birt, or old "Cause and Effect" as the girls call him, is the exponent of this self-interested obeisance to the "status-quo". He has been trained to examine causes, natures and functions of economic systems that are often developed by free thinking, self-reliant iconoclasts. But Birt has been trained in a subject and not as a human being so he is incapable of seeing himself as outside the orbit of the "spinning golden bowl"[9] of a bureaucratic society. This kind of society exists as long as its functionaries are not taught to examine the nature of meaning and experience through their ability to imaginatively connect with that experience through language. If they are not taught to examine experience they will have the choice of living like Birt, in vulnerable dependence within a State System, or like Moira, exercising within that system all the skills of an immoral manipulator.

In Concluding Green is examining types of social order and his ideas about order are inextricably connected with the way he uses language to identify these types of order. Any examination of types of social order raises questions about the limitations and balances that are necessitated by any social structure. Equipoise is established, in a structure, by the distribution of power and by its demarcation but

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[8] Ibid., p. 117.

[9] Ibid., p. 118.

questions must be asked about the nature of that power, the extent of its influence, the checks and controls upon it and who should possess it, and who should train its heirs. Questions are also raised about how the individual needs for permanence, purpose and love can be fulfilled within a closely ordered society. Can a social system be justified in dismissing these needs to the "periphery of outer darkness"? Or is the society right in restraining these individual needs that can so easily distort or destroy the beneficient aspects of man's nature? Mr. Rock, though he abhors the unnatural order over life that is established by the Institute, is equally abhorrent of the license in which Moira's cabalistic group indulge. At the end of the day that is described in Concluding Mr. Rock is "on the whole" "well-satisfied".[10] He still has his own way of life, his cottage, his granddaughter and his animals. He has evaded the menaces to this way of life occasioned by Moira's provocations and Miss Edge's intrigues. He has survived the dark walk home through the woods. But Green leaves unanswered the questions about how long, and for what purpose Rock's individualism can be sustained and whether there is to be no place for his kind of imaginative language in the Institute education. The Institute, and the forest will still be there the next day and the patterns of life they represent will be as forceful, if not more so, than the dignified, responsible, self-reliance that is epitomized by Rock. Several reviewers and critics found Green's ending to

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[10] Ibid., p. 254.

Concluding,[11] disquieting. Several mysteries remained. The lost girl was not found, Rock's position was unaltered, Elizabeth's relationship was not resolved, Edge and Baker were still in control and Birt was still a sycophant. On this Founder's Day, nothing apparently has happened but then Green is not writing a detective story or a romance, he is using language to penetrate into the complex and intricate mechanism of human nature and behaviour and how it constructs and finds expression in society. The only way the writer can understand that mechanism is by using language that is allusive and metaphorical; for only this kind of language can reveal the layers upon layers of knowledge and feeling that make up the experience of various and separate individuals. Only in this way can the writer approach an understanding of the meaning of certain patterns of existence that are adopted by certain individuals or groups of people. Examined in the context of this novel the choices seem to lie between petrification, subservience, or solitude; and there are no conclusions in this novel, only the consistency of thought provided by Green's images and allusions, for these are coincident with the types of social order that are presented in Concluding.

Miss Baker and Miss Edge are the Sapphic guardians of the pattern of life imposed by the Institution that they serve unquestioningly. Their function is to train State servants and their unnatural dependence,

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coupled with their capacity to exclude imagery, beauty and love from their lives make them ably fitted for their job. Green first introduces these able administrators as they are eating breakfast on the morning of the Founder's Day holiday. The words used to depict these women are more suggestive of mathematical equations than of human beings.[12] They have risen in the service "hand in hand"; they serve on Separate Commissions, but these Commissions meet at the same place and at the same time; they share an equal authority and even physically they balance each other. One is "short and thin" and the other "fat and short", a + b = c + a. In describing these women, Green uses words that indicate how their particular ordering of their physical and professional existence is extended to their surroundings. The inner "sanctum" of their private apartment reflects the state of mind that is loyal to a system that denies the need for independence and unfettered practical experience in living, and that relies on an unproductive mutual dependence. Edge and Baker have destroyed the genuine order of the seventeenth century room by laying parquet blocks and "State imitation Chinese Kidderminster rugs". The natural grace and beauty of the room has been distorted by the imposition of their own less than lovely taste. Anything vibrant that is beyond the control of their habitual routine is seen as a threat. Edge is afraid of the "glimpse of matter"[12] that is beyond her control and tries to protect herself with the waste paper basket, only to be reminded of yet another threat, the anonymous letter that asks crudely "who is

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[12] Henry Green, Concluding, p. 11.

there fornicates besides the goose". They have torn up the letter but they cannot destroy the human instincts and needs that are represented by the vitality of that "glimpse of matter". The women try to perpetrate an order that aims at controlling natural vitality and grace within the bonds of habit and routine.

Occasionally they are moved to an instinctive or natural action.

> In spite of summer and that it was dawn, there was already a log fire alight as Edge moved across to draw one pair of curtains, merely to look at the weather, or to lower a window perhaps, she did not know, but the room influenced her to act on graceful impulse. She took hold on velvet, which had red lilies over a deeper red, and paused, as she gently parted the twin halves, to admire her hands' whiteness against the heavy pile. Delicately, then, she proceeded to reveal window panes, because shutters had not been used the night before, to disclose glass frosted to flat arches by condensation, so that the Sanctum was reflected all dark sapphire blue from electric light at her back because it was not yet morning. She could even see, round her head's inky shade, no other than a swarm of aquamarines, which, pictured on the dark sapphire panes, were each drop of the chandelier that she had lit with the lamps switched on in entering.[13]

When this occurs the language explodes into images that reveal the classic intensity of the feelings that are aroused by early light of the morning. But because they have so tightly regulated their lives and have adopted the kind of language that may be sufficient for writing the authoritative text on orphans but which is totally inadequate for actually talking to one, they have lost the power, if

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[13] Ibid., p. 12.

they ever had it, of using language metaphorically, to explore what is happening around them and how they are affected by these events. The one occasion that Baker uses a simile to place themselves in a real perspective, she is called to heel by Edge.

> "Yes, Baker, but there is so much which is unexplained. That is the reason I feel we must have a clearance, a real spring clean," Miss Edge interrupted. But, now the tension was relaxed, she spoke in almost languishing tones.
>
> Miss Baker became unusually confident. The music, the dance, the air of festivity had loosened her tongue.
>
> "So long as we ourselves don't get swept up into the dust pan along with the wet tea leaves," she said.
>
> "Baker, surely that is rather fanciful," her colleague reproved, in an idle voice.[14]

The simile points to the real nature of their apparent power. They are as unattractive and useless as the simile implies but because this type of language can approach a reality that is beyond words it is best avoided, as it is most of the time, by those in command. Most of the time Edge and Baker use the formal Latinate language of State Directives. Edge masks her covetousness by describing Rock's future in a State home.

> "But it must depend on one's physical condition. There can be no comfort in age as such," Winstanley, who loved an argument, objected.

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[14] Ibid., p. 220.

> Miss Edge looked gravely at her. "In that case," she said, as though to refer to incurable illness, "there is another alternative. The State looks after its own. There are Homes of Repose for those who have deserved well of their Country and who, with advancing years, find the burden of old age detracts from the advantages of a life of quietude they have been permitted to lead at large."[15]

But even Edge's politely artificial lunch-time conversation is punctured by the thoughts that are raised by the scent of the azaleas and the sound of the girls' whispering. Edge's "fanciful"[16] thoughts are, for the moment, controlled by the formal language of grace but as the holiday progresses and the regular order of the Institute is lessened[17] the disturbing feelings and thoughts raised by the pervasive sensuality of the flowers come closer to the surface. The staff are unpunctual, rumours grow about the reason for Mary's disappearance, a ludicrous injunction from the State Council tries to give the girls some long-denied practical experience by providing them with pig farms, and suddenly Edge realises that the azaleas and rhododendrons are alive with blue-bottles.

> For a moment she thought she might faint.
>
> She looked again. She forced herself to admit that, at first glance, she had exaggerated. There were not as many as

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[15] Ibid., p. 101.

[16] Ibid., p. 102.

[17] Ibid., p. 122.

> she had thought. Yet the scent was distinctive, sickly. So what did this new frightfulness portend? And how could they ever dispose, now, of this huge mass of blooms? While the whole idea, that there must be the body underneath, was unhealthy, morbid, too absurd, would she have to face it, after the girls had made these flowers into great swags of fragrant colour at her direction on the walls, would it be that buzzing flies might stay round the bouquets, turn all to decay and desecration?
>
> Her mouth and throat burned dry. Try as she might, she could not swallow. She picked up the cup of tea with hands atremble, but before she could bring it to her lips, she retched.[18]

This time her language pierces to the real presence of natural disintegration that exists in life, against which punctuality, evasiveness and injunctions are powerless as well as phrases like " Everything must proceed, and in due order."[19] Edge finally capitulates when her sensations that the flowers express the inevitability of change and the disruption and disintegration that accompany change are confirmed by the presence of the grotesque rag doll that is "embowered" in the flowers. The words used to describe its presence can only be metaphorical.

> "What's this?" she demanded, horrified by the agitation in her voice. The students parted. And she saw, and it gave her such a frightful turn she straight-away fainted, a rabbity Rag Doll dressed gaily in miniature Institute pyjamas, painted with a

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[18] Ibid., pp. 126 - 127.

[19] Ibid., p. 127.

> grotesque caricature of Mary's features
> on its own flat face, laid disgustingly
> on a bit of mackintosh, embowered by these
> blooms.[20]

By using the adjective "rabbity" the Rag Doll is connected with other objects that cause irrational fear in her mind. Similarly the regulation "Institute pyjamas" and the uniformity and order they suggest are no protection against the possibility of sudden and violent death. The counterpointing of "gaily" and "grotesque" indicate the horror associated with unnatural death and the allusion to the mackintosh connects both with the way the living girl, Merode, was found nestled beneath the fallen beech tree[21] and with Baker's dubious story about the pig who ate her mackintosh.[22] So that all the memories and events are fused in this one object.

Neither these feelings and insights, nor the words used to approach them have a place in the "Reports of Behaviour" rendered to "Superior Authorities".[23] The elaborate machinery of reports and directives, rules and regulations set up by the State to allow its servants to analyse, order and make judgments on human activity is ultimately ineffectual because in trying to establish that one level of communication is possible it only negates any and all communication.

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[20] Ibid., p. 140.

[21] Ibid., p.

[22] Ibid., p. 152.

[23] Ibid., p. 131.

The dialogue between Baker and Edge and Mrs. Manley, Merode's aunt, is a clear example of this irony.[24] Baker has the responsibility of writing a report on a situation the reality of which escapes her because the child refuses to talk to her. None of the girls talk to Edge or Baker with the fluid expressive dialogue they use among each other[25] or to Mr. Rock, so the women have no conception of the girls' various personalities, motives and feelings. Like the pigs, that are to be provided for the Institute, the girls are carefully selected, herded together and fed collectively with a balanced diet of meals and lectures and by the end of the process they will be served up daintily for State service. Edge and Baker are too enmeshed in the State system to make this comparison, and any intimations of their real situation causes them to vomit or faint, while their acolyte Sebastian Birt is only introduced to it through his relationship with the girl who has been pronounced, by the State, to be a failure and therefore insane. In the process of breaking out of the pattern of language and behaviour demanded by the State, Elizabeth Rock's mind is apparently disordered but with her clumsy, jumbled thinking she approaches a reality that is more true than the itemized language of Jim Inglethwaite's letter,[26] or the pontifical prose of Birt's economic analysis.

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[24] Ibid., pp. 128 - 135.

[25] Ibid., pp. 180 - 187.

[26] Ibid., p. 125.

> "The rest goes to pig farms, I agree, but here we touch on what might be termed the ethics of political economy. I wouldn't exactly recommend your using this in exam papers, but I do put it forward that, if there is waste, then you should keep your own pigs. Clean up so to speak, behind."
>
> "Then what are they going to eat on pig farms?"
>
> "But, surely, that is the affair of the State?" he asked. "A mass feeding of a hundred thousand State factories must be made up into balanced pig foods."
>
> "And what if the pigs don't like?"
>
> "They will. That is the purpose of the State," he said.
>
> "But how can you tell, which is my whole point, don't you see?" Elizabeth rushed in. "You never know with animals, or anyone."
>
> "Yet, Liz," he explained patiently, "the one goes thin, the other complains aloud, and both go thin."
>
> "Oh it's not only food, I wouldn't be so silly, there's lots of things people are as silent as animals over. In what way is any single person sure how a certain matter will turn out?"[27]

In Birt's bland system of social organization, there is no place for choice, pleasure, individuality or privacy for Birt is not himself aware of these precious aspects of human life.

Elizabeth, on the other hand, with her need for love, her spontaneous response to those she loves and life around her, her insights into the natures of the girls and their teachers, and her

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[27] Ibid., pp. 206 - 207.

inquiries about the causes and consequences of actions in relation to the "single person", the individual, introduces Birt to these unfamiliar areas of thought. Fortunately for his career, her breakdown is an indication of her failure to succeed in the State-ordered world so her ideas that seem to arise out of this failure are also suspect. Her grandfather, though, is more of a threat because his recognizedly successful contribution to the State allows him and his ideas the protection of the State. Through the breadth of his intellect, his cherished self-reliance, his ease in talking with State Directors, students, administrators, and even his cat, goose and pig, his selfless concern with the loss of life and with the absence of justice and decency in life, he represents a man who can encompass, and control, in himself all areas of human experience. His perception is not narrowed by self-interest, his mind is not constricted by dependence on others, his life is not compartmentalized. There is about him an admirable freedom in his thoughts and actions, a freedom which is a beneficient force because it is disciplined by his love for his granddaughter and his desire to confront, at all costs, the forces that threaten a just and harmonious life.

Despite the frugality that his attitudes impose upon his life he is envied and feared by the materially comfortable Institute faculty. To Edge and Baker he and his animals are untidy, faintly disreputable reminders of the irritations of everyday life. Their mode of life, within the State hierarchy, has set them apart from the necessity of finding and preparing food, or of transporting themselves from one place to another and the sight of Rock, burdened by his swill

buckets, moving slowly across the park is an embarassment[28] that they want removed. Sebastian Birt, who himself is so dependent and dishonest resents Rock's impolitic wisdom and his freedom to "do what he thinks fit".[29] Birt is incapable of independent thought and action and cannot accept that such men exist, and are respected. The two groups, the Institute administrators, Elizabeth and her grandfather, together with their respective life patterns are brought together at the Founder's Day dance, with Sebastian Birt as a somewhat uneasy mediator. Green describes the dance in such a way that the cyclic interdependency that cements one group together is contrasted with the separate, discordant pattern of the other.

> Then the valse continued, on and on, and they could see couples circle into view, their short reflections upon the floor continually on the move behind swinging skirts over polished wax, backwards and forwards, in and out again as each pair swung round under chandeliers. And at the sight these others walked on the lighted scene, held white arms up to veined shoulders, in one another's arms moved off, turning to the beat with half shut eyes, entranced, in a soft ritual beneath azalea and rhododendron; one hundred and fifty pairs in white and while,--equally oblivious, inside their long black dresses, Miss Baker and Miss Edge lovingly swayed in one another's bony grip, on the room's exact centre, to and fro, Edge's eyes tight closed, both in a culmination of the past twelve months, at spinsterish rest in movement, barely violable, alone.[30]

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[28] Ibid., p.

[29] Ibid., p. 118.

[30] Ibid., p. 195.

Edge and Baker are at the centre of the dance, as they are at the centre of the Institution that directs the formal rhythm of the girls' training for State service. That this form of organization excludes certain aspects of human life is recognized, for any selection and ordering necessitates exclusion, but the form is sufficient and can be defended because while it exists those within it, like Edge, are "barely violable"; they are protected. Elizabeth and her grandfather, dancing in their own way and choosing their own path do not "cover much ground" but have the satisfaction of directing their own movement.

> He stepped high, which is to say he woodenly, uproariously lifted knees as if to stamp while he held the granddaughter at arm's length, but did not cover much ground. Still the one man on that floor, they made a twice noticeable pair because they were alone in paying heed to where they went, in his case to avoid a fall when he might break a hip, certainly fatal for a man his age, and she for the boy who remained, at the moment, her one hope of continuing to live.[31]

Though their self-confident and unconstrained movement may be irritating it does not find a place within the context of the dance and by inference their life style and attitudes of mind are not of real menace to the society of the Institute. The real threat exists in the sinister society of the girls, not in the independent thought and action of a man who is included, albeit unwillingly, within the orbit of the Institute. Rock's chief delight is in the pattern, sound, rhythm, colour and grace of natural objects.

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[31] Ibid., p. 196.

> Once the starlings had settled in that tree they one and all burst out singing.
>
> Then there were more, even higher, dots against paler pink, and these, in their turn, began to circle up above, scything the air, and to swoop down through a thickening curve, in the enormous echo of blood, or of the sea, until all was black about that black elm, as the first mass of starlings left while these others settled, and there was a huge volume of singing.
>
> Then a third concourse came out of the west, and, as the first birds swarmed upon the nearest beech, these late comers stooped out of dusk in a crash of air to take that elm, to send the last arrivals out, which trebled the singing.
>
> The old man wondered, as often before, if this were not the greatest sound on earth. Elizabeth stood quiet. The starlings flew around a little and then, as sky faded fast, the moon paled to brilliance, and this moment was over, that singing drooped, then finished, as every bird was home.
>
> "I'm glad I had that once more," Mr. Rock said aloud.[32]

His chief delight is beauty. With full awareness of the transience and loss, the cruelty and force concomitant with life he still reveres and cherishes living creatures and is profoundly disturbed by the distorted forms that have been adopted by the girl's secret society. Its Judas-like signal of recognition, its initiation rites, its concocted superstitions, mesmeric music and salacious gossip anger Rock far more than the mistakes and misunderstandings of Edge and Baker,

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[32] Ibid., p. 177.

for the girl's cabalistic society makes him realise that there are times when it is almost impossible to revere and cherish living things. When they distort and pervert life Rock feels "there are times when I have had enough."[33] After his experience in the Institute Inn, Rock stumbles upstairs pushing his way back to the dance, that represents a type of order which, though artificial and fallible, is preferable to that of the below-stairs sorority. Green describes Rock's re-entry into the dance in natural images that serve to reestablish the ordered grace of natural life.

> "Hush, Gapa," she said. But he walked away, then followed, and a second time that group of children opened, reclosed behind the couple trailing after, having parted as another vast bloom might that, torn by a wind in summer, lies collectedly dying on crushed fallen leaves, to be divided by one and then two walkers, only for a strain of wind to reassemble it, to be rolled back complete on the path once more, at the whim of autumnal airs again.[34]

The memory of Moira and her group, though, are still with him.

> "Don't go now, sir," Sebastian cravenly protested.
>
> They stood, a miserable trio in black cloth, in the dank dark; music at their heels.
>
> "What?" Mr. Rock demanded.
>
> "I said why just yet?" Birt asked, pale and obstinate.

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[33] Ibid., p. 230.

[34] Ibid., p. 231.

> "I've seen enough," the old man proclaimed. "Miserable children that they are. Too much freedom here. Lack of control. All they have to do is chatter," he ended.
>
> "Was it about your lectures, then?" she enquired.
>
> "They're downright illnatured," he replied, at a tangent. "And inclining towards a dangerous mentality in which I shall take no lot or part. I hope a man of my years would know better. Come out."[35]

For a time, Rock is afraid of the "dank dark" and the forest which are connected, in his mind, with the malevolent forms that man can create. Despite the rather bizarre attempt to mate the rigid form of Edge's life with the more spontaneous, but nevertheless self-disciplined life, of Rock it is obvious that those forms of life can cohabit but not marry. This kind of solution, though, grieves Rock because it is a form of imperfect compromise in the face of the distortion and destruction occasioned by the girls. He is especially saddened because throughout the book the girls have been described in images that have reflected their concordant beauty. Their awakening is clear, bright and hopeful.

> A lovely day had opened and, as she watched, a cloud of starlings rose from the nearest of her Woods, they ascended in a spiral up into blue sky; a thousand dots revolving on a wave, the shape of a vast black seashell pointed to the morning; and she was about to exclaim in delight when, throughout the dormitories upstairs, with a sound of bees in this distant Sanctum, buzzers called her girls to rise so that two hundred and eighty nine turned over to that sound,

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[35] Ibid., p.

> stretched and yawned, opened blue eyes on
> their white sheets to this new day which
> would stretch on, clinging to its light,
> until at length, when night should fall at
> last, would be time for the violins and the
> dance.[36]

Their conversation sounds to Rock like a "susurration of feathers". They diligently gather flowers to decorate the hall and they bear the clear reflected light of the red and white and gold flowers. Even as they bathe, they seem full of promise and enchantment. Moira, their chief spokesman seems to be the quintessence of their natural promise.

> So that when Moira entered, and did not
> shut the door but stood leant against it,
> half in, half out of the room, dressed in
> a pink overall (this colour being her badge
> of responsibility over others), her bare
> legs a gold haze to Miss Marchbanks' weak
> eyes, her figure, as the older woman
> thought, a rounded mass softly merged into
> the exaggeration of a grown woman's, her
> neck and face the colour of ripening
> apricots from sun with strong eyes that
> were an alive blue, shapeless to Miss
> Marchbanks' dull poached eggs of vision, but
> a child so alive, at some trick of summer
> light outside, that the older woman marvelled
> again how it could ever be that the State
> should send these girls, who were really
> women, to be treated like children.[37]

Later in the novel she reminds Rock of "a ripe plum, on a hot day, against green leaves on a wall".[38] But Moira's promising fruitfulness has been soured by the way she exploits and manipulates those around

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[36] Ibid., p. 19.

[37] Ibid., pp. 47 - 48.

[38] Ibid., p. 81.

her. Her education has provided no place for the development of a personal responsibility, only "responsibility over others". An understanding of beauty, an examination of the areas of human experience beyond the self through this kind of appreciation and through the language of this appreciation, has no place in the Institute curriculum so Moira is unredeemed. Her power over the girls is unchallenged, her deceits confuse her ineffectual "guardians" and though Rock is inviolable, Adams the forester has succumbed to her influence. Her involvement in Mary's disappearance is never made explicit but the Bacchanalian associations of her group, the way the girls hunt for Mary in the woods, the funereal associations of the azaleas the girls collect for the dining room, and the fact that Mary was the most diligent and admired student in the Institute all point to the possibility that, unlike a character in a later novel, Lord of the Flies, Mary has not been rescued from the savagery that exists in human nature. Rock's sagacity and love is, for the most part, powerless against Moira. All he can do is save himself and those he loves through the self-discipline and love that orders his day.

> He entered the cottage, switched on a light, began the routine he carried through each bedtime, set things to rights. When he was just about done he heard a cat discreetly yowl. He went to the door. It was Alice. After getting her in with some milk, he climbed the stairs to bed.
>
> On the whole he was well satisfied with his day. He fell asleep almost at once in the yellow woollen nightshirt.[39]

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[39] Ibid., p. 254.

Rock's kind of satisfaction, then, is all. Institutions, with their attempts to codify and order experience through formalized, bureaucratic language, only serve to petrify experience and encourage the growth of unnatural phenomena that are ultimately destructive. Human beings need the limitations suggested by "justice" and "decency" and "the give and take of a civilized community" but these can only by sustained by the internal self-discipline that is occasioned by the constant re-examination of experience through language that penetrates and orders the multiple levels of human experience. This metaphorical use of language is employed by Green in Concluding to express the variety of feeling and thought that constitutes living experience. The images impose their own "demarcations" on that experience and draw men through

> ..... fragrant portals, dimly-starr'd,
> And of ourselves and of our origins.

In Concluding Green has fused several classical and Biblical myths to present a Promethean character Rock, living on the edge of an Eden-like forest that shelters lovers and is tended by a guilt-ridden "fallen" Adams. Beyond the forest exists the man-made Park land and the Institution that has petrified not stimulated natural growth. From its windows the forest's beauty can be seen, and into its sanctum the azaleas infiltrate together with the bluebottles. The process of growth, fertility, decay and disintegration cannot be fixed into a perpetuity for the convenience of a social system. The individual can only accommodate himself to that process and find peace within it by understanding, through language, his part in it. Those who do not

will be as pompous and pathetic as Birt, or as bitter and silly as Edge. By describing one summer's day in the life of a girls' school and in the life of an old man Green has succeeded, by relying on the metaphorical powers of language, in exposing the futility of expecting a Utopia to arise from an Institutionalized society that destroys the mainsprings of a healthy society, namely independence in thought and in expression.

Chapter VIII

NOTHING

After the allegorical suggestiveness of Concluding, with its solemn examination of the way individuals and the State shape their lives through the presence or absence of the imaginative use of language, Green, in his next novel, narrowed his perspective and selected a technique that was as suggestive but more economical. In his attempt to write what he has called the "non-representational"[1] novel he selected dialogue as the main method of vitalizing his characters. Green's argument was that in life we learn by listening and looking. Experience is gained about other people, the world, and ourselves when, with a conscious act of the imagination, we translate sensory experiences into the letters and symbols that make up the words that approach our perception of the reality around us. Perception and judgments are influenced by the way the individual expresses these sensory experiences. The individual then communicates these, essentially personal perceptions, to others through speech. If the novelist wants to create characters in a life-like way, through the medium of words then by following the process of communication that occurs in life, which is by its nature selective, biased, oblique and confusing, by concentrating on dialogue the novelist will approximate to that vitality. Through this direct communication between the novelist and the reader, despite the paradox that the form of

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[1] Henry Green, "A Novelist to His Readers", The Listener, 9 November 1950, p. 505.

communication may be an indirect and inconclusive montage of gossip, anecdotes, conversational fragments, innuendos and half-truths the novelist Green says will "induce the reader to make an act of conscious imagination to fuse the narrative, if this is capable of it, into a work of art with a life of its own."[2] This art form, like the other non-representational forms of music and sculpture makes great demands on the reader. Perhaps this is why judgements about Nothing and Doting are usually circumspect. A close reading, though, of both novels reveals that there is a fine cohesion and balance in both, though these qualities are maintained through different emphases. In Nothing, Green relies more extensively on metaphorical descriptions of scenes, as well as recurrent and associative cross-references. In Doting there is less reliance on descriptions of scenes, or people, that suggest the writer's deeper intention, though these are in evidence at the beginning and the end of the novel, and more dependence on the oblique revelations of dialogue.

In Nothing there are six main characters, all bound together, if not by kinship then by the easy amity of long-standing frienship. Two of the characters, Mary Pomfret and Philip Weatherby are obvious products of the kind of State Institution depicted in Concluding. They are dedicated to their work in State Department D. where most of their day is spent in scissors and paste work[3] or in making tea.

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[2] Henry Green, "The English Novel of the Future", Contact, I, August 1950, p. 23.

[3] Henry Green, Nothing (London: The Hogarth Press, 1950), p. 39.

Their monotonous work is paralleled by their equally monotonous emotional lives. Philip exhibits a Hamlet-like mixture of devotion and disgust[4] towards his mother and is incapable of making any kind of choices himself. Mary to a lesser degree is dependent on her father but still enjoys the feeling that she is indispensable in his life. Their fledgling romance is an easy prey to the self-interested wiles of Mrs. Weatherby for in its undeveloped state it is as lifeless as they are. They both think too precisely and too seriously on the event of marriage, dwelling on the sensible arrangements of living together rather than the sensuous delights.[5]

Mrs. Weatherby and her contemporaries, being products of a society that was regulated less by the State than by the individual, may be a vanishing species[6] but they are, in their hedonistic self-absorption, still more likeable, satisfied and beautiful than their progeny. Their situation and their delight in it is ably summarized in one of John Pomfret's remarks to Liz,

> "Then what did you do?" Liz demanded.
>
> "Why nothing, of course," Mr. Pomfret cried.
>
> "That is the whole beauty of us, we never can seem to do anything."[7]

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[4] Ibid., p. 25 and p. 213.

[5] Ibid., p. 234.

[6] Ibid., p. 83 and p. 214.

[7] Ibid., p. 95.

In Nothing, the generations seem to have changed places. It is the middle-aged, not the young, who are absorbed with gossip, parties, fashions, pleasant dinners and comfortable beds. Mrs. Weatherby, especially, takes enormous pleasure in the jockeyings for position in the sexual race. She and her contemporaries perpetually talk about their sense of duty and responsibility towards their offspring but the only action they take is to remove these children if they get in the way of their parents' gratification. Despite this obvious divorce between their parents' intentions and actions the children are the dutiful ones. They are painfully responsible and touchingly filial despite the lies and intrigues that are erected by their parents. On one level the characters and the events of this novel appear farcical. The action occurs in well-to-do hotels in London and Brighton and in tasteful suburban drawing rooms. Life is spent eating and drinking, and manipulating other people. Hidden identities and relationships season this kind of life, which could become boring, and sex, though the encounters are politely not described, also adds its own unique flavour. However, beneath this Restoration comedy-like surface of Nothing there are fundamental tensions that are supplied by Green's mode of presenting the "way of the world". It is his manner and insight that gives force to what, only in appearance, seems to be a trivial middle-class comedy.

In his immediately preceding three novels, Caught, Back and Concluding Green is evidently fascinated by the images raised by

language. Their therapeutic and transfixing powers are given form and so too is the way metaphorical language draws men to a reality which is denied by the language of reports and directives. These very various novels deal in very various ways with ideas of the order the individual can establish through his imagination. In Nothing the metaphors pale before the force of Green's handling of dialogue. The dialogue, though, is not isolated from metaphor. Without the binding force of the metaphorical references and scenes the novel would disintegrate into a series of highly comic, but nevertheless disconnected conversational vignettes. Green's use of an oblique, referential style serves to reveal the tensions that run below the level of social chatter and to reflect the sentimental, cruel, passionate and obscene, trivial and absurd amalgam that is life. People may be collectively lazy, selfish, vicious, irresponsible and greedy but they are still very funny while seeking satisfaction.

All the characters are either engaged in this search or, once they have discovered a kind of satisfaction, in trying to sustain and perfect that satisfaction. Philip's tedious insistence on the importance of family and heredity[8] is caused by his essentially human need to feel that he belongs to someone, that he is not isolated, that his being is significant. He thinks that the

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[8] Ibid., pp. 21 - 25.

way to satisfaction is by affirming valid blood ties. That he finds his relatives are actually unpleasant and that there is some doubt even about his paternity calls into question his philosophy and leaves him, at the end of the novel, even more dependent than he was at the beginning. For a while, he had opted for a socially acceptable attachment by choosing to be engaged to Mary, the daughter of his mother's close friend but this tie was even more unsatisfactory than that with his uncle. Most of the time with Mary is spent in quarreling and when Mary finally breaks with him he is happier[9] and more composed than he has ever been, having discovered that although conventional wisdom decrees that fulfillment comes from involvement with marital and family ties, in actuality these ties can become chains. Mary, Philip's reluctant fiancée, pursues a similar search. After a frustrating conversation with Philip that emphasises how hopeless and constricted life appears to be,[10] she takes French-leave from work and tries to find out the truth about herself, her origins and the influences on her nature. The oracle she consults, though, is devious.

> The two women stared at each other in amazement. Suddenly Jane laughed. A good-natured smile spread across her face but there was still a trace of slyness about the eyes. Miss Pomfret looked small, frightened, and bewildered.
>
> "Then what exactly did dear John say?" the elder asked with a casual tone of voice.

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[9] Ibid., p. 238.

[10] Ibid., pp. 53 - 55.

"Only that Mummy and you were great friends."

"Darling Julia" Mrs. Weatherby assented. "And you are so like her dear. Simply the living spit! I am very fond of John" she added then waited rather out of breath.

"You see I've never had anyone tell me about Mummy" the girl said with an appealing smile.

"But doesn't dear John?"

"Oh you know what Daddy is."

"Yes I see, I see. What was it exactly you wanted to find out?"

"But everything, how she was like, everything."

"Of course. Look my angel" Mrs. Weatherby beamed on Mary "I'm such a stupid, so you will forget all I said about idle tongues won't you? I thought" she went on obviously at random "you'd heard something about that absurd houseparty. It was in Essex before you were born. But simply invented, every single word made up! I suppose people had much more time on their hands those days which made them so dangerous. Darling Julia!!" She sighed. "Darling darling Julia and how she would have simply been overjoyed to be sitting looking at you here this instant minute!"[11]

Mrs. Weatherby adroitly parries any slander on her reputation, or that of Mary's father. Initially caught off guard she retrieves her position by blocking the truth with flattery, a technique that she has perfected. Philip's more open accusations[12] are countered by similarly indirect generalisations for Jane Weatherby, while enjoying the social occasions that having a family provide, does not want to be bound by them. As

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[11] Ibid., pp. 57 - 58.

[12] Ibid., p. 12.

she and John agree,

> "our children will just have to work their own lives out, we can't do everything for them."[13]

Philip and Mary's search is paralleled in a similar quest by their parents, though John and Jane, being well ahead in experience can avoid dead ends. Both are the single survivors of marriages that were less than perfect. John's wife was humorless and Jane's husband brutish, leaving her with a desire for male attention but with little satisfaction in its consummation. Nevertheless, there is still the urge to make some kind of perfection out of the male, female relationship, to make, through this community of two, a sanctum in which the self is preserved against **loneliness**and decay. Mrs. Weatherby has a horror of being alone. Her surprising outburst of emotion, when she hears of an old friend's death is caused by her fears that she might "be alone when it happens".[14] Marriage is one demonstrably imperfect system that human beings have developed to counteract the solitude and suffering that the individual can experience and most of the conversation in the novel is devoted to reminiscences about past relationships or plans for future ones. The novel opens and closes with two scenes[15] that are similar in setting and mood and in the language used to describe the situation. In the first a mock marriage is celebrated between John Pomfret and Penelope, Jane's young daughter; and in the final scene a

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[13] Ibid., p. 246.

[14] Ibid., p. 208.

[15] Ibid., pp. 1 - 4 and pp. 244 - 247.

real marriage is arranged between John and Jane. For the rest of the novel Green demonstrates, always indirectly, how all relationships have false and true elements because as Jane, with some wisdom, remarks to her son

> I really do believe, that you only truly
> meet people even your nearest and dearest
> once or twice in a long long while.[16]

In consequence these relationships, no matter how fine, are difficult to sustain. To check the disintegrative elements that are inherent in the self as well as in relationships with other people certain rituals are established. These may be a ring or a cigar band, a party to mark maturity or a dinner to plight one's troth but these external rites are no guarantee of security.

Time and again in Nothing Green, in scenes of high comedy, displays his characters floundering through the morass of their greed, fatigue and petulance in an attempt to find the secure footing of the better side of their natures. Green uses the rhythms of conversation to trace this movement but despite their better moments when action, speech and gesture are controlled, almost ritualized, Green's characters keep falling back into the slime of their own envy and irritation. The occasion of Philip's twenty-first birthday[17] party is a climactic example of how Green fuses his ideas about the reality of human nature and its ceremonies with an ideal technique for explaining

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[16] Ibid., pp. 152 - 153.

[17] Ibid., pp. 82 - 122.

that reality. He contrasts the peevish and private conversations about Philip's action in announcing his engagement at the party his mother has given him with the formal, rather rhetorical description of the scene.

Philip has managed to steal some of the limelight by announcing his engagement to Mary. Undaunted, though annoyed, Mrs. Weatherby rises to the occasion and performs the ritual blessing, much to everyone's satisfaction. Her movement towards the couple is mirrored a thousand times, as the grandeur of the room lends dignity to what otherwise could be a graceless occasion, and the mutual friendship between the two families adds a further harmony.

> And when Jane came to their table she folded Mary Pomfret into so wonderful an embrace while the child half rose from her chair to greet it that not only was the girl's hair not touched or disarranged in this envelopment, but as Mrs. Weatherby took the young lady to her heart it must have seemed to most the finest thing they had ever seen, the epitome of how such moments should be, perfection in other words, the acme of manners, and memorable as being the flower, the blossoming of grace and their generation's ultimate instinct of how one should ideally behave.[18]

Her ideal behaviour though soon evaporates in her private conversation that follows her son's announcement. Ironically, it is during the discussion of a ritual procedure that is to bind the young people

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[18] Ibid., p. 109.

together, the bridal wear, the organ, the choir, the bridesmaids, honeymoon, first apartment and children that the natural feelings of Mrs. Weatherby emerge.

> "Oh isn't parenthood confusing! I always tell these girls when they get engaged they simply can't guess what they're in for." At which she gaily laughed "Now there I go again" she went on, beaming at Mary "I do declare I'd quite forgotten for the second! What will you think of me? Oh Philip your stupid Mamma!"
>
> "When they began giving sex instruction at Council schools" Philip told them "there was a woman wrote to say the lesson had taken ninety minutes each week off her daughter's mathematics and surely maths must be more important."
>
> "My dear boy" Mrs. Weatherby approved "that was almost witty."
>
> "Good for you Philip!" Mr. Pomfret said. "Well then mum's the word when Pen's concerned eh?"
>
> "Yes, you must all and every one of you promise faithfully" Jane agreed. "In fact the less spoken about this secret engagement the better, so it doesn't get to her sacred little ears poor soul."[19]

It is so difficult for Mrs. Weatherby to sustain the feelings she knows she ought to have, of maternal pride and concern for her son's happiness. The habits of speech and action that are dictated by an elaborate code of manners can sometimes bridge the gap between what we ought to feel and what we really feel.

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[19] Ibid., pp. 118 - 119.

More valiantly than Jane, John tries to like his child, to invest her with some special kind of quality, when, in fact, he finds her only slightly less uninteresting than her friends.

> "Oh Liz" he cried and spread his arms out over two dirty plates on which were soiled knives and forks, two glasses or red wine, and a bottle in its gay straw jacket, "she made a picture, you know she's a remarkable girl. Mary stood there like an angel, just a Botticelli angel framed in my lovely Matisse over the fireplace, those lozenges of colour perfect as a background for that pretty head. When I think how she's carried on for years without a woman to talk with I feel ashamed and proud Liz!"
>
> "What did Mary say then?"
>
> A faint shade of embarrassment seemed to come over his handsome features.
>
> "Not much" he replied.
>
> "How d'you mean?" she anxiously asked.
>
> "No man could be luckier in a daughter" he said. "Not one moment of worry, nary one. Of course if Jane hadn't quarrelled with Julia before she died I might easily have called on Jane for help. I know I thought of it. But Liz it seemed disloyal to my wife, she would have turned in her poor grave. So I struggle on alone."
>
> He paused. Miss Jennings appeared incapable of speech. He was gazing through the great window on what looked to be a white sheet of water from which a few black trees in bud leaned against driving rain.
>
> "And it's come out quite perfect" he proceeded. Miss Jennings blinked. "I can't say too much in praise of my girl. So I'm going to give a party!"[20]

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[20] Ibid., pp. 40 - 41.

John Pomfret seeks some kind of perfection in his life. His Botticelli and Matisse provide some consolation, but his daughter despite his loyal comparison of her beauty with theirs, is too serious and sensible for his taste. He is guilty about these feelings but finally agrees with Jane that "our children will just have to work their own lives out, we can't do everything for them."[21]

It is as difficult to sustain relationships with those one loves, or ought to love, as it is to preserve those special moments of experience that make the individual forget for a while, the inevitability of, first, decay and then oblivion. Green describes the hotel room before the arrival of the guests in such a way that these intense points in time, are occasions for the self to crystallize into some kind of perfection. Though these occasions are fleeting, and contrived, they are necessary.

> Standing prepared, empty, curtained,
> shuttered, tall mirrors facing across
> laid tables crowned by napkins, with
> space rocketing transparence from one
> glass silvered surface to the other,
> supporting walls covered in olive-
> coloured silk, chandeliers repeated to
> a thousand thousand profiles to be lost
> in olive gray depths as quiet as this
> room's untenanted attention, but a scene
> made warm with mass upon mass of daffodils
> banked up against mirrors, or mounded once
> on each of the round white tables and laid
> in a flat frieze about their edges,--here
> then time stood still for Jane, even in
> wine bottles over to one side holding the
> single movement, and that unseen of bubbles
> rising just as the air, similarly trapped
> even if conditioned, watched unseen across
> itself in a superb but not indifferent
> pause of mirrors.[22]

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[21] Ibid., p. 246.

[22] Ibid., p. 82.

For a moment Mrs. Weatherby's lacerating tongue is constrained by the occasion and she appears to embody perfection.

> As after a pause of amazement she stepped through, murmuring over a shoulder "oh my darlings" the picture she made there, and it was a painting, was echoed a thousand thousand times; strapless shoulders out of a full gray dress that was flounced and soft but from which her shoulders rose still softer up to eyes over which, and the high forehead, dark wings of her hair were folded rather as a raven may claim for itself the evening air, the chimes, the quiet flight back home to rest.[23]

The picture is soon marred by the intrusion of her son Philip and her memory about the sacrifice of the brooch that paid for the evening. Nevertheless at least for that one evening she is "the only person out of all London", special, secure and as preserved against the forces of time and decay as the bubbles in the wine bottles.

Despite Jane Weatherby's careful planning and her artistic pleasure in those perfect moments even she cannot exclude those forces. They are as evident in this scene as they are throughout the novel, like uninvited guests at the feast. In this scene they are represented by the yellowing place card of one William Smith that has been left over from a previous reception. This card is a pointed reminder of time's effects so it is torn into pieces and discreetly removed from the room, "where everything is fresh".[24] References, though, to William Smith and to others like him are scattered throughout the novel.

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[23] Ibid., p. 83.

[24] Ibid., p. 86.

Smith was one of the group of friends that was associated with Jane, a group whose relationships have disintegrated as well as their bodies. William Smith, whose arms have been amputated after a car accident and who, as a consequence, has been abandoned by his wife was one of the group. Arthur Morris, whose limbs are being eaten away by gangrene was another. With these macabre reminders Green counterpoints the attempts by his more lusty characters to establish harmony and perpetuity in their lives. As the novel progresses even the vitality of some of these characters begins to dwindle. At the beginning John Pomfret, barely manages to suppress a smile[25] when he talks about the loss of Arthur Morris' toe. Even the news that his ankle now has to come off, though regarded with more sympathy, is still of less interest than the conversation about whether to have "cheese or sweet or both". By the end of the novel John is not quite so indifferent for he has to puncture his own limbs with an insulin needle and even his more vigorous friend, Dick Abbot, suffers from an ominous choking fit at the very moment that he is going to exhibit his potency to Miss Jennings.

> "Look here..." she said seriously when
> next he allowed her to come up for air
> but at once his mouth came back on hers.
> After a moment she went noticeably limp
> and then, while he still pressed his
> lips on her tongue she raised her arms
> and tightened these around his neck.

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[25] Ibid., p. 5.

> "Oh Dick!" she said at last. "Oh Dick!!"
>
> Upon which for no discoverable reason he began to choke. He soon had to let go of her and if at first she seemed to smile goodnaturedly, then as his face grew more purple and at last black, as his staring eyes appeared to fight an enemy within so frightful was the look of preoccupation on them, so in no time at all she was thumping his back, breaking off to fetch a glass of water, letting off small 'oh's' of alarm until, when his red eyes were almost out of their sockets he began to be able to draw breath once more and what was plainly a glow of ease started to pale him, to suffuse his patient, gentle orbs.[26]

Even the six-year old Penelope's grotesque imitations of first the man in Brighton, with his amputated arm,[27] and then John Pomfret's punctured arm[28] are further indications that each generation, in its turn, will have to endure the effects of time.

The idea about how time devours the individual's achievements and his body is, of course, not new. Green does succeed, though, in giving it a new and even comic expression which suggests that humour and friendship are the only defences against time. One's friends may giggle about one's misfortunes but at least they will mark one's own life.[29] John's attitude is not really as callous as it sounds,

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[26] Ibid., p. 243.

[27] Ibid., p. 72.

[28] Ibid., p. 191.

[29] Ibid., p. 200.

> "If I lay in bed about to be amputated" he went on "I wouldn't expect you to laugh of course my dear and naturally Mary couldn't, but I'd lose a certain amount of resistance if I thought our acquaintances weren't roaring their beastly heads off! I'd even forgive you a grin or two" he said smiling at her.
>
> "That's better" she said and grinned back. "You mustn't ever be serious."[30]

This is one way the individual is devoured but there are other ways. Gossip and sex can similarly accelerate the process. All the conversations in the novel take place in restaurants, pubs or over the dining room table. Reputations are carved up as the main course is being served, and relationships are destroyed over coffee. Civilized man may no longer have to fight for survival in the jungle but his character can be as easily diminished by his failure to obtain a waiter[31] as to secure some game. People feed off each other as perpetually as they feed off the menu. As the process is integral to life it can, therefore, be made perfect, for a while. The description of Pascal's dramatic presentation of the joint of meat follows close upon Liz and Dick's uncontrollable laughter about Arthur Morris's amputations. One limb is ridiculed, the other is respected.

> Pascal and the head waiter hurried over with a trolley crowned by a dome of chromium which between them they removed with a conjurer's flourish to disclose the roast. Abbot watched this closely,

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[30] Ibid., pp. 7 - 8.

[31] Ibid., pp. 10 - 11.

> leant forward to touch the plate on which they were to serve Jane's portion perhaps to make sure that it was hot and in general was threatening although at first he said very little. Mrs. Weatherby, the appreciative audience, greeted this almost magical presentation with small delighted cries, praised everything but told Gaspard to take away the potatoes that he had laid, one by one, around her portion in the loving way a jeweller will lay out great garnets beside the design to which he is to work, before the setting is begun.[32]

The appetite for food, in Jane's generation is about as well-developed as their appetite for sex.[33] According to the anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss, in some tribes, the word for eating and copulation is the same. John, Jane, Liz and Dick probably would not articulate such a comparison but one of their band, Arthur Morris, does see the connection. In response to Philip's questions about his mother's relationship with John Pomfret, Arthur says,

> "Is she feeding him?"
>
> "What on earth are you getting at?"
>
> "Does she ask him continually to meals. Not drinks, meals."
>
> "Well yes he does come pretty often."
>
> "It's an infallible sign with women Philip."[34]

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[32] Ibid., pp. 14 - 15.

[33] Ibid., p. 69.

[34] Ibid., p. 68.

John succumbs to Jane's cooking and to her demands because Jane panders to his taste for jugged hare[35]. He willingly, though subconsciously, criticizes his daughter and leaves the way clear for Jane to oust Mary from his household. Liz Jennings makes the same cannibalistic connection after she and Dick have been given their "marching orders"[36] by Jane.

> "Oh I'm truly beginning to feel as if I'd escaped" she cried.
>
> "Careful Liz, they'll think we're despising 'em."
>
> "Well aren't we?"
>
> "I'm not."
>
> "Oh cheer up Richard. They can't eat us."
>
> "No but we should keep things in decent order" he explained.[37]

In Nothing not only is it difficult to prevent other people from devouring oneself, along with their food, but it is just as difficult to curb in oneself the animal impulses that are behind the drives. Throughout Nothing passing reference is made to animals and birds in connection with certain human impulses and behaviour. These references serve to link together Green's ideas about man's aggressive appetites and their debilitation through atrophy or decay. Man vainly tries

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[35] Ibid., pp. 78 - 79.

[36] Ibid., p. 222.

[37] Ibid., p. 221.

"to keep things in decent order" but it is a never-ending battle. Mary and Philip begin a rather half-hearted discussion about their proposed marriage. The fact that this union is doomed never to take place because of the young people's incapacity to understand the real nature of other people's desires and demands as well as their own is neatly underlined by the description, in this scene, of an encounter between two dogs.

> She took his hand under the table, stroked the ring finger with her thumb. A silence drew across them.
>
> She watched a couple up at the bar with a miniature poodle on a stool in between. Its politeness and general agitation appeared half human. But when a man came in with a vast brindled bull terrier on a lead as thick as an ox's tail the smaller dog turned her back to the drinks, ignored her owners at once, and gazed at the killer with thrilled lack lustre eyes. For his part the bull terrier lay down as soon as the man on the other end of his lead let him, and, with an air of acute embarrassment gazed hard at the poodle, then away again, then, as though he could not help it, back once more. He started to whine. Miss Pomfret smiled. The other occupants began paying attention to these interested animals.
>
> "Rather sweet isn't he?" she said.
>
> "Who? Your father?"
>
> "Oh no, Daddy always is. The bull terrier I mean."
>
> "So long as he doesn't take it into his head to murder that other wretched brute in front of our very eyes."
>
> "But he won't Philip. She's a lady."

"I've known it happen."

"The man who's with him's got him safe."

"They'll do something crazy to let them meet before the evening's out. We'll see blood spilt yet" he opined.[38]

Mary also regards Philip's mother as a lady but she is, in fact, as powerful and destructive as the bull terrier. Jane Weatherby, with the extent of her experience, expresses metaphorically John's situation, once Mary goes away. She sees him exposed to the depredations of women like Liz who are "waiting in their lairs" for John who is a "whole line of goods freshly come into the swim".[39] Because Jane views life in these terms she is well-equipped to deal with it: even her well-manicured nails are rather claw-like. Liz Jennings, who, like Mary, is ousted from John's life by Jane, is gradually initiated into the adult world. Despite her earlier pious and lengthy conversation with Dick about how "it's perfection, true manners what distinguishes us from animals",[40] by the end of the novel she sees that human relationships are "natural" in a farmyard sort of fashion"[41] and accordingly makes her own conquest.[42]

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[38] Ibid., pp. 140 - 141.

[39] Ibid., p. 170.

[40] Ibid., p. 103.

[41] Ibid., p. 201.

[42] Ibid., p. 244.

In the "civilized" world, there are restraints on human behaviour. In Green's England, as well as in Conrad's, there was still the policeman on the corner as well as the restraints imposed by customs and manners. Only on occasion, are the restraints loosened. Levi-Strauss' tribe has its orgy, Green's group have their cocktail party.[43] Gratification comes from the skillful and intimate destruction of other people through dialogue. Jane, queen for most of the evening is gracious and conciliatory. She welcomes all her "nearest and dearest" friends, only to grow rather impatient with them as the evening wears on; she smoothes the ruffled feathers of Liz's reputation but preserves, in order to use later, the information that Liz was accused of drunkenness by Maud Winter; and even though the party is technically Philip's, to celebrate maturity, she spends the evening discussing his impotence and dependence. Throughout the novel as well as in this scene Green marshals all the forces of cadence, inflection and tone that dialogue has of revealing, shocking and delighting the reader. The dialogue is deliberately oblique, inconclusive and repetitive but within its whole tightly connected context it presents a textured and balanced view of human life.

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[43] Ibid., pp. 82 - 122.

Chapter IX

DOTING

In Green's final novel, the characters are very similar to those in Nothing. In both novels the main character is a wealthy and beautiful older woman. Mrs. Middleton's intrigues and self-deceptions in Doting are as carefully contrived as Mrs. Weatherby's in Nothing. The main objects of their intrigues are men and Mr. Middleton is as malleable as John Pomfret. In both novels the middle-aged rapaciously surround themselves with more and more tangible gratifications in an attempt to blot out their fears about their physical decay and emotional insignificance. The young, in both books, are made doubly vulnerable, by nature of their own inexperience and by their pathetic reliance for advice and direction upon their elders who are devoid of any sense of values, significance or security. This comparability of characters and ideas has led to the general assumption that Green's final novel is a weak imitation of the one before. But this judgement ignores the style and structure of each novel, which is always for Green, integral to his art. Like most artists he was determined that each new creation would not be a photocopy imitation but have an inherent vitality and form of its own. Two years before the publication of Doting he wrote about the difficulties facing the novelist.

> At the same time he must always be changing his own style so as not to be trapped by the cliches which he is continually creating for himself. A fine example of a good writer so trapped is Henry James, who at the end of his life became virtually meaningless, as much as any journalist in the daily press.[1]

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[1] Henry Green, "The English Novel of the Future", Contact, 1 (August 1950), p. 23.

It remains to be seen whether he has succeeded in breaking out of the forms used in other novels, but at least, this was his intention.

Although the writer's use of dialogue is the main technical device in both Nothing and Doting, the patterning of the dialogue is very different. In Nothing the pattern of the novel closely conforms to Green's earlier ideas that prose was a "web of insinuations". The dialogue in Nothing provides the spun threads of the web of meaning and the spaces that are left to complete the pattern are occupied by images. In Doting there are far fewer accompanying images and the dialogue has to sustain itself through its more densely woven texture. Far from Doting being a weaker version of Nothing it is a purer expression of the oblique and inconclusive sounds that people use to express their thoughts, reactions, daydreams and desires. By listening to these sounds we can approximate to another person's reality. Even this approximation is only possible after a long intimacy with that other person and even then only one facet of the character may be revealed. For example, John Pomfret and his daughter, Mary, in Nothing consistently claim that Jane Weatherby is a wonderful woman. They never hear her conversations with other people in which she shrewdly manipulates every one, including John and Mary, for her own satisfaction. The novelist allows his characters to be revealed in this way, not by explanatory paragraphs that nudge the reader into an understanding but by allowing the reader to experience the characters by listening to what they say. The talk on the telephone as well as on radio and television programmes indicates how frequently

dialogue is used in everyday life. Most of such communication is repetitive, lifeless and false but it does reflect an age in which the impact of life is generally understood through talk and not through the ordered and reflective process of reading. This may be regrettable to some but it provided for Green a process of language which he could refine in order to reveal the extraordinary nature of ordinary conversation.

> For how do we, each one of us, find out anything in the lives we each lead? Very little by reading, still less by what we are told. We get experience, which is as much knowledge as we shall ever have, by watching the way people around us behave, after they have spoken. As to other people telling us about what they have found in life, about what others have told them, or even about what they have said themselves upon occasion, it may be personal prejudice, but whenever I can check up, I find they are only giving their own version of whatever it may be. Thence, I suppose, the old saying, 'There are two sides to every question'. Presumably the reason for this is that the moment anything happens which is worth while--you could say memorable--one goes over it verbally after, and because conversation comes into almost any experience, in going over it one adds favourable interpretations, favourable to oneself, which colour and falsify the account one gives. If the experience is particularly damning to oneself one can go to the other extreme, shame can make one exaggerate the unfavourable side. What actually may have happened probably lies somewhere, east or west, of what one is told of an experience.
>
> In other words, we seldom learn directly; except in disaster, life is oblique in its impact on people.[2]

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[2] Henry Green, "A Novelist to His Readers", 9 November 1950, p. 506.

Doting is Green's most abstract expression of these ideas. It is a novel which most resembles another artistic medium where sounds, tone and texture play out the artist's experience. In Doting the shape of the characters' lives and relationships emerges through the conversations they have in chorus, and in alternating duets: the structure of Doting more closely resembles an Elizabethan madrigal than a spider's web. Like the madrigal the novel contains six distinctive voices. Though the voices are distinct, they assume additional dimension and tone when they are heard in fluctuating relationships with another voice or voices. As the general effect of music is immediate and dynamic it is possible to read this final novel rapidly and with apparent ease. Reading it is like spending a pleasant evening listening to sixteenth century songs. Its comedy and sensuality is as refreshing as the light rhythms of "Flora gave me fairest flowers", though the questions raised, and the responses, are as mournful as Raleigh's "What is our life". But whether the tone is bright or melancholy, the dialogue is orchestrated by a disciplined and skilful intellect.

In the opening section of the novel each individual establishes his "voice" and its relationship to the other voices. The subsequent parts of the novel, taking up the chords from this opening chorus, elaborate on the harmonies and discords suggested by the notes that are sounded there until they are all brought together again in a final and richer expression. The movement, then, in the novel is from the unity of the opening scene, through a recounting of its

fragmentation until the parts are again combined in the finale. The opening occasion in Doting is an after-the-theatre party given by the Middletons for their son, Peter, on the first night of his school holidays. Miss Annabel Paynton, the nineteen year old daughter of a family friend, is also invited. These two young people are being introduced to the delights of the adult world: drawing-room theatre; dinner in a night club; and a floor show. Apart from his enjoyment of the food Peter finds these adult delights insipid compared with a day's fishing on a Scottish river. The Middletons, and Annabel, however, caught up in the business world of the city, take their pleasures where they can find them: Annabel's pleasure is in tantalizing older men with her obvious and virginal attractions; Mr. Middleton's is in submitting to obsessive dreams of those delights; Mrs. Middleton's in manipulating the situations that arise from her husband's torment. Peter's opening comment "Pretty squalid play all round, I thought"[3] could be applied to the situation of the novel if one ignored the masterly way Green allows the characters to reveal the complexity of their natures and desires through their conversation, and the brilliant comedy of their mismanaged intrigues. Most of the conversation between people is gossip, anecdote, daydreams, fancies, reminiscence and most people are revealed through the proportion and balance they give to one or all of these areas. This is how Green

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[3] Henry Green, Doting, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1952), p. 1.

reveals his characters in life: encounters and conversations are often random but in Doting the dialogue and its setting are contrived to create not only a pleasurable sensation but also an understanding through these feelings. Indeed the situation, a flaccid, aging business-man's breathless pursuit of younger game, may be "pretty squalid", but the arrangements, proportions, colours and sounds of the pursuit are satisfying.

The whole novel is so well-balanced that it is difficult to discuss parts of it in isolation; for echoes of one section are heard in subsequent ones and it is difficult to dissect it without damaging the harmony. However, a discussion of the opening scene,[4] the central one and the final one may serve to show the whole range of sounds and movement, without going through the score note by note. Green's control over his composition is obvious in the restaurant scene. The apparently random use of a word or description of a gesture is the momentary external expression of a long lasting characteristic. Mrs. Middleton's self-centredness is revealed by her immediate identification with the wife in the play. Annabel's meaningless reply indicates her naivety. Arthur Middleton's careful use of what he imagines to be schoolboy slang represents his feeble attempt to ingratiate himself with his son. He does this to compensate for the guilt he feels because, in his own mind, and later in conversation with Annabel, he sees Peter not as a human being, but as the absurd

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[4] Ibid., pp. 1 - 18.

outcome of a houseparty hoax.[5] Arthur Middleton met his future wife, Diana, at a houseparty and because they had the same feelings about a prank played on one Humphrey Byass, they became friends, later married and then produced Peter. The actual chain of cause and effect in life is exemplified by this situation which can easily be reduced to the terms Annabel uses when she describes Peter as "an accident which came out of someone else's apple-pie bed". Annabel's undeveloped but eager sensuality is suggested by her movement.

> Then, to yet another roll of drums,
> violet limes were switched on the small
> stage, a man hurrahed, and Annabel
> bellied the corsage of her low dress
> the better to see between elegant shod
> toes, the party being seated to supper
> up on a balcony at this night club and
> hard against wrought iron railings.[6]

And as a counterpart to this Diana's maternal watchfulness over her son's taste in women is revealed by the tone of her question and the expression that accompanies it.

> "Would you call her pretty, Peter?"
> the mother asked in a bright voice.
>
> "Fairly awful", he replied. At which
> Mrs. Middleton smiled her fondest."

While this exchange is occurring, Arthur Middleton is transposing to Annabel his erotic feelings that are aroused by the scantily-sequinned dancer.

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[5] Ibid., p. 32.

[6] Ibid., p. 2.

> "All right by me" his father said to Annabel to be snubbed by yet another "sh'sh" from Peter.
>
> For the lady had begun to dance.
>
> All she wore was a blue sequin on the point of each breast and a few more to cover her sex. As she swayed those hips, sequins caught the light to strike off in a blaze of royal blue while the skin stayed moonlit and the palms of her two hands, daubed probably with a darker pigment, made a deeper shadow above raised arms, of a red so harsh it was almost black in that space through which she waved her opened fingers in figure of eights before the cut jet of two staring eyes.
>
> Mr. Middleton did not seem able to leave Miss Paynton be.
>
> "How old would you say she was?" he demanded of the girl in what sounded a salacious whisper. "Every bit of sixteen?"
>
> "Heavens no! Twenty three at least" the young lady answered, in a matter of fact voice, as she continued to watch.
>
> "Come now" he said, louder, and appeared confident. "Any girl with a figure like that could only be a child!"[7]

That the dancer provides erotic sensations only for Middleton and not for anyone else is revealed by the contrasting descriptions of the girl. The first is seductive, the second only sad.

> The woman below stood still, and seemed to swell as saxophones took over to welcome heads of what, it

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[7] Ibid., p. 3.

> soon became plain, were mechanically operated snakes thrust forth on springs from the now apricot coloured washing basket, and which did not sway their blunt heads, but kept quite quiet to a sudden return of flutes.
>
> "Perpetrated a bit of a bloomer, surely, when they turned their lights full on as she staggered in with the old property basket?" Mr. Middleton suggested.
>
> He had no answer. Now, to a crescendo, in which the whole band joined, the woman began to waggle with extreme violence and the limes went red till she seemed almost about to melt in flames.[8]

This twentieth century style Garden of Eden, with its blue-sequinned Eve and mechanical snakes is as sorry and automatic as Arthur Middleton's pursuit of Annabel. To establish his virility against his wife's catalogue of his ailments, Middleton deliberately looks down Annabel's dress at her breasts. But his look is as guilty and indecisive as his later attempt at seduction.

During a lull in the conversation and the accompanying gestures that have set the characters in the reader's mind, Green takes time to describe another floor show. With infinite skill and patience a juggler creates a pattern from two balls, a stick and a jug. The sexual implications of the juggler's objects are obvious but the juggling act and its implications are ignored by the Middleton's party, who are more intent on obtaining the menu. The lack of skill and artistry in the sexual relationships of the characters in the novel is nicely

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[8] Ibid., pp. 3 - 4.

underlined by Green's description of the juggler. The characters pay as little regard to the juggler as they do to any attempt to make pattern or beauty out of their own lives. The characters continually search for some sense of purpose, without realising that meaning arises out of the pattern that the individual makes and does not exist in some clearly crystallized state outside him. So the juggler, who becomes the conjurer in the final scene, is the visual expression of this austere and abstract idea as well as serving to bind together the two sections of this dinner party scene in which oblique and referential dialogue is the dominant technique.

The climax to the controlled eroticism of this sophisticated evening comes during another long description that reveals the vertiginous sensations Arthur Middleton feels when he looks into Annabel's innocently, uplifted mouth.

> Her wet teeth were long and sharp, of an almost transparent whiteness. The tongue was pointed also and lay curled to a red tip against her lower jaw, to which the gums were a sterile pink. Way back behind, cavernous, in a deeper red, her uvula seemed to shrink from him. But it was the dampness, the cleanliness, the fresh-as-wet-paint must have made the man shut his lips tight, as, in his turn, he leant over hers and it was then, or so he, even, told his wife after, that he got, direct from her throat, a great whiff of flowers.[9]

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[9] Ibid., p. 13.

This glance into Annabel's mouth is the extent of the Middleton's fulfillment, for though he dances with her, she pays more attention to the poet Campbell Anthony. To crown his dissatisfaction, his wife vindictively allows his food to get cold but covers her spite towards her husband by expressing concern for her son. Thus the scene ends. Each character's nature is revealed in tones almost too imperceptible for each other to detect but in the context and communion of Green's writing the reader is fully cognizant, from the outset, of the writer's ideas. Green is not a polemic artist. He is more concerned with presenting his people as they reveal themselves in life through gestures, intonation, certain repeated words, glancing looks and apparently random conversations. "Life is oblique in its impact on people"[10] and so are people upon people. Most people do not conform to set patterns and theories and are rarely direct or decisive in their confrontations with other people, so it is very difficult to know the truth about any one. This leaves the novelist, who is pledged to present life's reality through the medium of language between the covers of a book, with a complex and intricate task. He, also, is like the juggler who seeks to create a beautiful pattern from the ordinary everyday objects around him. He, also, will probably be ignored and his skill disregarded.

After the unity of the opening scene in Doting the characters resume their everyday lives, as Charles Addinsell says "getting what

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[10] Henry Green, "The English Novel of the Future", p. 23.

they can".[11] The Middletons have their well-run marriage that has been oiled by their little "arrangements" about enjoying other people's company. The marriage is characterized by the same topics of conversation that are repeatedly explored and the same sharing of memories of courtship and conception and the same veiled insults and indignities. The marriage has fallen into a routine that has made it moribund and it is based on doting, not on loving. In Green's earlier novel Loving the capacity to love was presented as a revitalizing force in life. In Doting the characters feel the need to love but have no understanding of its nature, its process or how it may be satisfied. The older generation are only capable of either obsessive lust or dutiful affection and all feel the absence of love in their lives. The younger group, mainly Annabel and Claire, still await the rapture of "falling in love". While they wait they ask questions about the qualities of love, how it can be identified and how sustained. Most of Annabel's conversations with Arthur Middleton are about these questions. Middleton can distinguish between the mechanical and self-interested satisfaction of doting and the more complex demands on the self of loving.

> "Well, you know doting, to me, is not loving."
>
> "I don't follow" she said with a small frown.
>
> "To my mind love must include adoration of course, but if you just dote on a

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[11] Henry Green, Doting, p.

girl you don't necessarily go so far
as to love her. Loving goes deeper."[12]

But he cannot disentangle his feelings for Annabel from his desire to be reassured of his virility. This natural need, that men like Annabel's grandfather, used to sublimate by going hunting or fishing, is indulged during Arthur's girl-watching lunch hours. But his leash is as short as the lunch-hour permits and his wife holds the other end secure. Because of their civilized "arrangement" she knows about his restaurant lunches with Annabel and even arranges the menu of a private dinner between Arthur and Annabel while she and Peter will be travelling to Scotland. She carefully arranges that Arthur will be reminded of his weakening physique during the dinner by ordering ices,[13] that set his teeth on edge but, nevertheless, appears to be the sophisticated and solicitious wife. This is one way satisfaction is arrived at. The wife still has control over Arthur though she allows him the occasional titillation, the benefits of which will spill over into her own bed.

Even when he runs beyond the bounds of their relationship she is not only able to call him to heel but also to use his indiscretion to secure the sympathetic attentions of her long time admirer, Charles Addinsell. The duet that marks the confrontation between Diana and Arthur,[14] after the disastrous private dinner, is a phonic delight. The comedy of Arthur's high-pitched blusterings is

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[12] Ibid., p. 50.

[13] Ibid., p. 73.

[14] Ibid., pp. 82 - 85.

counterpointed by Diana's pained little repetitions of "I saw your hand", "I smelled you". He is left feeling ashamed and foolish while his wife remains wronged but wonderful. Femina vincit omnia. But even the fruits of sexual victory turn sour after a while. After the initial pleasure of blackening Annabel's character to her mother, and of binding both Arthur and Charles to her even Diana begins to question the purpose of all the endeavours. In a querulous tone she wonders about the value and quality of a life that is devoted to office work night and day in order to ensure that one's offspring will enjoy the same existence. Her feeling that most of life consists of wearily marking time and that it is only heightened by the occasional theatre visit or domestic intrigue is one which is shared by her contemporaries. Annabel and Claire still assume that love, marriage and children will provide life with a sense of purpose while even the most successful members of their parent's generation, Diana and Arthur, know that these never provide total satisfaction. Unlike the philosopher F. H. Bradley, all of the characters in Doting expect too much and so end up being bored by the devices they employ to pass the time. Peter, the son, escapes from the impotent cynicism he finds in his parents and their friends in London and captures fish upon fish in Scotland while his father and Charles Addinsell contemplate their future decay.

> "Now look around this room" Charles
> Addinsell appealed. The tall
> windows, leaning against rain, seemed
> to filter light back to dark bookcases
> from floor to ceiling to make a number
> of men, older than themselves, seated
> in deep, black armchairs with two

> waiters in attendance, appear as wraiths, thin before illness, and bloodless as cardboard. "Look at them. D'you suppose there isn't one not ready to think, or talk, of sex."[15]

For the man who lives in the city and works in the office there are few tangible conquests, only dreams of a more intense and vigorous way of life. In this situation the young feel expendable, as Annabel so often iterates, and the old feel cheated. All are living is a society in which poems that examine the variety in nature, process and purpose of love, are compiled into an anthology confusedly titled Doting, a confusion that endorses the distortion of values that exists. The poets, themselves, spend most of their working day in the Ministry of Propaganda.

To collect this information, which is scattered loosely through the novel, and contain it in one paragraph is to make Green much more polemic than he would appear to be. In this way it is easy to distort Green's intention. He is presenting life, not proselytizing. However, it would be foolish to ignore the implications about the quality of life in the mid-twentieth century that are suggested through the conversations. A conversation that is central, both in position and content, is the one between Annabel and Charles that occurs when Arthur is trying to disentangle himself from Annabel.[16] Addinsell, whose name is an amusing pun on the business-man's endeavours, uses

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[15] Ibid., p. 120.

[16] Ibid., pp. 138 - 144.

a bitter analogy to express his grief that the only permanent satisfaction in life, with all its intense conversations, bright dreams and high triumphs, is the knowledge that "the spin of the wheel is all any one of us can expect". No matter what you bet, or how you calculate your chances the end will still be death. From the depths of his cynicism Charles proffers Annabel the consolations of friendship in a world where it is foolish to hope for permanence or security because "there's very little anyone can do about things". This conversation places the games the characters play in a different context. It divides two sections of the novel that are very similar. Life goes on the same. The domestic intrigues, the deceits, the manipulations, the quarrels and the assignations continue as before until the finale; but accompanying them is the tragic, though obviously fallacious, sense that life should at least be worth the living and at most capable of fulfilling the promises of love and fulfillment in marriage that are within the context of the Western World. However, Green, is not a crypto-Marxist. Unlike Arthur Middleton, he can clearly see the human being beyond the rather absurd chain of cause and effect that calls him into being. It is with the human being he is concerned so the second part of Doting moves along as easily as the first. The same melodies are heard. Sometimes the key is altered. Sometimes the characters are out of tune but the effect is the same. The lives of Diana and Arthur are spiced by their social interaction and the sexual politics that ensues; and for this relief, much thanks as there is nothing else in their lives. Life is easy; there is no great struggle to survive, no great dreams, even the passions are puny. What sustains

the reader are the light and interesting rhythms of the dialogue and its extraordinary comedy. For although Charles is probably right when he says-

> "My experience is, don't ever laugh about it. Can always end in the tragic."[17]

- his heavily admonitory tone during the tipsy dinner party, and after his successful seduction of Claire, makes the whole statement worthy of Claire and Annabel's giggles. The final dinner party, loathed by Peter more than the first, ends in an intoxicated cacophony of voices where the characters come closest to revealing their real feelings about each other to each other. The final roundelay ends on this high, and conclusive note, and when it is over the characters all go "on very much the same".[18]

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[17] Ibid., p. 235.

[18] Ibid., p. 252.

ENVOI

It was Baudelaire who said that "the immoderate love of form produces monstrous and unprecedented disorders"[1] and though this study has been an incursion into the varieties of form that Henry Green has used it is hoped that I have not been immoderate but have helped to reveal the integral order that governs the forms of Green's novels. Though Green used the forms of language with the precise economy of the professional business man, his compassionate perception of humanity, ensured that his novels were neither disordered nor monstrous.

Few other English novelists can move with such ease, such lack of pretension and condescension into the several worlds that Green presents in his novels. His ability to depict both the traditional world of servants and masters and the disestablished world of office-workers, charladies, firemen and prostitutes is remarkable. Henry Green's infallible understanding of why people in different stages and positions in life think, talk and act the way they do is matched by his equally clear knowledge of a writer's inability to express, truly, those thoughts, conversations and actions.

Like many other writers, both English and European, Green expresses, in his novels and in his broadcasts, his dissatisfaction with the power of language to garner and present the multiduninous aspects of life. Unlike other writers, Green does not fall into the

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[1] Baudelaire, L'Art Romantique, (Paris: Louis Conard, 1923), p. 97.

impasse of choosing silence as the writer's salvation from the impurity of language. Even though in his final novel, Doting, by making his words echo the rhythms of music he does bring speech closer to the formal purity of that medium, he still, like Wordsworth, speaks up for the harmony that can exist between language and mankind. This harmony, though, can come only if man is aware of the imaginative as well as the scientific connotations of words. This is not an attitude that Green came to gradually, even though his later novels, Caught, Back and Concluding can be read both as separate investigations of those uses of language and as revelations of the dangers inherent in the imbalance of those uses. Even his first novel Blindness is, in part, an exploration of how a young man moves out of the darkness of his imperception by using words, with all their colours, textures, associations and harmonies, to make real himself and his place.

Henry Green's novels, though, are much more than a dialectic on language. In his books he gradually reveals men and women who are able to feel as well as to articulate and to discipline their feelings about life through the several forms words provide. If those men and women, like Rock in Concluding[2], John Haye in Blindness[3], Raunce in

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[2] Henry Green, Concluding, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1948), p. 177.

[3] Henry Green, Blindness, (London: J. M. Dent, 1926), pp. 252 - 253.

Loving[4], Charley Summers in Back[5] and even Mrs. Weatherby in Nothing[6], no matter how eccentric, immature, dyspeptic, maimed or selfish, can sense as well as express the aesthetic harmony that is necessary in life they are assured of satisfaction. Those who cannot, like Pye in Caught, Julia in Party-Going and the Middletons in Doting, are desolate. Several of Green's characters would agree with Mallarmé that, "After I had found Nothingness I found beauty".[7] The "Nothingness" could be John Haye's blindness, Raunce's self-indulgence, Richard Roe's helplessness, Charley Summer's silence or John Pomfret's lack of purpose but their various forms of isolation are alleviated when they can make contact through words with the external world. The forms of those words are presented by Green in the various ways that are necessary to depict the various people and situations that he is writing about. As the process of life is heuristic, so too are the shapes of Green's novels. It is only through the process of reading his books that the reader will discover the life that Henry Green accurately and imaginatively documents.

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[4] Henry Green, Loving, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1945), p. 229.

[5] Henry Green, Back, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1950), p. 240.

[6] Henry Green, Nothing, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1950), p. 244.

[7] Bradford Cook, Mallarmié, (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1956), p. 89.

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