

READING AND WRITING JOHN BERGER'S G.

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## Reading and Writing John Berger's G.

The central focus of this study is John Berger's novel G.. The main component of the thesis will be a commentary - a close textual analysis of specific moments in the novel, partly inspired by Walter Benjamin's Commentaries on Poems by Brecht. It is assumed that Berger's writing presents a similar form of challenge to our sense of the modern novel as Brecht's writing does to lyric poetry. The commentary will treat Berger's novel as though it were a 'classic' text, generating a detailed exposition of the language and central themes by means of selective line-by-line discussion. This 'classical' commentary will be modified however by a response to the work of Roland Barthes, particularly his own commentary on Balzac in S/Z, focusing on the plurality of the text rather than attempting to locate a single definitive interpretation. One of the aims of the thesis is to discover what might constitute a 'Brechtian way of reading' and the commentary will be punctuated by two other forms of writing; 'Encounters' and 'Readings'. 'Encounters' will pursue the various writers, theorists and other texts suggested by the commentary. This will create an opportunity to expand and develop the thematic and contextual analysis of the text. The 'Readings' will represent an attempt to introduce a more informal and reflexive response to the novel and to the other sections of the study. They will attempt to include the 'I' in 'I read the text'. It is hoped that these alternative strategies will provide a suitably responsive approach to Berger's work and that taken together, will form a Brechtian, and truly dialectical form of criticism.



### The Curtains

Leaning back the spectator  
Should see  
How cunningly you prepare for him  
Should see  
The tin moon come swaying down  
And the cottage roof brought in  
Do not disclose over much  
Yet disclose something to him  
Friends  
Let him discover  
You are not conjuring  
But working.

Bertolt Brecht (1)

The following is a study of John Berger's novel G., at once both a commentary and an interpretation. At one level it is an attempt to 'examine the spirit and the theme' of Berger's work and to 'try and delimit the world of his imagination' (2). It is also however an attempt to define some idea of 'commitment', not in terms of the author but of the reader, an attempt, in fact, to locate a 'Brechtian way of reading' (3).

This study will contain three distinct responses to the initial reading of the novel, varying in form (and formality). The first and central feature of these is the 'Commentary'. This is partly inspired by Benjamin's 'Commentaries on Poems by Brecht' and particularly by the ideas expressed in the Preface:

It is a known fact that a commentary is something different from a carefully weighed appreciation apportioning light and shade. The commentary proceeds from the classic nature of its text and hence, as it were, from a prejudgement. It is further distinguished from an appreciation by the fact that is concerned solely with the beauty and the positive content of its text. And it is a very dialectical state of affairs which enlists this archaic form, the commentary, which after all, is an

authoritative form, in the service of a poetry which is not in the least archaic and which boldly challenges what is recognized as authoritative today.

Such a state of affairs coincides with one envisaged in an old maxim of dialectics: the surmounting of difficulties by their accumulation. The difficulty to be surmounted here consists in reading lyric poetry today at all. Supposing, then, that one tries to meet this difficulty by reading the text exactly as though it were an already established one, heavy with a content of ideas, in short, a classical text? (4)

Substituting 'the novel' for 'lyric poetry' would give something of the project intended here, to examine the difficulty of reading and writing the novel today and to attempt a dialectical consideration of the complex relationship between reader, writer and text. To adopt this 'dialectical' approach to the work of John Berger seems particularly appropriate and it is hoped that bringing a 'classical' mode of enquiry to a distinctively modernist text will help surmount some of the difficulties surrounding Berger's work as a novelist. The commentary deals only with chosen 'moments' in the novel, the analysis concentrating on specific 'entrances and exits' to and from the narrative, rather than dealing with the text as a

chronological whole. Clearly this process is subjective and the commentary represents a personal focus. However, the study does have a clear structure, grouped around the five principal relationships within the novel. These sections of the commentary will therefore be named after the five women who represent the 'journey' of the central character.

This 'classical' approach is modified however by a response to the work of Roland Barthes, for example his own commentary on Balzac in S/Z, and in particular on his emphasis on the active nature of reading. The function of literature, Barthes states, is to,

make the reader no longer a consumer, but  
a producer of the text. (5)

One of the aims of this study is to map out a history of that 'production' (reading as 'work'). The commentary clearly has an important role in 'production' and must itself therefore be open to comment and analysis. The commentary will therefore be 'broken', or interrupted by what will be termed 'Encounters', which will represent the pursuit of 'other names' (6) which the commentary has driven us towards. These will focus on the theorists, critics, authors and other texts which were prompted by the first reading of the novel or by the subsequent commentary and will seek to develop and expand the thematic and contextual analysis of the text. The 'Encounters' will further represent a response to Harold Bloom's theory of

'influence', that is,

that there are no texts, but only relationships  
between texts. (7)

The 'Encounters' will explore Berger's novel in terms of its literary and theoretical 'relationships'.

The study will also reflect Barthes's questions regarding 'connotation' and 'interpretation':

To interpret a text is not to give it a (more or less justified, more or less free) meaning, but on the contrary to appreciate what plural constitutes it. (8)

This recognition of plurality is an integral part of any dialectical approach and will therefore form a central part of the present work. The aim is not to present a definitive interpretation of Berger's novel but a close working through of its narrative possibilities. Berger's G., as a 'scriptable' work (9) demands both a close attention to linguistic detail and some kind of personal response, an acknowledgement of the 'I' in 'I read the text' (10). The commentary and the 'Encounters' will therefore be 'disrupted' by 'Readings', responses to the experience of reading both Berger's work and my own, implicating myself in the (seemingly) objective analysis of the text. As Barthes again states,

rereading is here suggested at the outset, for it alone saves the text from repetition (those who fail to reread are obliged to read the same story everywhere. (11)

It is hoped that rereading the commentary will help prevent the 'rewriting' of the same kind of criticism 'everywhere'. The 'Readings' should also allow a dissident voice to be raised, which the formal commentary, by its very nature, forbids.

Finally, Hugh Kenner's comments on the difficulty of writing about Samuel Beckett's Watt corresponds to my own position regarding the problem of finding a satisfactory approach to John Berger's work as a novelist. As Kenner points out, any exposition of Watt,

begins to sound like a page out of Watt, which is unsurprising, since the style of Watt is the most efficient that can be discovered for expounding the kind of material Watt contains. (12)

If this study represents the same implicit invitation to 'debate' as Berger's fiction, then it will perhaps have achieved its most important goal.

## *Guide*

Commentary: the page references for the commentary will be given at the beginning of each section. Line numbers refer to my own annotation of the edition used (as given in the bibliography).

Encounters: these will be identified by the appropriate 'Header' which will appear in the top right hand corner of each page of the 'Encounter'.

Readings: these will be printed in italics and will be clearly signalled with the title '*Reading*'.

Commentary: 'Roman girl'. (G., pages 77 to 89)

The passage is introduced by the title 'I FATTI DI MAGGIO 1898', that is the events of May in 1898. The events to be described are placed within a precise historical context - they can be located within 'real' time. The fictional events have their parallel within real historical time. The writer draws our attention to the relationship between the two. However there is a third relationship which is suggested by the title, and that is the narrative's relationship to the time of the writing of the novel itself. As we shall see later in this commentary, many of the themes and events of the 'Roman girl' episode have their parallel in the 1960's when Berger was working on the novel.

Lines 1-2:

'The boy wakes early, as he intended to.'

This time of the day, the early morning, is a time of great significance in the novel. It is a portentous time, a time of expectation and exploration. The final scene will begin on a 'morning of early summer' (page 331), the quiet of the morning giving way, as in this scene, to the violent and anarchistic events which will follow. In this way it contrasts the natural world, the natural sense of time which is cyclic and predictable, with the 'history' written by men and women, which moves through a dialectic of violent change.



Lines 3-39:

The narrator here discusses the complexity of the situation in which the young boy finds himself. He has left his parents sleeping in the hotel and has set out to explore the streets of Milan, streets in which he knows the atmosphere of fear and revolution is growing. The boy's situation is 'complex' not only because the foreignness of his surroundings has reduced the streets to a theatre of gestures only. His inability to understand the language of the people who crowd the streets forces him to attempt to interpret these gestures, to read in faces what he cannot translate from the newspaper reports. This leads to ambiguity - is the man boarding the carriage in such a hurry frightened or merely late for an appointment (lines 6-7)? A man reading aloud from a newspaper is shouted at by a group of men who have been listening. Are they agreeing with him or are they angry (lines 10-13)? The absence of linguistic communication forces the boy to consider the city around him as a world of signs, signs which are open to interpretation, open also to misprision. The visual world is revealed as a field of ambiguous signification, an open 'text' which calls all meaning and all sense of self-knowledge, into question. This experience is in direct contrast to the sexual one (the experience which G. is yet to discover), where language is similarly rendered redundant, where the linguistic, and therefore culturally constructed self, is silenced, and yet a truer knowledge of self, a clearer grasp of the 'moment' of lived experience is realised. It is this 'moment', the

revolutionary moment for G., which will conclude this scene, where the 'truth' of the events he has witnessed, and the meaning that they have for him, is located in the knowledge of the senses, not in language. The meaning literally is 'wordless' (line 439). The narrator hereby draws a comparison between the revolutionary moment and the sexual one, neither can be fully defined within the context of formal language. Later in the scene the narrator will say, 'The writer's desire to finish is fatal to the truth'(lines 379-380). That is, the desire to 'complete' an experience by fully narrating it, by inducing a narrative closure, falsifies and renders artificial all that it transcribes. The young boy, entering the streets of a foreign city, slips into a free space where meaning will be generated from the reality of what he feels, not what is 'read'. This is not to say that language does not have a role or function in helping to locate and relay truth. Later in the scene the narrator will give a brief 'factual' description of the day's events and a short summary of the next twenty years' political history in Italy. The narrator does not question 'facts', does not suggest that language itself is meaningless, for that would be to deny narrative any political role whatsoever. Berger is not a postmodernist in the sense that he denies all signification within a text. What he suggests is a dialectic between individual and political 'history'. The young boy who finds himself on the streets of Milan is caught in just such a dialectic, the events of that May morning are 'revolutionary' in the

personal and the social sense. The reader is caught between competing realisations of time - the time of the narrative (the story of G.), the events of May 1898 in historical terms, the events of May 1968 which are undoubtedly evoked by the narrative events, and the time of reading the novel itself (we will attempt to unravel this complex fusion of temporality later in the commentary). However this passage sets the tone for the remainder of the scene, where the boy will remain on the 'outside' of the events he witnesses, a spectator, a visitor, an alien - one who travels towards a personal understanding of the moment through sensual, rather than linguistic, knowledge, ending significantly with a single 'look'. The subsequent story of G. will be a repeated series of attempts to go beyond language, through sexual experience, to return to that moment of self-knowledge discovered with the Roman girl in Milan.

Lines 32-42:

G. is spotted by a young worker and interrogated as to his purpose in being on the streets. When he discovers that G. is not an Italian, his hostility vanishes. G.'s status as an outsider, his position outside of language, confers on him a kind of neutral status (see lines 34-39). G.'s 'wordlessness' is his passport through the strangeness of his experience, it gives him a purity which protects him from suspicion and from danger (significantly, in the other revolutionary scene which comes at the end of the novel, G. is similarly 'wordless' - he again does not speak the

language of the crowd. However on this occasion his involvement with their action, by way of gesture, leads directly to his death. When he joins his individual 'history', by way of memory and dream, with the political moment in which he finds himself, his 'immunity' is destroyed. In the final scene, the 'immunity' of the reader will also be challenged, we will not be allowed to remain the privileged spectator). G. is surely one of the most 'silent' of all novelistic 'heroes'. In fact, in a novel where there is no direct speech, G.'s words are hardly even alluded to. In this way he is allowed an 'immunity' within the novel itself; because he does not speak, we, the reader, do not judge him to the extent that we would a conventional fictional character. Wordless, nameless, he escapes the hypocrisy of words, at least to those women whom he encounters on his sexual odyssey. The narrator will explore in detail the falsity of our sexual vocabulary and the language of love, perceiving in it the syntax of possession and oppression. Sex, in the bourgeois society G. invades, is poisoned by the nomenclature of the market place. In this world, G.'s silence, like his wordlessness on the streets of Milan, is his guarantee of truthfulness, his promise of freedom.

In strictly formal terms the reader too is situated as a 'foreigner' or stranger within the narrative. The frequent use of Italian words, phrases and even songs throughout this scene disrupts our reading of the text, renders ambiguous and problematical what would normally be directly 'consumed'

(unless the reader can read Italian of course, in which case a different kind of distancing of the text, through knowledge of another language and an awareness of the transformation of meaning through the act of translation, is created). We can guess what such phrases and words mean by their context within the narrative, rather as G. can guess what the gestures of the men and women around might mean. However, we are forced to consider the text as essentially a problematical 'site', one which must be 'worked' in order to have meaning. It brings into focus our own silence as readers, entirely different from that of the young boy, a silence which does not ensure our 'truthfulness' or innocence. We only have the linguistic connection to the events described, we are reading and not experiencing the happenings on that May morning, and therefore our understanding can only be partial and impure. The words we translate and interpret will create meanings and images which can only lead us away from the events depicted, away towards our own memories and feelings, rather than create a richer intimacy with the moments on the streets of Milan. It is partly in recognition of this unavoidable process that Berger chooses to write a 'historical' novel, with a mythological central character, rather than a story based in the 'here and now' of the 1960's and early seventies. Any such narrative would falsify and limit the experience it set out to transcribe. It is only by attempting to go beyond temporal limitations, in the same way that G. steps outside of linguistic ones, that Berger can hope to locate a 'way of

telling' which implicates the reader, which makes the reader recognize his or her active role in generating meanings.

Lines 39-41:

The young worker's call to his sister roughly means in translation, 'Look come meet our chick' (or perhaps 'rookie'). This pulls together several thematic layers. At dinner the previous evening the boy had questioned his father over a special dish which he had ordered for Laura, his mother, called 'Pollo alla Cacciatore' or 'Hunter's chicken' (page 76). By remembering Laura's favourite meal, Umberto receives an intimate look, the only one he will provoke. This look is significant, as 'looks' are in the scene as a whole, as it links G.'s parents through the shared knowledge of an intimate past whilst excluding G., positioning him as an outsider, as an observer, in a role, as we have seen, which G. will develop throughout his life. By introducing G. as a 'chick', the worker returns us to this earlier moment in the novel, reminding us of G.'s innocence, his role as an observer only. The look exchanged between his mother and father alert him to a past and a form of intimacy of which he has been ignorant. The 'look' which will be exchanged between the Roman girl and himself will bring him to the knowledge of a historical and political past, and to the recognition of an existential 'moment' - a moment which will cut across the personal/political divide.

Lines 49-51:

G. now notices the Roman girl, standing out from the others. It is her singularity which draws his attention to her, her individuality which is striking in defiance of any conventional notion of 'beauty'. It is the girl's 'acknowledged ugliness' (line 67) which sets her apart from the rest of the group. He observes her 'pock-marked' skin, the 'black hair above her lip', her 'unnaturally thin arms'. As with all his later significant encounters with women, G. catalogues these precise details, preserving these physical 'signatures' as evidence of the 'real' woman beyond the culturally imposed persona. It also reflects the author's phenomenological spirit, locating 'truth' or 'reality' only in the observable detail. G. too seeks the 'real' in the observable world, a world which at times can seem more like a demi-world, a place where to see is to suffer. Berger has explored this theme in his play, written with Nella Bielski, Goya's Last Portrait. In Act 2 scene 1 Goya exclaims:

Blind fools! Appearances tell all. There's  
nothing they can't tell. There's no  
exaggeration that goes further than them.  
God, Amore, has left us alone with the  
visible, like deserting us in hell. He,  
the seer, is invisible. We with our flesh  
and hair, mucus and bones, are condemned  
to be seen. And worse than that, we are  
condemned to face what we see. (1)

The writer too can be seen as the omnipotent seer, the creator of first and last things. It is this omnipotence which Berger attacks through the character of G.. G. accepts his damnation and transforms what should be a journey through darkness into an odyssey of light. For G., the 'look' will become the fundamental link with the real and permanent. The evidence of his eyes will destroy the hypocrisy of words.

Lines 69-70:

Here the narrative focus, moving like a film camera, pans out for a wider view of the surrounding streets. Suddenly we are 'faced', like G., with the sight of around 50,000 assembled people. As with later scenes (see for example the 'London' scene in the final passage) this phalanx will later form into a single body, with their shared economic 'consciousness' dominating any individual experience. How else is the narrator to attempt to express it after all? He cannot hope to represent the hopes and fears of 50,000 people. By discussing the crowd in terms of a 'collective consciousness', the narrator can try to convey the feelings of the people gathered together on that day, as they turn to view the city they thought they knew, which at this moment has transformed. Collectively the crowd built this city, collectively they can recreate it, reclaim that which is theirs by right. At this singular moment the crowd can find a unified voice, a voice to claim the hitherto unexpressed



individual desire of all gathered there.

Lines 91-99:

The passage here reminds us that this 'revolutionary' moment was largely a-political, rooted primarily in the simple, elemental demand for more bread (2). Rioting occurred throughout Italy in the 1880's, a backlash against the 'Tariff war' with France (and also the banking scandals of the time and failed imperialist ambitions in Africa) and following the lowest wheat harvest since unification took place. The poorest people of Italy began demanding a lowering of the tariff rate on imported wheat, subsidised bakeries and a lowering of the tax on bread itself. Most of this rioting took place in Sicily and was associated with the 'Fasci' (meaning literally 'bundle') groups of insurgents, originally socialist intellectuals, but also landowners and mafioso gang members. These 'Fasci' were fairly speedily repressed. In the North the rioting reached a peak with the 'Fatti Maggiore' - the 'May Events' with Milan at the centre of the worst violence. Although Milan had been associated with the Italian marxists (as the Emilia was the focus for Italian anarchism and Republicanism) the rioting was, as Berger draws to our attention, basically concerned with the need for food, and not essentially concerned with political theory. The overreaction of the government, sending in troops to assist the police in the quelling of the unrest, transformed these events into something resembling a political rally, the

crowd literally discovering their political power, their 'creativity' as Berger puts it, within the moment itself. The socialist pamphleteers who had been agitating were quickly rounded up and jailed, turning many hitherto unknown activists into popular heroes overnight. The violence itself quickly grew to tragic levels - official government figures put the numbers at eighty killed and four hundred and fifty wounded, however the final tally was probably more like twice this figure. In this sense Berger's own estimate of one hundred killed and four hundred and fifty injured is generous towards the di Rudini government. However, repression followed by a softening of policy by the government headed by Guillo to effectively silenced the nascent revolutionary voices heard on that Summer morning. As the narrator in G. states, '...the spectre of Revolution was banished from men's minds' (line 89). When we come to the second 'revolutionary' event, the uprising in Trieste at the end of the novel, we will see that the crowd assembled is still unaware of their full creative' powers, still waiting for the opportunity to express their collective desires.

Lines 102-110:

The narrator here points out the discrepancy between how the crowd 'appears' to be acting and how they are in fact behaving. Rather than re-grouping after each attack of the military, the crowd is in fact obeying a far simpler need, grouping together out of fear. In the way that the gathering

itself was motivated not by political ambition but by hunger, thus the crowd gathers together again not as the result of some 'tactic' but purely out of physical need, the desire to survive. The crowd act in the name of self-preservation. Taken from the opposing side, the side which wishes to see deliberate and conscious 'intent' behind all the behaviour of the crowd, violent suppression is justified. As in the later crowd' scene' at the end of the novel, the crowd in these circumstances will form itself into a single body, as if such a metamorphosis will provide some kind of safety, a form of immunity from the violence of those who would destroy them. The 'physical will' of the crowd unifies into a single giant figure, reacting as a unified mass, a Leviathan of pain and suffering, hope and despair. In this sense the scene is similar to that at the end of the novel, where G. recalls the crowd in London, with its 'staring eye-balls', 'bloodhot veins', 'unquenchable thirst' and 'pubic hair' (pp. 339-340). The crowd in London has transformed itself into a monster of brutality in its desire for war, however the opposite is true here, the crowd is transformed into a monster by the authorities which oppose it. The crowd is of course in fact made up of individuals, individuals who are willing to struggle and die for a just cause. The author gives us the opposite view of the military who destroy them, who do not, or indeed cannot recognize in this crowd (in this 'inhuman' monster), as we are made to do by the narrative, the parents and children (the innocent) who make up the numbers. Only for one brief

moment do the soldiers see beyond the facelessness of the crowd, when they hesitate to march upon the women who stand on the barricades, reminding them as they do of their own mothers.

Lines 111-112:

The passage focuses closely on the line of advancing cavalry - using once more the image of the horse to convey the image of threat and fear. The horse, used to stamp down the demonstrators, stands physically and symbolically between the soldiers' violence and the demonstrators' fear. The horse, as we shall see, is used at various moments throughout the novel to convey this sense of fearfulness and dread. Its use here links the scene to the earlier moments in the novel where the young boy is knocked from his horse and nearly killed, and the slaughtering of the horses by the two strangers in the forest at night. The horse is thus used as a symbol both of death and of a kind of pure physicality. The horse embodies both - the fire of life and the violence of death. In Christian mythology we have this dual nature also, with the symbol of the horse often used to indicate the swiftness of life, but also of course it symbolises death in the form of the 'pale horse' of the apocalypse in Revelations. At the end of the novel, Nusa is 'horsewhipped' by the enraged Marika (p.326), an anticipation of the final violence yet to occur. It also creates a further thematic link with Lawrence and the famous scene in Women in Love where Gerald spurs his horse towards the advancing train. In

a fast metonymic progression, fear and violence, fused with a morbid sexuality, is used to create an intense atmosphere which Berger repeats here. However, what is most recalled by this scene perhaps is Shelley's Mask of Anarchy, with its focus on the slaughter of the innocent crowd, which also has discovered, in the midst of fear, their own 'creativity', their own power to change their environment. In each case the crowd has begun to think that the idea of change is possible. However, in Shelley's poem this is turned into an idealised vision of what 'could be', and again the horse is used as a central image:

And Anarchy, the ghastly birth,  
Lay dead earth upon the earth;  
The Horse of death tameless as wind  
Fled, and with his hooves did grind  
To dust the murderers thronged behind. (3)

In Shelley's idealistic poem, the horse, representing death, turns on the 'murderers' - the soldiers and politicians who are intent on destroying them. In Berger, there is no such idealism, 'Hope' remains a 'maniac maid' rather than a 'Shape arrayed in mail' (4).

Lines 137-148:

Now the cavalry charges become increasingly severe and the crowd is quickly split apart. 'Blood' becomes the dominant image, red the predominant colour in this scene.

Significantly both men and women are injured and killed in the confrontation and the blood covering the faces of the wounded makes identification even more difficult. A single figure, a man, approaches the ranks of soldiers and is shot down and again the 'facelessness' of those killed is emphasised as he 'falls on his face' (147-148). To the soldiers these are simply 'the enemy', they are not recognizable as people. It is only once the arrests have been made that each individual face will be memorised in order to punish. It is part of the narrator's perceived duty to attempt to 'memorialise' all those who are present, to account for all their lives. In another sense, the narrator has as little choice as the soldier who shoots the man who walks towards them - 'When he is shot...' (line 147) clearly suggests a kind of determinism or fatalism. The events have their own independence, beyond the control of those caught up in them or indeed the narrator himself.

Lines 149-161:

It is noticeable throughout the novel, and starkly portrayed here, that the narrative is cut up into discrete passages, forming self-governing lexias. This paragraph, or lexia, forms a very clear response to the preceding one, breaking the 'action' of the narrative in order to comment on and explore those events as they happen. This lexia, for example, forms, in the authors words, a 'wreath' for the preceding one. Here the narrator sets up a deliberate set of antitheses - replacing the street death described earlier

with 'poetic' death in a wildly beautiful setting. Here the blood flows back into the 'earth' (159) rather than onto the bare 'cobblestones' of the street(160). The opposition between 'natural' imagery here, where death is envisaged as dignified, organic and mythical and the ugly, and seemingly pointless death in the city streets is created through a number of strong poetic images and perhaps centrally through the emphasis on colour. Thus we have the 'grey sandstone' and 'honeysuckle' of the butterflies; the 'faded white' of the petals 'but not clay white ...like snails'; the amethyst of the 'gladioli'; the 'red of of poppies'; the colour 'a child pictures fire'; 'wine stains'; rock 'grey like dolphins'; and finally of course, blood itself, red on 'dry earth'. These give the passage an impressive strength, building up a detailed narrative picture through the repeated natural imagery. Each colour is likened to, or finds its true description in, an element or image from nature (there is a detailed description of the symbolic significance of the colours used here in the 'Nusa' commentary). Nothing is 'external' to this, each image is intertwined with the next, each image finding its strength by embracing another, just in the way that a 'wreath' is woven around. This is in sharp contrast to the description of the street fighting given in the remainder of the scene, where no description involves colour (except, significantly, descriptions of the Roman girl herself). The rest of the scene is in remorseless black and white, like an old newsreel or photograph. Berger's writing 'colours' history,

'fleshes' it out. The effect is 'filmic', like Louis Malles, Berger brings in colour at moments of heightened emotional feeling. In terms of the narrator's intention, this links us to the statement on page 87, where he says:

Dress with the words of your voice as  
others dress his wounds.

Here the narrator 'dresses' the fallen man with poetry, the tenderness of the words calling for the support of the natural world for their effect. Death, as a return to nature, will be a linking theme, leading us directly to G.'s own death at the end of the novel when he is thrown into the impassive sea. The novel charts a series of these returns to nature, whether it is Chaves's plunge from the sky in the 'Leonie' scene, or the dead of the First World War lying on the fields of France. Symbolically this echoes the return to the 'garden' or forest which is such a feature of the sexual odyssey which forms the central strand of the narrative. Noticeably, this episode will also end in the quiet garden of G.'s father's house in Livorno, yet another instance of this kind of 'return'.

Lines 177-184:

The narration of the events of the uprising continues, as the crowd attempts to construct a barricade to protect themselves from the advancing lines of soldiers. Ironically it is a railway carriage which is overturned to form the



barricade, a modern form of transport used as a last line of defence against the horses of the military. Line 185 - 'Everything is about to be transformed' denotes the impending tragedy about to happen, yet also suggests the feeling of anarchy and 'misrule' which had marked the uprising in its early stages. This sense of 'transformation' takes the form of turning everything upside down, the carriages of the trams are 'overturned', the workers who helped build the city are now ripping it apart, literally stone by stone. The young man, who is a 'maintenance mechanic' will soon be tearing apart the very machines which he usually keeps working, the railway men will dismantle the railway tracks, one becoming 'like an officer of the artillery'. In another series of transformations, soldiers will become cowards and renegades, mothers will become whores and an awkwardly ugly Roman girl will become the wife of an eleven year old boy. G. of course will himself have been transformed for ever by his experience on the streets of Milan. This is an apocalyptic vision, a state of misrule where evrything is changed and warped, and the old certainties, the supporting antitheses are all swept away.

Lines 186-195:

The image of the guillotine here reaffirms the 'revolutionary' nature of this scene. It represents a set of antitheses, justice and injustice, revenge and terror and here cuts across both the material infrastructure of the city and the flesh of those who choose to stay and fight.

Symbolically it also represents the 'scythe' of death; the 'fissure' which it creates is the abyss of time, the 'black hole' of history into which this moment, and all its participators, will soon be cast.

Lines 209-212:

Here again the emphasis is placed upon seeing, rather than on speaking, looking as opposed to listening, feeling as opposed to comprehending. On this occasion it is the boy's 'look' which binds the two young people together, conveying an understanding not based on words but on the shared experience of the violent events which surround them. It prepares for the look the Roman girl gives G. later in the scene and which appeared to reflect G.'s own feelings exactly. G.'s look contains a revelation which words could not convey, a meeting point of experience where language itself creates barriers. It will form the basis for G.'s later sexual encounters, where language is similarly redundant, incapable of conveying the intensely shared moment, where only a 'look' can be specific and 'permanent' (p.127).

Lines 215-222:

The barricades now become a metaphor for the disruption of the experience of time itself. What the protestors are engaged in is not simply a fight against the injustice they face at the hands of those who oppress them, not simply attempting to defend themselves from the violence in which

they find themselves engulfed, they are in fact resisting their own past and the imposition of an unchallengeable future. The 'present' is destroyed in this scene by the overturning of all the old rules and restrictions which are usually placed on the demonstrators lives and this is the real political significance of their action. It ruptures the 'continuous present' imposed by the 'ruling minority' (223-225). The revolutionary moment, like the sexual one as G. will later discover, 'fucks' the false time of oppression which makes us all prisoners of inaction.

Lines 223-226:

Just as the barricades break the 'present' (226) of the lived experience of the crowd on the streets of Milan, so too do they form a 'break' within the 'time' of the narrative itself, a break which allows the connections between the different time-scales operating within the novel to be glimpsed. These might be summarised as:

1. The time of the events in Milan in May 1898, based on true historical events.
2. The 'time' of the writing of these events and the referential basis for the historical account - May 1968.
3. The 'time' of the reading of this

narrative (constantly changing,  
however May 1993 for example).

4. "Time" itself as a concept, in both  
historical and political terms.

What the barricades do here is to allow a link between these different senses of 'time' to co-exist. They are the physical frontiers which the crowd erect on the streets of Milan, they are equally the barricades which the students erected in the 1960's and they are structurally part of the system of 'barriers' which the narrator erects throughout the novel to prevent the reader overrunning the narrative. In the same way that the crowd use the barricades to destroy the control of time by the ruling minority, so the narrator uses these linguistic barricades to deny the hegemony of the reader.

Encounter - 'Berger and the 1960's'.

Although it could be said that John Berger, as both artist and political thinker, is more a 'product' or represents the 'structure of feeling' of the 1950's rather than the 1960's, the novel G. has a clear contextual basis in the events of the latter half of the 60's and can be seen as an attempt to set up a dialogue with the prevailing currents of thought of that time. Ideologically, Berger's key date might be 1956, but 1968 provides a real platform for the re-examination of the political and moral debates focused through the increasingly pluralistic and individualistic movements of the 60's. The 1967 'Dialectics of Liberation' conference at the Roundhouse in London, attended by, amongst other important theorists of the day, Herbert Marcuse and Stokely Carmichael, sounded a warning shot to the New Left. The voices of an 'outdated Marxism' found that they had less power in the new 'liberation' movements (interestingly enough, the voice of women, surely the most significant of the new movements growing at that time, was also left out of the 'liberation' dialogue). It is clear that for a writer such as Berger, steeped in the older 'traditional' Left Wing political beliefs, some kind of response would be needed to this major ground-shift in the language of liberation, and clearly the novel G. can be seen as such a response.

Following the author's own description, G. was written over a period of 6 years (1965-1971) and thus grows from the most turbulent events of the sixties.. Of course Berger

chooses not to write a novel detailing contemporary events, but to go back in history to find a period which would act as a suitable analogy for that experience of the present. The events on the streets of Paris or on the campuses of America might provide the source or inspiration for the scenes depicted in G., however it is the longer historical perspective which is the main focus of the author's attention. In any case, the events of the late 1960's, the blockades, the street battles, the 'sit ins' could in a sense be seen as an essentially anachronistic form of opposition, not a revelation of the new but a celebration of a much older form of radical opposition and essentially apolitical in nature. For example, Giorgio Amandola, a PCI intellectual, criticised the student activity in Italy at the time, describing it as:

...nineteenth century reactionary barricades  
tactics. (1)

As Berger was marching on the American Embassy in London, in support of the anti-Vietnam war movement (2), fighting was breaking out all over Italy, based around the Universities. This provides a useful connection to the events which took place some seventy years previously, events in which the fictional character of G. will become embroiled. Many of the students' tactics at this time, like the actions of their colleagues across Europe and in America, were aimed at the media and newspapers (in the same way that G. will lead an

attack on the newspaper Il Piccolo). As with the events of May 1898, the unrest grew mainly from a specific isolated demand. Then it was the Wheat Tarrif and now the University Reform Bill. However in each case the dispute grew into a far more widespread, and politically motivated revolt. In 1967-68, nineteen out of thirty three universities were effected with thirteen of those campuses occupied by the students, with over half a million students on strike. The students, and sympathetic teachers, formed counter-courses on anything from 'guerrilla warfare' to 'repression in the family' (3) and celebrated the work of Mao Tse-tung and Che Guevara (largely ignoring the Italian communists Gramsci and Togliatti). As the riot squads joined paratroopers in attacking the student occupations so the workers (for example from the Italian car giants Fiat) joined the students in December, fighting with the police in Milan, Genoa and Venice. However, for the communists the student ideology was totally unacceptable , labelled as 'anti-technocratic' and even 'pantheistic' (pp.61-62 Caute). We can see that Berger had at his immediate disposal events which could form the basis of his fictional work and a fictional framewok within which to deal with his reaction to these real events taking place in the world outside. There is little doubt that the scenes of disorder and riot which occur within the novel directly reflect the events which Berger himself would have witnessed at the time.

Clearly however, the main focus of Berger's novel is the sexual politics of the time and the liberation of

sexuality from the limitations and restraints of a capitalist system. Although Berger was clearly familiar with the developments within feminist theory (he would certainly have read Juliet Mitchell's famous article 'Women, the Longest Revolution' in the New Left Review in 1966), G. could be said to still be examining the 'position of women' as Berger calls it in the novel, from an entirely male theoretical perspective, the liberation of sexuality from the single viewpoint of the male libido. It is, in other words, phallocentric in its focus. This attitude towards the liberation of a repressed sexuality, which is perhaps the most lingering of the 1960's inheritance, is a useful rubric within which to consider Berger's own reactions to the movements of the time.

It is clear that Berger does ascribe, as do many cultural theorists of the time, to the notion that sexual liberation means essentially a greater ability or willingness for women to 'let go' their sexuality. This 'active' sexuality will then create an equality between men and women, an equality which would in turn be a radical threat to the false power relationships created by a capitalist economy which depends for its existence on the theory of 'ownership', whether material or emotional. We therefore follow the character of G. through a sequence of sexual encounters in which he 'liberates' the women from a suppressed sexuality and political suppression at one and the same time.

There are of course some problems with this concept. The first is the question of whether greater sexual freedom,



as experienced by women in the 1960's is in fact a liberating process or rather a new form of denigration and enslavement imposed by men. What this concept essentially achieved was to locate the very roots of the Women's Movement within a sexual context rather than focusing on political issues to do with rights and to do with power. The line between representing women as 'liberated' sexually and a new form of pornography was particularly thin. A good example of this was the treatment of women in the so-called radical underground press which flourished in the late sixties. Although these were often, on a practical basis, run and administered by women, they had little or no say on editorial policy. As Nigel Fountain points out (4), the Beats in the 1950's had already established an idealised image of the 'outsider' male, a Juan type figure 'fucking' society and, of course, as many women as possible (a figure very much like G. in other words). The Situationists in the 1960's also created a similar revolutionary image, subverting capitalism through a 'critical' pornography. Women, needless to say, were the passive material for these fantasies. Jeff Nuttall in his commentary on the sixties, entitled Bomb Culture, stated that:

There are times when beautiful women come  
like food to the starving. Not to hold or  
make love to or talk to, but just to be  
there with their peaceful flesh...as we  
apply a quivering phallic strength to our

civic organisation and economy. (5)

This Lawrentian appeal is representative of much of the 1960's 'free-thinking' and could stand as a kind of manifesto for some of the sentiments expressed in the 'radical' and 'right on' periodicals of the time. Berger himself is not free from similar recognitions of 'womanness':

There are women - often they are wide-hipped and plump - whose bodies become unforeseeably beautiful when recumbent. Their natural formation, like a landscape's, seems to be horizontal. And just as landscapes are for ever continuous, the horizon receding as the traveller advances, so, to the sense of touch, these bodies seem borderless and infinitely extended, quite regardless of their actual size. His hand set out. The large dark triangle of hair on her pale skin announced unequivocally the mystery which it hid.

(G., p.162)

There are several things of interest here. Firstly there is the 'viewpoint' - the 'voice' of the narrator takes on the role of the all-knowing male, who can divide women up into catagories because they have observable and quantifiable

qualities. 'There are women' suggests the focusing on a discrete 'set' from the whole species known as women who are also observable - those with narrow hips and who would be best advised to remain vertical perhaps. The success or quality of the woman's body is judged by how it looks or how it feels, from a 'consumers' point of view. We shall see how this narrative treatment of women matches Berger's well known comments on the way in which we look at women in paintings later in the study, however for the moment this is a very revealing passage indicating its roots in what I would call a sixties polemic. To suggest that the women described in this passage are seen to their best advantage 'horizontally' is not too far removed from Stokely Carmichael's infamous comment:

The role of women in the struggle is  
prone. (6)

For women, the revolutionary act is to lie down. As the final issue of the 1969 underground magazine Oz put it, 'Pussy Power' was on the agenda but not political power for women. There was a 'Playboy' mentality worryingly at the very heart of the hippy ethos, which led to a misreading of the link between sex and revolution, which is a dialectical relationship at the very centre of G. itself. The implicit form of pornography which this in many cases led to - "Tits, Ass and Hot Revolution" as IT magazine succinctly put it in 1970 (p.21 Underground) - would soon become explicit, as the

'chicks' of the underground magazines changed into the 'page 3's' of the contemporary tabloid press. As David Widgery stated:

The underground can't go on seeing every  
nipple and ripple and grunt as an attack  
on capitalism. (7)

He also points out the obvious fact that,

...women are doubly enslaved, both as  
people under capitalism and women by  
men. (8)

He should have perhaps said women under men to more precisely capture the situation. However these issues are certainly part of Berger's thesis in G., although perhaps rather more peripherally than the dedication of the book would at first seem to suggest (dedicated as it is to 'Women's Liberation'). The metaphor used in this passage to describe the experience of the woman's body is also revealing, the idea of the 'traveller' in an unknown land. This echoes the existential role of the main character, the outsider moving through a landscape confined only by his own decision, his own experience and will. The final sentence underlines the Freudian sense of women as 'dark continents', who embody the very essence of mystery, and are, as a result, the emodiment too of that antithesis

excitement and danger.

Much of this kind of theorising about the new role of sexuality in the radical movements of the sixties came from theorists such as Marcuse, whose books, for example One - Dimensional Man (1964), were very influential. David Caute neatly summarises the central idea of this work:

Marcuse rejected Freud's insistence on an inherent conflict between the reality principle and the pleasure principle, offering instead the perspective of a non-repressive sublimation, allowing the pleasure principle to liberate man from the performance principle (nonstop automated work) and to discover himself as both subject and object of his needs and desires. (9)

Here is a manifesto for the new Don Juan, a restructured 60's Don Giovanni who would find within himself the limits of all his desires, in the 'here and now' of praxis, whether political or sexual. The link between the political and the personal is forged anew, to fulfill one's desires sexually is to extend ones aims politically, they are both part of one revolutionary act. As one piece of graffiti in Paris in 1968 puts it:

The more I make love, the more I make the

revolution. The more I make the revolution,  
the more I make love. (10)

Or as Tom Mcgrath puts it, this is a whole new way of seeing things:

Inner directed...A new way of looking at things,  
not an ideology...The revolution takes place within  
the minds of the young.

...You either have the attitude or you  
don't...The search for pleasure (orgasm)  
covers every field of human activity...  
Abolish money...Not a movement of protest  
but of celebration...Grooving...No leaders  
...Crazy...The squares sneer...Don't forget  
the bomb, but begin the revolution with  
love and McLuhan-style media theory.

(11)

Not so much a 'global village' then as a universal  
bedroom. The search for pleasure is the path towards  
revolution and freedom. In this sense Berger's character can  
be seen as a kind of archetypal sixties radical man, a  
'history man' in the truest sense, linking past, present and  
revolutionary future in a picaresque adventure through love,  
war and death.

But what of the women whom he 'liberates' along the  
way? In the 1960's, women's acceptance of the prevailing

attitude was soon to be stretched to the very limit. By late 1969 and the early seventies, when Berger's novel was coming to its completion, women were reacting strongly against the explicit chauvinism of all the 'New Age' groups. Robin Morgan made direct attacks on the sexism inherent in the male-orientated militant groups in her 'Goodbye to All That' of 1970, in which she described the 'counterfeit, male dominated Left' with their 'token pussy power or clit militancy articles' (12). In light of this kind of criticism we have to consider the extent to which Berger himself escapes the charges of reducing the women's political movement to a form of 'clit militancy' - of seeing women's liberation only in terms of their sexuality. The novel G. is structured around a series of encounters and seductions. From the moment of the first seduction with 'Aunt Beatrice', G. becomes a Don Juan figure who selects his women and 'liberates' them from the strictures of society and their own libido alike. It is a quintessential sixties scenario.

The time was clearly ripe for this kind of story. If we look at other works of the period we can see a clear frame of reference for Berger's development of the Don Juan myth. It is possible, for example, to see G. as a similar kind of hero to Antonioni's central character in that most representative of sixties' films, Blow Up. The central character in this film is a photographer (that most representative of sixties figures), a seducer and a rebel, a sixties Don Juan, objectifying women and throwing them into new roles at one and the same time (thereby, some would

argue, empowering them). In his role as 'witness', or 'observer', this is one prototype for Berger's hero. Or perhaps we might think of Dennis Potter's Casanova, a television serial broadcast in 1971, which also explored the theme of the seducer. In print, the move towards a new permissiveness in the underground press (which, as we have suggested, was a short step from the pornography which was soon to follow) opened up new ways of writing about sexuality and desire. In fiction, a new explicitness was made possible by the publishing of Lady Chatterly's Lover and a whole series of other books dealing with explicitly sexual themes.

So were all these predominantly male responses to the the new sexual mood of the times a genuine attempt to focus on the potential liberation of women, or simply a further example of male appropriation and exploitation of women's sexuality? Berger himself can be seen to be representative of the confusion over these issues at this time, and his novel a way of attempting to work through the problems raised. For example, Godard, that other seminal figure of the sixties, can be seen to present a similar 'confusion' regarding his attitude towards the representation of women, being ultra-radical and ultra-sexist in almost equal measure. However, we can detect in Berger's writing, strategies which could be considered similar to Godard's revolutionary film techniques (13), revolutionary in that they changed the very nature of film-making and the way we, the public, watch films. Godard's method of including within



his narrative abstract ideas, alien concepts, monologues, a mingling of documentary and fiction, the absence of character development and motive and the use of jump-cuts and other radical editing techniques have their parallel in Berger's novel. G. is 'filmic' in this sense, it experiments with time and place, always seeking new perspectives and angles of vision. The comparison is particularly true in terms of both artists' use of other 'texts' within their own narrative. For example, in Godard:

A monologue from Saint Just (in Weekend) or from Mao (in La Chinoise) would suddenly intrude as an obsessive distraction. (14)

In G. we have the sudden 'intrusions' of passages from Pascal, Levi-Strauss and again Saint Just, amongst others. This represents a neo-Brechtian attempt to 'engage' the reader, to involve them in the 'performance' of the text.

To sum up; we can perhaps discuss Berger's G. as a 'sixties' novel by using three headings:

1. Sex: The 'permissive' portrayal of sexual relationships (not including, significantly, homosexual love) and the raising of feminist, liberationist issues.

2. History: The historical events of the novel can be read as a direct metaphor for the 'happenings' in the

late sixties; the First World War representing Vietnam. The scenes of uprising and mass demonstration as a displacement of the student actions of the sixties across Europe.

3. Theory: The form of the novel itself represents a response to, and a working through of, theoretical developments from the continent, mainly from France, in the field of literary and cultural studies. Specifically this may be linked to the work of Roland Barthes and the growing awareness of developments in post-structuralist thought. The novel, as 'text', offers a reflection of ideas concerning representation and narration current at the time, on the border of two very different decades.

Before we return to the streets of Milan, it may be useful to consider one last version of the student revolt in the sixties:

Marcel Cornu reported the key phrase cropping up in all discussions, prise de conscience, accompanied by a feverish desire to become the actor rather than the spectator of history. (15)

This is something at the very heart of Berger's novel, and we shall see how far the hero is governed by this desire or by his sexual desire as a Don Juan.

## Reading

There are a few points here which one could, how shall I put it... 'dispute'. Firstly, which 'New Left' is intended? The 'Old New Left' (1956-1960) or the 'New New Left' (1960's)? It makes a difference. If Berger is such a 'fifties' thinker, then one would want to place him with his old mates E. P Thompson et al. If, on the other hand, one wants to transport him to the sixties, it is fair to say that there was not one 'movement' in which to enlist him, but several quite disparate ones. However, to tackle the central argument, we must at least distinguish between the 'hippies' on one side and the New left on the other. By no stretch of the imagination, I think we could all agree, could one describe berger as a 'hippy'. He displayed little enthusiasm for the student movements of the late sixties and generally his interests did not tie up with anything remotely connected to 'youth culture'. It is therefore somewhat unfair, not to say misleading, to criticise Berger for the shortcomings of the hippy movement. The Communist party had little time for the activities of the student bodies, the Socialist press equally little time for 'underground' publications such as Oz, and it is here we have to look for Berger. To suggest, in particular, that Berger, as a representative sixties figure, had little knowledge or interest in feminist theory is inaccurate. After all, the New Left Review (as all too briefly mentioned) published Juliet Mitchell's 'Women: the

longest revolution' in 1966 and there was a clear context for the discussion of the empowerment of women which Berger would have been closely involved in. The connection between revolution and sex in the 1960's, to take another related issue, was not a 'hippy' invention but part of a continuous debate which has been at the centre of all revolutionary movements. The concerns and issues taken up in G. are therefore a reflection of developments within the New Left, and the images created by the 'Encounter', of mini-skirts, the Pill and Pink Floyd are somewhat irrelevant.

I think the central problem is the reliance on one text - David Caute's '68', which seems to form the backbone of the whole 'Encounter'. Why the reliance on one source? Why the faith in one 'historical document'? After spending so much time building up the idea of 'textuality' and questioning the whole idea of the reliability of commentary and analysis, we suddenly move to the opposite, Caute as indisputable historical 'evidence'. Of course, Caute provides us with a version of history, so why the abandoning of that 'distance', that scepticism about the 'truth' value of language? If this is going to work the rule has to apply to all sources, to all 'texts' - there are no exceptions!

Where was Berger in the 1960's? There is no easy answer to this, but it would be safe to say that he was not in Carnaby Street. In the meantime, it might be worth considering this little 'history' which a friend (BS) kindly suggested to me:

Brecht	applied	Marx	to	theatre
Barthes	"	Brecht	"	culture
Godard	"	Brecht	"	cinema
Berger	"	Brecht	"	fiction
Berger	"	Benjamin	"	television

*Its neat, its informative and easy to remember! (it also tells us that at least for part of the sixties Berger could be found at the BBC studios). It also demonstrates the extent to which Berger was influenced by German theory, rather than the quintessentially French intellectual context of the 1960's.*

One last thing - the 60's 'permissiveness' which G. undoubtedly does reflect, is especially poignant to a reader in the 1980's or 1990's. It is not possible today to consider sexual 'promiscuity' without simultaneously considering the problem of AIDS. One of the 'lessons' of contemporary sexual experience is precisely Berger's point, albeit given a new and tragic twist), that all lovers are brought together in the sexual moment, regardless of space and time. To know now that when you have sex with a partner you are, in a sense, having sex with all their previous partners as well - 'All are there together. He joins them.' (G., pp.227-228) - is to be aware of a mutual threat as well as a shared sensual consciousness. The Don Juan figure now has a devastatingly powerful potential.

Commentary.

Lines 228-229:

This scene creates a repeated comparison between the terror of the moment and images of domesticity, between anarchy and social normality. Here the Roman girl speaks as though to her husband (again the young boy is cast in the role of husband - a role he will never of course assume for 'real' later in life). The 'cloudburst' reminds us of how the authorities regard the protest itself, as a kind of 'act of nature', an 'ineluctable' force which threatens the whole of society:

...in the rolls of thunder echoing between the far mountains and the near buildings, in the incontestable force of the downpour and in the hysteria of the electrical tension, they have seen the spectre of their working population in revolt. (p.74)

The soldiers become like the huntsmen described earlier in the novel, who 'use' nature and form it to their own desires:

Thus the force of nature (either from within or from without) is never allowed to accumulate; the rules always establish calm, as locks do in a river. (p.97)

Thus order and calm is imposed on the streets of Milan after a brief period of misrule, the terrible, and sublime, vision of the revolutionary 'storm' brought under control, the locks on the river of time and history put back in place.

Lines 237-242:

'Hammering from the yards' indicates that the city has not come to a stop, that the workers have not joined their comrades in the street. This sound is then an ill omen, a sign that the uprising is doomed to fail. The sound of the soldiers' marching feet is like the ticking of a clock. It creates the dual time-sense which has always haunted the young boy and always will, where time is both a promise of time to come, the future, but also an ever-present record and reminder of time passing, of the present becoming history, of death. The words in parenthesis - 'its promise of a seemingly endless time lulls him; but the way it fills the time, whose passing it records, oppresses him' are a direct repetition of the words used on page 55, where G. is only seven and a half years old and contemplates the 'endlessness of time' within his Aunt and Uncle's house. In each case there is a mingling of both hope and fear, and at the end of the novel fear will take over as time is perceived to finally 'run out'.

Lines 244-246:

The Roman girl steps forward to sing - and again the image of the everyday is placed in juxtaposition with the

unexpected and unusual events on the street. She steps forward to sing like a singer approaching 'footlights', in stark contrast to the actual conditions which prevail. She sings the 'Canto dei Malfattori', the song of the wrongdoer or criminal. The printing of the song within the text, with its full musical notation strikes another incongruous note. Just as the girl's voice 'fills the street' (line 250) and for a moment creates a break before the advance of the soldiers, so too does the musical notation 'break' the narrative at what would be a dramatic point, again halting the 'advance' of the reader. This Shandyesque moment, recalling that moment in Tristram Shandy where 'Lilli Bullero' is reprinted (5), ruptures the surface of the narrative, restraining the progression of the events in the story.

Lines 247-251:

The narrator consciously resists romanticising this moment, the girl's voice is not beautiful but 'full and coarse'. As with her features, it is the individuality of the girl which captures the attention of all gathered there. The girl's voice, like her physical appearance, defies stereotyping, demands to be taken as indicative of the unique and the singular (as with Camille later in the novel, whose voice is like a 'corn-crake', p.187).

Lines 253-255:

When the soldiers begin firing into the barricade, the



girl's voice is immediately lost, and all 'distractions' are blown away, bullets focusing attention on the 'here and now' and in so doing, simplifying all experience. The seven stones which fall short of the advancing soldiers are pathetic testimony to the absolute imbalance of the confrontation. From this point on there is no doubt how the scene will end.

Lines 270-276:

The railwayman, who had become a kind of leader or officer of the protestors is shot from an upstairs window. The bullet hits him in the face, again reinforcing the sense of the violence 'effacing' those it strikes, making them lose their identity, the identity the Roman girl's voice attempted to establish. The shot is described as coming from a past 'preceding his own childhood' and which 'gives birth to his own death'. This is a familiar antithesis in the novel as a whole, birth and death (linked closely to the other central antithesis sex and war) and at the end of the novel G. will be carried 'foetus like' (p.348) to his own death.

Lines 286-312:

This is an important passage in that it highlights a singular moment in the young boy's development. His total reliance on the Roman girl, on her strength, her determination, her 'uniqueness' (note again the emphasis on her individual features, for example 'squashed' and

'blemished') will eventually develop into an understanding that the two young people are experiencing the moment in exactly the same way, that it is possible for people to 'come together' in a moment of time, to be 'at one' with someone else. The girl's face somehow expresses exactly what G. himself is feeling, the events have brought them together into a state of deep empathy. It is this expression which will form part of the 'mysterious continuity' which joins the different moments and events in G.'s life, and will specifically link this moment with a moment from the final part of the novel with Nusa, when an expression on another person's face will again reveal the thoughts of the central character for us (page 328).

Lines 319-326:

The narrator attempts to describe in detail one of the wounded men, not to dramatise the moment, or to make the event more theatrical but to do the opposite- to try and give a sense of what the pain the character is feeling is really like. This is something only possible through this kind of narration. It could not be conveyed by film, as much of the preceding moments of this scene could indeed be (much of it reads like director's notes) it can only be suggested by words, however ambiguous and unsatisfactory they may be.

Lines 327-336:

It is not entirely clear why the narrator abandons the

notion of 'truth' entirely from his narrative at this point. Over the page (lines 377-380) the narrator is determined to shape the text in such a way that it retains the maximum 'truth-value' possible. The role of narration is here diminished to a form of 'dressing', a kind of sticking plaster rather than a cure for the society it comments upon. Here the narrator suggests that any words 'will do', that language is entirely arbitrary, that all that matters is the 'intent' - the purpose behind the language. Berger seems to be caught here between two approaches, two concepts of language: a postmodernist reading which focuses on the ultimate arbitrariness of all signifiers, and a 'commitment' to a form of writing which believes that it can make a difference, that it can record history and that it can change the way the future will develop. The narrator faces a difficult choice - to speak or to stay silent.

Lines 337-348:

There are two areas of interest here - the image of the women on the barricades and how this relates to certain historical stereotypes and more recent social events and, secondly, the words which the women use, specifically 'castrati'. At the time the novel was written, part of the shock of the demonstrations which took place, against the Vietnam war for example, was created by the full participation of women, also by the violent treatment of those women by the forces of order. The narrative, however,

taps into an older tradition, the portrayal of the women in the French Revolution, the heroines of the barricades and the attack on Versailles. These women have been idealised and demonised in roughly equal measure by later commentators, from Carlyle's outright dismissal, to the Victorian romanticism typified by Dickens, portrayed with the full force of a mythological framework, women as some kind of pagan force. The women in this scene, with their bloody legs and torn stockings, belong to this older tradition. The soldiers halt in their advance because they recognise in these women images of their own mothers whilst the captain sees only whores (that most ancient of antitheses). Neither sees revolutionaries and the novel fails to supply an image of women in any real political liberationist mode. The names which the women call the soldiers - 'castrati' - forms another thematic link with the rest of the novel. Later G. will ask his father what the term means (p.99) and the father, rejoicing in his own fatherhood, is delighted to supply him with a graphic description. This forms a link in the young boy's mind with what he has himself observed on the farm at home, with the castration of lambs. Thematically it alerts us to the theme of paternity, of absent fathers, of rebellion against 'law' or the father figure which marks the novel as a whole.

Lines 370-372:

The scene concludes with another image which joins the concepts of birth and death - 'stillborn' (line 372). The

women are lamenting the moment that never came into being, the revolutionary event which was itself 'stillborn'. It is noticeable, and this is connected to the comments on paternity above, that there is indeed no mention of children in the remainder of the novel. There is never any suggestion, for example, of any offspring from G. himself, despite the frequency of his sexual encounters. Neither do any of the women he 'seduces' appear to have any children and this creates a real sense of a period coming to an end, of a discontinuity in historical terms.

Lines 373-381:

The narrator suddenly leaves off his description of the events in Milan in 1878, for, as he states, 'the desire to finish is fatal to the truth'. Here is the writer's postmodernist inheritance, the idea of closure (the 'sphericity' of the novel form) being antithetical to any idea of truth or realism. His intrusion into the narrative at this point prevents the reader 'closing' the account of those events, prevents the aesthetic distancing, through 'story', which conventional narrative would allow. Instead the reader is forced to consider how he or she deals with narratives, historical or otherwise, how we are trained to expect an ending which will satisfactorily conclude our negotiation with the text. The intrusion underlines the supreme artificiality of the novel form (and particularly the 'realist' form) and in true Barthesian mode brings the 'I' of the author directly into the narrative itself. As

with sex, the moment of death or violent struggle resists language and forces any rendering of it in words to accept both its own artificiality and its ultimate hypocrisy.

Lines 382-392:

As if to underline this sense of the artificiality of the fictional mode, the narrator concludes the scene with some historical 'facts' (although as we have seen, even these facts may be disputed). The narrator would seem to place some trust in figures, as if they provide a more truthful and trustworthy means of expression than words alone. This occurs at various times in the novel, for example:

The St Gothard tunnel was opened in 1882.  
Eight hundred men lost their lives in its  
construction. (p.13)

Sunday, 9 May, appears to have been a sunny  
day all over Europe.....Four thousand men  
had already been killed along a line of two  
and a half miles in the Western Front. (p.282)

Each 'fact' is accompanied by an appropriate date, as though mapping these events permanently within history in a way that narrative could never claim to. As the narrator points out later, 'description distorts' (p.91). It is part of Berger's search for surety, for truth, part of what he describes as 'the magnificent impossibility of my being a

writer' (p.152). Berger, in drawing on these moments of 'recorded' history, is reaching for 'co-ordinates' which will link the political with the personal. Writing 'in the spirit of a geometrician' (p.152) may be one way of charting a path through the competing forces of a suspicion about language and a need to 'bear witness'.

Commentary - 'Beatrice'. (G., pages 117 to 131)

Line 1:

'She sat down cross legged on the rug...'

Beatrice's posture suggests both ease and isolation. It is a position assumed when one is 'unobserved' by any external agency, yet suggests a certain self-consciousness. This sets up the surveyed/ surveyor discussion which follows (for example in lines 91-92 - 'she was different when she was alone or when she believed that he was not there.')

Line 2:

'Wasp' is the first of several 'natural' references and images used throughout the scene as a whole, which generally serve a symbolic function. We may demonstrate this in tabular form:

'dog's head'	(line 4)	sexuality
'horse'	(line 11)	death
'cow'	(line 89)	innocence
'fish'	(line 118)	sex
'horses'	(line 128)	death/ mortality
'a fox, a donkey, a deer'	(line 356)	dream/ myth
'cattle'	(line 371)	innocence/ protection
'cows (bison?)'	(line 373)	transformation



This may be contrasted with the repeated use of plant and flower imagery:

'white lilac'	(line 18)	longing/ hope
'embroidered leaves'	(line 22)	Beatrice as nature
'sweet grape'	(line 43)	intoxication
'stalk'	(line 68)	fecundity
'grass'	(line 72)	nurture/ desire
'lilac'	(line 104)	anticipation
'tree-trunk'	(line 114)	touch
'fields'	(line 117)	smell
'blackberries'	(line 199)	'firstness'
'cyclamen'	(line 348)	sex/ pleasure
'forest'	(line 352)	dream/ recollection

The reference to the 'wasp sting' links this seduction scene to an earlier moment in the novel when Beatrice is stung on the foot by a wasp in the 'walled vegetable garden' (page 104). Beatrice had been attempting to collect some wild lilac (again, the smell of this lilac permeates the seduction scene, forming a further narrative link between the two episodes). The scene symbolically represents Beatrice's past and present sexual experience. The walled garden suggests the claustrophobic and incestuous relationship with her brother Jocelyn, and the sexual bondage (literally) of her marriage to Captain Bierce. Thus the garden is described using the language of

decay and dissolution: 'wet earth', 'rotting brussel sprout plants', 'mud up to her ankles' and a ladder which is 'black, rotten'. In contrast, Beatrice is reaching towards new experience, symbolised by the fresh boughs of lilac, with the young G. representing 'new life' (although still contained, through ties of blood, within the artificial confines of the garden). A clear correspondence can be seen here with a similar moment in Thomas Hardy's Tess of the d'Urbervilles:

She went stealthily as a cat through this profusion of growth, gathering cuckoo-spittle on her skirts, cracking snails that were underfoot, staining her hands with thistle-milk and slug-slime, and rubbing off upon her naked arms sticky blights which, though snow-white on the appletree trunks, made madder stains on her skin: thus she drew quite near to Clare, still unobserved of him. (1)

In the same way Beatrice draws near to G., while the natural world provides a living allegory of the inner sexual life. Finally, the linking of sexuality with 'animality' and the wildness of nature (earlier in the novel Beatrice is described as 'an animal, with the patterns of action and reaction necessary to satisfy her own unquestioned needs', page 38) is established as the antithesis to the falsity of social and cultural life.

## Reading

What exactly is a 'clear correspondence with Hardy' supposed to mean? That Berger's scene consciously draws on the Hardy episode, or that both scenes, though unconnected in any formal way, somehow express the same ideas, convey the same 'meanings'? Or do I mean that such 'correspondences' are subjective - a result of personal memory and association? Certainly it was because I 'remembered' Tess as I read about Beatrice that Hardy came up at this specific point in the first place. Otherwise Hardy is an unlikely candidate to place alongside Berger (however, there is a comment on this subject in David Caute's review of *G.* in the Times Literary Supplement of June 1972 - where the comparison is similarly raised and then rejected). Either way, maybethe 'clear correspondence' is based simply on what Harold Bloom, in *A Map of Misreading*, calls 'misprision', both on Berger's part and on my own. As with all such comparisons there is a tendency here to 'allegorise' the text, that is to reduce the 'specificity' of the work through a sequence of comparisons and lateral interpretations. A scene in *G.* is therefore 'like' an episode from Hardy, a passage of Berger 'echoes' Lawrence, Berger's narrative 'acts out' a form of Brechtian 'alienation'. Each time we move further and further away from the original text itself, further away from our own first reading. It could be argued, I suppose, that treating the novel 'metaphorically' in this way, repeats Berger's own project as a writer - to form 'complex synchronic patterns' (*G.*, p.152), thus allowing me to chart the structure of the novel across 'space' rather than 'consequentially in time' - narrative geography rather than literary history - creating a clearer sense of the novel's uniqueness. Nevertheless, the feeling that each of these 'moves' takes me further and further from my own first understanding of the novel remains worryingly strong.

Lines 6-10:

Beatrice's actions here create two different impressions; firstly of the essential childishness of Beatrice herself, directly suggested in lines 89-90, where unobserved she does 'a childish drawing' with some chalk on the floor. This also carries the suggestion that there is a fundamental difference between actions (and particularly this is seen as applying to women) carried out in private and those 'acted out' in a social setting (see **ENCOUNTER: 'Ways of Seeing'**). Secondly Beatrice's movement is sexually charged, like a Picasso nude it at once exposes the genitals and renders them abstract.

Line 11:

The second character to enter this scene is the 'I' of the narrator, the first of many interchanges between narrative and 'discourse'. This 'narrator' should be distinguished from the voice of Berger himself (as author) which is also heard. The 'I' of the above line is the narrator/ storyteller 'within' the narrative, experiencing the story through the act of telling. Later, lines such as, 'Sexuality is by its nature precise' (line 174) will represent Berger the essayist, the pedagogue. It is important, at an early stage, to discriminate between the two. Lines 294-295 suggest the nature of the transition from 'I - author' to 'I - narrator'. Following Berger's advice in connection with the drawings of a 'cock' and a 'cunt' which the above lines refer to, we find ourselves as

readers (as ourselves) becoming 'story-tellers'. By the time we return (as it were), the Berger of 'Take both drawings' has slipped back into the narrator of 'I am writing...'.

Line 18:

Lilac is a repeated image throughout the novel, indeed it can be traced through Berger's work as a whole (see for example his latest work of fiction entitled Lilac and Flag), both in terms of colour and scent. It generally symbolises hope, anticipation and 'love'. Lilac is the antithesis of the 'smell of gun oil' for example (page 100) and as we have seen, lilac is the link between Beatrice's earlier sexual life and her subsequent seduction of G.. In And Our Faces, My Heart, Brief as Photos Berger writes,

The scent of lilac, you once said, is not so far from the smell of cows in the stable. Both are smells of peace and procrastination. (2)

The smell of lilac is linked with a feminine environment, as opposed to the male world of 'guns' and 'leather', the smells G. associates with Beatrice's brother Jocelyn. The smell of flowers is opposite to that of 'paraffin', the fragrance of life and desire in comparison to the stench of death and fear. 'Procrastination' is also linked to the 'Beatrice' scene, where lilac signals an event which, for the lovers, exists outwith the bonds of normal time. The

couple defy time, defer the future, creating an experience which G. will strive to recreate for the rest of his life.

Lines 18-19:

The narrator here distances himself from full control of his narrative, as if he is at once both constructing the scene and observing it as it happens. The narrator in this sense shares the experience of the reader. The suggestion of 'uncertainty' on the narrator's part breaches the narrative in such a way that the reader must generate his or her own 'certainty' in terms of the events and characters presented. Berger encourages an 'implicatory' relationship between reader and narrator, both are 'responsible' for setting the limits by which the story is understood. Note the conscious break between the inclusive portrayal of Beatrice (we are shown the pink circle on her foot, we are told of the coolness of her hair) and the intrusion of the narrator's own sensuous awareness, he 'sees' the horse in the drive and 'smells' the lilac in the vase. What is suggested is that there is no 'innocence' in narration; we, as readers, must admit, as the narrator explicitly does, the reality of our own experience as a constitutive part of any 'fiction'. By this is meant the memories, feelings, signs and even hopes which are generated in response to a narrative. In this case, 'reality' is a misleading or inappropriate word. Berger does not present narrative as though it were a 'total picture' - the narrator is not omniscient but is himself

subject to the limitations of memory and to the distortions of retelling. Berger's narrative self-consciousness, his awareness of the reader's presence, of their gaze, is the novelistic equivalent of Brecht's 'alienation effect'. This comparison provides a useful way of interpreting and analysing the experience of reading the novel as a whole.

Encounter: 'Brecht'.

Lines 18-19 - 'the smell of it is the only element that I can reconstruct with certainty' is a moment of 'alienation', for with it the narrator (who here takes the place of the actor in the Brechtian model) 'expresses his awareness of being watched' (1). There is no narrative 'fourth wall', the novel is not a sealed spectacle. The word 'reconstruct' emphasises the creative nature of the narrator's role, he is not reflecting 'real life' but 'constructing' it. This has important ramifications for the reader in terms of 'implication' (that is the reader becoming a producer and not a consumer of the narrative). As Brecht states in 'Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting':

We lose Aristotelian 'empathy' with characters -  
but not entirely with the 'creator' i.e the  
author or the idea of 'creation'.

(2)

Berger, as narrator, invites us to join in the problematics of 'reconstructing' experience in the unwilling medium of language.

Berger's interpretation of the 'A-effect' is a central device in the novel as a whole. Consider Brecht's comments in A Short Organum for the Theatre :



Schiller's distinction is no longer valid: that the rhapsodist had to treat his material as wholly in the past: the mime his, as wholly here and now. It should be apparent all through his performance that 'even at the start and in the middle he knows how it ends' and he must 'thus maintain a calm independence throughout'. He narrates the story of his character by vivid portrayal, always knowing more than it does and treating its 'now' and 'here' not as a pretence made possible by the rules of the game but as something to be distinguished from yesterday and some other place, so as to make visible the knotting-together of the events.

This matters particularly in the portrayal of large-scale events or ones where the outside world is abruptly changed, as in wars and revolutions. The spectator can then have the whole situation and the whole course of events set before him. He can for instance hear a woman speaking and imagine her speaking differently, let us say in a few weeks time, or in another place. (3)

Berger adopts this analysis to the development of an 'alienating' narrative style - where the events of the novel are not isolated in some fictional past, nor the narrative itself fixed to some imagined 'here and now'. Alienation locates meaning at the site of the

confrontation between author, reader and text, and one of the features of this confrontation is the differing experiences of time which are brought to this site. Berger discusses this, in connection with the folk-tale, in his contribution to About Time (see quote 17 in 'Beatrice' commentary). The 'narrative and all its tenses' denies history, not through the sense of becoming 'timeless' - as in a continual 'universal' present, but rather through the aggregation of experiences of time leading to time-consciousness:

A story is seen by its listener or reader through a lens. This lens is the secret of narration. In every story the lens is ground anew, ground between the temporal and the timeless. (4)

This 'grinding' is the political moment of the 'A-effect', the moment when the notion of time (of history) is brought dramatically to the forefront of the novel. In G. the protesters on the streets of Milan experience the 'revolutionary' moment as a moment of 'time-consciousness':

Suddenly there is nothing to regret. The barricades are between their defenders and the violence done to them throughout their lives. There is nothing to regret because it is the quintessence of their past which is now advancing against them. On their side of the barricades it is already the future.

Every ruling minority needs to numb and, if possible, to kill the time-sense of those whom it exploits by proposing a continuous present. This is the authoritarian secret of all methods of imprisonment. The barricades break that present.

(page 84)

Similarly the 'barricades' are erected in the novel itself, through narrative lapses, intrusions, digressions, questions, demands, which 'break the present' of the narrative, forcing us to forgo the comfortable illusion that 'the player is identical with the character and the performance with the actual event' to quote Brecht (5). What is important is meaning, and the meaning of a moment (as in event) is different from the experience of that moment. Reconstructing and restructuring any event is dependant on memory, on the recognition of the possibility, and desirability, of alternatives:

Where he is (in the garden in Livorno) or where he was (in the Via Manin) is unimportant; what he sees in front of him (his mother's round face and her hair impeccably arranged in a bun) or what he saw (the Roman girl's blemished open mouth) belongs to the particular moment; what he hears (the sound of the fountain playing) or what he heard (screams and

curses of women) are simple alternatives; what matters is what her expression in the yard confirmed but what, until this moment, was wordless. What matters is not being dead. (G. p.90)

These are not 'simple alternatives' however, the parenthesis marks the site of the stark antithesis created by the revolutionary event as remembered (whether public - the barricades in the Via Manin, or private - Beatrice's bedroom) in comparison with the (inevitably tranquil) moment of recollection itself.

But if the protagonist must come to terms with the relative instability of the notion of time, and its complex relationship to history, then so too must the narrator recognise, in order to fulfil the A-effects's dynamic, the alternatives of 'telling':

I cannot continue this account of the eleven-year-old boy in Milan on 6 May 1898. From this point on everything I write will either converge upon a full stop or else disperse so widely that it will become incoherent. Yet there was no such convergence and no incoherence. To stop here, despite all that I leave unsaid, is to admit more of the truth than will be possible if I bring the account to a conclusion. The writer's desire to finish is fatal to the truth. The End unifies. Unity must be

established in another way. (G., pp. 88-89)

Unity is achieved at the expense of the 'Unities'; space, time and action converge in the reader/ author/ text/ matrix. Unity, 'oneness', is found by discovering its dialectical other - 'plurality'. By refusing metameaning we discover the source (and course) of meaning. By alienating empathy, we transcend the full stop.

Of course the alienation-effect is apparent in G. in a more directly structural and functional way. We can consider, for example, Brecht's 'Short Description of a New Technique of Acting', where simple linguistic constructs identify the site of the A-effect in literature:

The very simplest sentences that apply in the A-effect are those with 'Not...But': (He didn't say 'come in' but 'keep moving'. He was not pleased but amazed). (6)

Thus in G. we have two examples of this effect in the 'Roman girl' episode:

They do not know exactly how many they are;  
but all of them sense that they represent  
the majority. (p.179)

After a line had passed, sections of the  
crowd appear to re-form - not in order to

resist, for resistance at this instance is unthinkable, but because in order to avoid the horses they have pressed themselves into unimaginably tight units which, as soon as the danger has momentarily passed, inevitably enlarge again. (p.80)

In both examples the A-effect draws the reader's attention to the 'innocence' of the crowd, who do not know, but sense their strength in terms of numbers (and thereby the justice of their cause) and are represented as 'protecting' rather than resisting. Without this effect, we might easily assume that the (and by implication any) revolutionary crowd is automatically aware of its strength and presence, or that its actions are always dictated by its perceived aims.

There are further examples of this structural use of the A-effect in the novel, in the 'Beatrice' episode for example, Berger writes:

The sweetness itself is not extreme but the experience of tasting it is. (p.119)

Her softness belongs to a body which has substance and seems very large. Not large relative to him, but large relative to anything else he now perceives. (p.119)

Each of these occasions offers an opportunity to further

examine the meaning of experience more deeply, the limitation of narrative more critically. It forces the reader to stop, or at least to slow down. The 'writing' of experience is a highly complex process, the 'reading' of that experience must be no less arduous. The A-effect is testimony to the author's 'good faith' in attempting to render experience, and to make of that experience an example of the possibility of change. As Benjamin comments on Brecht:

Here literature no longer trusts any feeling  
of the author's which has not, in the desire  
to change the world, allied itself with sober  
intelligence. (7)

So too must the reader remain distrustful of the narrator who does not communicate experience which goes beyond surface appearances, and who refuses to locate narrative in the world of real men and women, in 'history'.

Commentary.

Line 30:

'Beatrice lifts an arm towards him...'

The hand is an important image in the scene as a whole (and indeed in the subsequent scenes dealt with in this commentary). Here the boy responds by 'pushing the door shut' (line 31) and taking 'her hand' (line 32). The innocence of this initial image, reminding us perhaps of those medieval depictions of Adam and Eve before the 'Fall', leads us towards the greater physical intimacy to follow - the hands are the instruments which join to pull the couple towards the sexual encounter. The image of the hand occurs eight times within this one scene, denoting specific moments in the development of G.'s first sexual experience. Thus we have:

She, by turning their hands, ensures that they  
both look out of the window. (lines 33-34)

When they laugh they swing back the arms of  
their held hands and this swinging moves them  
away from the window towards the bed. (36-38)

Beatrice puts her hand on the back of his head  
to move him closer towards her. (49-51)



He unhesitatingly puts his hand on her hair  
and opens his fingers to let it spring up  
between them. What he feels in his hand is  
inexplicably familiar. (138-140)

She holds his penis with both hands, as though  
it were a bottle from which she were about to  
pour towards herself. (147-148)

She places her hand so that his testicles may  
rest upon the palm. (340)

It should go on forever, she says. It is not a  
complaint. She grips two fingers of his hand.  
(386-387)

Looking at this portrait of her father, he  
waves a hand. (404-405)

The quotations are placed together without any intervening  
comment so that the progression of the scene, through the  
device of the lover's hands, can be clearly seen. The image  
of the hand is an enabling tactic - G. and Beatrice join  
hands, and by the various movements of their hands find  
themselves on the bed. The hand is then identified as the  
first source of sensual arousal, the first articulation of  
sexual excitement. When the sexual encounter is over and  
the couple 'lie abandoned, sided by side', their gradual

slipping away from each other is signalled by Beatrice 'grabbing' (no longer merely holding) the fingers of G.'s hand - they are already leaving each other. Finally G. waves at the portrait of Beatrice's father - he has left the sexual domain for the 'political', arguably his first step as a Don Juan, and the hand must act out a different gesture.

G.'s hand on Beatrice's vagina also echoes an earlier moment in the novel, where G.'s father and mother, Umberto and Laura, lie in bed together. In fact the same phrase is repeated in each scene:

Warm mucus encloses his finger as closely as  
if it were a ninth skin. (pages 21 and 122)

This repetition draws attention to the opposite nature of the sexual moment as experienced by father and son. For Umberto this signifies the end of his sexual relationship with Laura, a last gesture, whilst for G. it marks an initiation. The repetition also suggests the 'universal' nature of sexual experience at a sensual, if not emotional level (there are equally extensive uses and developments of the 'hand' theme in later scenes, and these will be looked at in more detail in the '**Camille**' commentary)

Line 42:

This introduces another feature of the description of the sensual/ experiential in this episode, that is that it will

be defined by means of all the senses. The hand, as we have seen, represents 'touch'. The above quotation clearly suggests 'taste'. For 'smell' we have identified the lilac in Beatrice's bedroom, or we might think of the smell of Beatrice herself - 'the smell of fields' (line 117). G. 'sees the eyes of an unknown woman' (line 133) and 'hears the voice of an unknown woman' (line 135). Beatrice is experienced by G., and by implication by the reader as well, through all the five senses (the 'pentagon' which represents the inner life - see page 139). This, the narrator suggests, is how we learn to really know someone, by forgetting them in their social sense and rediscovering them 'sensually'. The 'mythic familiar' (line 130), the imagined or fictionalised image of Beatrice, and 'Aunt Beatrice' (line 130), the social persona, are both lost, to be replaced by the direct knowledge of the senses.

Line 75:

Beatrice as 'mirror' reminds us here of Dante's Beatrice in the Divine Comedy, where in 'Paradiso', Canto 1, she acts as the poet's guide:

The journey with Beatrice begins with a simile stressing light as reflected light and action by reflection, as it were. To see with the light which Beatrice represents in the allegory is to see by reflection, hence the stress on mirrors and mirror images throughout that part of the

journey for which she is the guide. (3)

Berger's Beatrice is also a mirror, a reflection (like the 'Roman girl' earlier in the novel who reflected G.'s own feelings and emotions so exactly) which creates the knowledge of G.'s own sexuality. However, G. himself will from this point, this moment of self-awareness, become more than a 'mirror' to the women he seduces. For example, in 'Leonie', this development is made quite clear:

He recognizes you as each mirror you have ever  
stopped in front of has reflected you. The  
mirror reflects: he recognizes. (p.151)

What we see of ourselves in relation to other people is merely reflections of our possible selves, but to be recognised is to have shed outward appearance, to have allowed ourselves to be seen in such a way that we also 'know' ourselves for the first time. Both the Dante and the Berger 'Beatrice' are more than mirrors, they are 'guides', their light leads the hero to new levels of understanding. It may be interesting to note at this point that the 'journey' undertaken by G. is in some sense an inversion of the poet's journey in the Divine Comedy. The first seduction, which takes place in the 'Beatrice' episode, occurs in the morning, whereas G. meets with Camille in the afternoon and his eventual death takes place in the evening. Thus the Dante schema - 'Inferno' (night),

'Purgatorio' (morning) and 'Paradiso' (noon) is displaced. The novel G. moves from 'Paradise' (sexual awakening) to 'Hell' (G.'s ultimate destructive isolation from all intimacy with others - and the 'Hell' of revolution and war).

However the image of the mirror appears in a variety of situations throughout the novel. Through her relationship with G., Camille is led away,

from the mirrors which are falsely impartial to husband and wife, further and further away from where she belongs until she is herself alone. (p.226)

Mirrors are in this context another mechanism of the 'lie' which is the social self. Beatrice as 'mirror' is a more complex image however, one more closely connected to a moment earlier in the novel where Laura feeds her new baby:

It is as though the milk which flows from her is the quicksilver of an extraordinary mirror. In the mirror the child is part of her body, the number of all her parts is doubled: but equally, in this mirror she is part of the child, completing him as he desires. She can be object or image on either side of the mirror. The two of them, so long as the nipple remains in the mouth, revert to being parts of an indispersible whole whose energy will lead to

their being separate and distinct as soon as  
the child ceases to suck. (p.31)

In such moments of physical intimacy (and dependency) the mirror is no longer an artificial barrier, a simple one-way process, but dissolves into a way of sensing oneself through the sight and touch of another. The comparison with G.'s first sexual encounter is made obvious:

He bends his head to kiss her breast and take  
the nipple in his mouth. His awareness of what  
he is doing certifies the death of his childhood.  
(p.120, lines 63-65)

It is at once the 'death of childhood' and the discovery of a new 'indispersible whole' which is achieved through sexual union. Lover's bodies become 'extraordinary mirrors' to each other, but it is an 'Orphean' experience of touch and sense rather than sight.

Lines 91-93:

This is connected to the previous discussion of the significance of mirrors in the novel, as it concerns the idea of women as both 'surveyor and the surveyed' (p.166). It is one of the central themes of the novel as a whole, and reflects similar concerns to another book published by Berger at the same time - Ways of Seeing.

Encounter: 'Ways of Seeing'. (1)

In G. there is short section, no more than five pages, which reproduces almost to the word, the text of an argument given in Ways of Seeing. This concentrates, in its early stages, on the difference between men and women in terms of their 'presence', which, for Berger, has almost the same meaning as 'disguise' (W.S., p.54). There is some variation between the two works, for example, the awful sounding 'joker woman' of Ways of Seeing (p.47) is altered to the equally worrying 'cook-woman' in G. (p.167). However the argument is essentially the same - 'men act and women appear' (W.S., p.47). Berger insists that women are at once both the 'surveyed' and the 'surveyor', that is that they are both continually observed by men and by themselves, that they are implicated in the process of looking at themselves as 'objects', a process which actually constitutes the personality of the individual involved. For the character of G., it is this 'multi-layered' personality ascribed to women which must be shattered, and a new 'truer' individual discovered. The narrator concludes the discussion of this topic in G. with this statement:

I hope the preceding few pages will throw  
some light on the story I am about to tell  
and in particular on G.'s insistence upon  
Camille being 'solitary' (i.e unsurveyed by  
her own agency). (p.170)

This is one of Berger's more influential and indeed controversial arguments, however the book as a whole has become a kind of accepted wisdom, in many art history departments for example, or so Berger's opponents would like us to believe. Perhaps the most famous of critical responses to this work came from Berger's one-time colleague and friend Peter Fuller, who after an initial period of art criticism which closely drew on the kind of work Berger had been writing for two decades, turned his back on the 'Marxist' approach and strongly attacked the kind of analysis of art history which works such as Ways of Seeing represented. In Seeing Through Berger, Fuller writes:

Berger's book had an extraordinary and, as I now believe, quite disproportionate influence, since it was prescribed on innumerable courses for students beginning their studies of fine arts. It has been reprinted almost every year since it was first published. (2)

It is perhaps the suggestion of a kind of malign influence which is most startling here. As Mike Dibb, the director and producer of Ways of Seeing replied:

Ways of Seeing, despite its sometimes overassertive simplifications, unlocked



Encounter: 'Ways of Seeing'

a whole spray of ideas to be argued over and refined by others. And frankly I cannot believe that art teachers and their students could seriously be undermined by it. It is not a sacrosanct book, just one to be used, together with much else. (3)

However, the arguments regarding the 'position of women' in art and society were to have serious significance and to become the most common reference points in discussions of Berger's work. For example the 'New Art History' (4) has rallied against Berger's thesis, most recently in Marcia Pointin's Naked Authority, where she writes:

I wonder if Berger's Ways of Seeing, which attempted chronological range and which addressed the Renaissance nude, for example, has served at one and the same time as a tokenist foray by a progressive and iconoclastic figure into sacrosanct territory and as an embarrassing warning about the limitations of the Left in dealing with images of pleasure. I am constantly suprised by how uncritically we have tended to accept an author who proposes that 'women watch themselves being looked at' and that 'the surveyor of woman in herself is male', perhaps phrases that have become a litany for generations of students. Indeed Berger has

Encounter: 'Ways of Seeing'

sometimes been protected by writers who, in quoting Ways of Seeing, have suppressed the more embarrassing of Berger's utterances. (5)

In particular Pointin takes issue with Berger's pinpointing of the 'mirror' as evidence of the female's implication, indeed conspiracy (however forced) in making herself the object of 'perception':

Berger proposes that the mirror in relation to the female body is a manifestation of hypocritical moralising, a Vanitas symbol produced by men who covertly enjoy the spectacle of female nudity. He suggests that the woman looking at herself in the mirror joins the spectator's of herself. But, as Lacan has shown, the subject can never see herself as she is seen. Berger wishes to co-opt the object of desire into the company of voyeurs but the self-reflexive circuit is not disrupted in this way. (6)

This begs two questions: how far we accept the authority of Lacan's 'mirror-stage' (given that it was available to Berger) and how far this is an adequate summary of Lacan's position? To take the second question first - this hardly seems like a useful appropriation of Lacan's analysis. It suggests the existence of a unified self (as in 'her/self') which is somehow independent from the viewed 'subject', and

### Encounter: 'Ways of Seeing'

that the mirror-image cannot reveal anything other than a version of the 'surveyed' self. However, in Lacan, we see that the mirror stage (central to that self-reflexive circuit) is:

a turning point in the chronology of the self,  
but it is also the origin, the moment of  
constitution of the self. (7)

The 'self' is the product of the mirror-stage, before which no totalised image of that self existed. To suggest that there is a unity called the 'self' outwith that totalised vision is to misconstrue Lacan's terms.

Secondly it is possible to locate traces of Lacan's theories in Berger's novel. The idea of the mirror-stage being a 'birth' of the self and simultaneously the moment of recognition of a fractured personality which existed before that 'birth' is important:

The mirror stage is thus high tragedy: a brief moment of doomed glory, a paradise lost. The infant is 'decisively projected' out of this joy into the anxious defensiveness of 'history' much as Adam and Eve are expelled from Eden, so the child, although already born, does not become a self until the mirror stage. Both cases are two-part birth-processes: once born into 'nature', the second time into

'history'. (8)

This is extremely suggestive in terms of the themes of Berger's novel, and we can compare this to the two episodes previously discussed, that is the scene involving Laura and her new baby and the seduction scene with Beatrice, both of which involve the use of mirror imagery:

In Paris Laura feeds the new-born child at her breast. It is as though the milk which flows from her is the quicksilver of an extraordinary mirror. (p.31)

Her difference from him acts like a mirror. (p.120)

Here then is the two-part birth-process, into the self and into self-awareness (bearing in mind Dante's 'Beatrice as mirror' discussed earlier). The nipple to mouth image which also connects the two scenes suggests demand, for sustenance and for love, but also for a totalising moment in which to fully experience the sense of 'self'. When G. waves at the portrait of Beatrice's father at the end of the scene, he enters 'history', he takes his place in the chronology of patriarchal time, a fact which he at once acknowledges and resists. Later in the novel, G. will resist the idea of the mirror itself, in terms of sexual experience, 'The mirror reflects: he recognizes' (p. 151). G.'s search, initiated at the 'second-birth' of

### Encounter: 'Ways of Seeing'

the Beatrice seduction, is for the fractured self behind the totalised reflection, for all totalisations, he perceives, are fictions. Prior to the eventual sexual encounter with G., Camille expresses this idea exactly:

I am now. But I am not the sum of my parts.  
See me as wholly as your own dear life demands  
that you see yourself. I have as many hairs on  
the back of my neck as you have ways of  
touching me. (pp. 224-225)

It is this which supplies a clue to the meaning of the 'fractured' narrative description of Camille and G. during their sexual encounter at the end of the scene (p.228). This has been described as 'Cubist' in style (9), an attempt to deal with the problem of communicating sexual and perceptual experience through language, by adopting the 'multi-viewpoint' of Cubism. However this is only partially the case. Certainly the description of the two bodies dislocated and fractured into an almost abstract mass perhaps echoes the work of artists such as Picasso, particularly in relation to that artist's approach to the nude figure or the sexual 'moment'. As Berger himself wrote:

The painter's right to displace the parts -  
the right which Cubism won - is essential  
for creating a visual image that can

### Encounter: 'Ways of Seeing'

correspond to sexual experience. Whatever the initial stimuli of appearances, sex itself defies them. It is both brighter and heavier than appearances, and finally it abandons both scale and identity. (10)

However, to suggest that Berger would 'select' specific modes of writing to meet particular narrative requirements would be reductive. Rather, the scene discussed here is a natural culmination of the themes of perception and identity established at preceding moments in the novel. The bodies of the two lovers are in fact not mirrors of each other (not part of some physical transaction which offers 'wholeness' in return) but have become 'memories' of the Lacanian 'body in bits and pieces' (11). To 'fuck' is to re-enter the 'temporal dialectic' (12) which the mirror stage represents.

Returning to the specific complaints concerning the idea of women as both surveyed and surveyors of themselves, this question can be asked: if these criticisms are directed at specific points arising from, or thought to be located in Ways of Seeing, then can they also be aimed at the novel G. ? How are the arguments concerning the 'position of women' actually acted out in the fictional work? Let us consider a few scenes from G. which could be said to be constructed from some of the issues discussed above:

Encounter: 'Ways of Seeing'

In a corridor Madam Hennequin had passed a huge mirror in the shape of the sun and in the mirror she had found herself trying to see the mantle over her shoulders and the fringe over her forehead as he might see them. Through his eyes she found herself pleasing. (p.181)

Camille touches the fringe of her hair and stares at her own hand. It looks extremely small and delicate, likewise her wrists and forearms. She wants to appear as fresh and intricate as white lace (she remembers a painting she once saw of a girl on a swing in a garden in Montpellier whose petticoats were bordered with white lace). She wants to appear like that... (p.215)

Here the present, the past and the future are all determined by a self-image created externally. In both scenes, connected formally by the 'fringe' of hair, Camille 'acts out' exactly the kind of character 'deferment' described in Ways of Seeing (and later in G. itself):

The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object - and most particularly an object of vision: a sight. (W.S., p. 47)

### Encounter: 'Ways of Seeing'

In the first scene quoted, Camille looks at herself as she imagines her potential lover will look at her. The limits of her own satisfaction (with herself) is dictated by the presumed desires of the male. In the second quotation, the point of reference for Camille's self-image is a painting, a conventional image of a girl on a swing. Camille's knowledge about herself is based entirely on a sense of 'presence' and not on actual identity. Even in the most intimate of moments, in her relationship with her husband Monsieur Hennequinn, Camille will not be 'naked as she is' but 'naked as the spectator sees her' (W.S, p.33). In opposition to this is G.'s desire to see Camille in 'isolation', that is unsurveyed by her own self, or any other third party. Central to this is the idea of the 'banality' of 'nakedness', as opposed to the culturally loaded image represented by the 'nude', which in Ways of Seeing is suggested by Rubens's portrait of Hélène Fourment, which, according to Berger, 'continually breaks every ideal convention of form and (to him) continually offers the promise of her extraordinary particularity' (W.S, p.61). This is precisely the 'breaking of form' which G. seeks in all his 'seductions', and hence the concentration on characteristic details of each of the principle women in the novel, and on their 'nakedness'. The emphasis is always on the 'extraordinary peculiarity' of each of these women, and not on her relationship to some external standard of beauty.

This exact process occurs during the scene with



### Encounter: 'Ways of Seeing'

Camille where the 'banality' of specific characteristics of Camille's body is precisely the source of sensual arousal, of attraction. At these moments, the narrator suggests, the woman is viewed 'as she is' and is at the same time put in a position where she sheds the external 'versions' of herself imposed by patriarchal myths of 'presence'. Thus a change in the way of perceiving is the trigger for an alteration in the sense of being perceived. It is a mutual exchange. It is G.'s 'neutral' gaze, his lack of proprietorial claim upon Camille which allows the free space where the lovers can meet in 'shared subjectivity' (13). This moment is equivalent to non-European representations of 'nakedness' and 'sex'; as Berger states, such art,

is likely to show active sexual love as between two people, the woman as active as the man, the actions of each absorbing the other. (W.S., p.53)

If Ways of Seeing was concerned with the differing modes of representations of sexuality in European and non-European art, then in G. Berger is attempting to locate a form of narrative which will demonstrate the fundamental difference between 'nakedness' and the 'nude'. By refusing to conform to an external mode of the narrative description of sexuality, for example through the use of 'shock' language within an extended analysis of the meaning of sensuality, Berger begins a 'process of questioning' about the novel

form itself. The problem with much of the criticism of Berger's analysis in Ways of Seeing is that it ignores the fact that it is primarily engaged in interrogating the ideology of representation, not in analysing interpersonal relationships, which are, Berger would be the first to agree, infinite and varied.

Within this ideological context, G. himself represents a way of locating not the 'real' woman behind the trappings of patriarchy, for any such discovery would only be another imposed fiction, but of discovering a space where the various versions of a 'fractured' personality can be disassembled. However, the narrator can, like the painter of the nude, only suggest such a free space, it cannot be 'pictured'; what we have ultimately can only ever be another 'version'. Similarly, G. can experience the 'moment' of Camille, a moment, however, which is outwith space and time. Sex is a way of 'unfixing' the world, through the giving and receiving of identities. When Camille removes her clothes she ceases to be part of 'history':

Part of the power of nakedness is that it seems  
to be unhistorical. Much of the century and  
much of the decade are taken off with clothes.

Nakedness seems to return us to nature. (14)

Camille as 'dryad' (G., page 226) demonstrates this return to nature, as she and her lover exchange their physical

selves they lose their social 'presences', and through this exchange they exclude everything which is not part of that moment. In an essay written shortly after the publication of G. Berger comes to a similar conclusion but with wider implications:

The equivalence between the beloved one and the world is confirmed by sex. To make love with the beloved is, subjectively, to possess and to be possessed by the world. Ideally, what remains outside the experience is - nothing.

This provokes the imagination to its very depths. One wants to use the world in the act of love. One wants to make love with fish, with hills, with forests, in the sea. (15)

This begins to point the way towards an understanding of the narrative style of Berger's later fiction, the trilogy Into their Labours, where the landscape, the animals and even the machinery of peasant life is experienced with the same 'intimacy' as the characters and individuals of the villages themselves.

However the source for these concerns goes back to before the writing of G., to a previous debate concerning the portrayal of the nude. In the essays entitled 'Loves ABC' in The White Bird, Berger discusses four artists and their different responses to the subject of the nude - Goya, Bonnard, Modigliani and Hals. Goya's 'Maja' is deemed

Encounter: 'Ways of Seeing'

a 'failure' as it portrays the 'nude' as imagined, not 'naked' as seen, and in doing so,

substituted an aesthetic of sex for an energy of sex. It is the nature of energy to break bounds: and it is the function of aesthetics to construct them. (The White Bird, p.90)

Here Berger implies 'picturing' sex takes over from a sensual knowledge of sex. With Franz Hals and Rembrandt however, there is a deliberate attempt not to idealise the naked subject. Rembrandt painted as he loved, Hals as he saw, but both released the captive subject of the 'nude'. It could be argued that there is a similar attempt to reclaim the 'energy of sex' at the heart of G..

## Reading

It should be pointed out that the programme which focused on the 'position of women' was the result of a collaboration among various writers and critics (as indeed the whole of Ways of Seeing was) and that the extent to which the ideas expressed in that programme are an exact reflection of Berger's own views is difficult to gauge. The discussion which took place between Berger and Anya Bostock, Margot Heineman and Jane Kendrick during that programme should be considered. I leave this as an open invitation to myself.

The above was written some time ago, before I had a chance to view the tapes in question. I have just watched the series again, and the discussion is actually pretty disappointing - or perhaps its range just seems limited in retrospect. Like a first reading, the impact of that broadcast, and the issues it raised, is difficult (impossible) to recover. Without doubt, it is Berger who dominates the series (regardless of any 'collaboration' behind the scenes). Berger never really had the chance to become the film-maker he once dreamt of being, but he was at the right place at the right time for television. The kind of narrative 'detournement' he was exploring in his fiction at the time was also well suited to television, where the formal structure of programming had barely been challenged. Like the radical theatre of the time, Berger

attempted to make the television experience more 'interactive' - for example by appealing to the camera directly in a provocative way:

But remember that I am controlling and using for my own purposes, the means of production needed for these programmes. The images may be like words but there is no dialogue yet, you cannot reply to me. For that to become possible in the modern media of communication, access to television must be extended beyond its present narrow limits. Meanwhile, with this programme, as with all other programmes, you receive images and meanings which are arranged. I hope you will consider what I arrange, but be sceptical of it.

(first programme, concluding remarks)

This must have been fairly shocking to an audience used to the formal and pedagogic delivery normally associated with television arts programmes, for example Kenneth Clark's Civilization, a delivery which did not allow for any questioning of the images or meanings provided. An invitation to scepticism - good heavens! Ways of Seeing brought together this 'textual' approach to the visual image with many of the most central cultural issues of the time - the sustained and detailed debate on 'women's issues' for example. This idea of 'debate', of 'dialogue'

was what gave the programme its particular power and significance. As Marina Warner suggests, the programme, and more specifically Berger's own idiosyncratic delivery (which she likens, interestingly enough, to a form of *seduction*) is almost a return to an oral tradition - the television presenter speaking 'intimately' to the audience in their own home, around the hearth so to speak (see Mike Dibb's recent documentary on Berger's career for Marina Warner's comments). Berger uses his power as a storyteller to make social and political issues more resonant. This is exactly what he set out to accomplish in *G.*, which he was finishing simultaneously.

Commentary.

Lines 128-129:

This picks up the quotation on page 36, from Pascal's Pensées, number 658:

With animals virtue is its own reward.

We thus have a connection with the continuing animal imagery used throughout the scene, comparing the 'natural' and instinctive nature of G.'s experience with Beatrice, to the artificial and antagonistic tendencies of 'social' relationships.

Lines 133-136:

At the moment of sexual encounter, the other person is 'unknowable' by all previous terms/ names/ signs, only the physical sensations themselves are 'inexplicably familiar'. This prepares us for the discussion concerning the inappropriateness of language for the expression of sensual experience later in the scene.

Lines 150-151:

Beatrice undergoes a transformation, from an 'unknown woman' to simply 'cunt', in the same way that later in the novel, in the 'Camille' scene, G. will become 'penis' (p.227). Just as Umberto suddenly feels that he and Laura have become reducable to some sexual graffiti he once saw,



'...a cunt with hair above it and below it a cock with hanging balls' (p.22), so here, at the moment of sexual union, each person becomes identified with their sexual organ. There is a difference between these gender visions, but they are both part of the same experiential event.

Lines 156-173:

The narrative at this point changes entirely - now the 'I' comes to the front of the stage, autobiographically, whilst the lovers are left, contrastingly, at the personally annihilative moment of sexual completion. Now the narrator intrudes with a story concerning a Paris laundry, with its fluorescent lights, at once an anachronism in terms of the narrative of G. and a brusque disruption of the two lovers and their 'moment'. The 'reality' of the Paris streets (for the intrusion, at least in regard to the preceding 'poetically' charged narrative, has the tone of an actual memory rather than a further part of the fiction itself) where everyone is dressed in the 'uniform' of social life, disturbs the duration of the image of G. and Beatrice. It counteracts the 'romantic' portrayal of love, suggesting the prosaic physical reality of all such experiences (dirty sheets) and affirms the brevity of sexual communion and more significantly, the pointlessness of attempting to capture it through language:

At this moment I begin to doubt the value of  
poems about sex. (Lines 172-173)

Sex is not a permanent escape despite of its place, experientially, 'outwith' time. It can only be repeated, or partially communicated. It is to this problem of communicating sexual experience, of translating it into words, that the narrator now turns.

Line 174:

It is the precision of sexuality which provides the opposition to the 'indeterminate world in flux' (p.123). Part of the problem of writing about sex is the 'imprecision' of language. This antithesis echoes the formal structuring of the novel as a whole - flux/ order, male/ female/, dead/ alive - the novel is built around a series of binary opposites. However, as a work of fiction, G. uses this structure to attempt to go beyond such stark oppositions, to travel dialectically towards a solution to all thematic antagonisms.

Lines 189-190:

If words are unable to translate the experience of sex (one of the most central of human experiences) then perhaps this fact reveals, '...what may be a general limitation of literature in relation to all aspects of experience' (lines 192-193). Language is the least successful medium for conveying the energy, the immediacy of sensual and sexual experience, especially at a first encounter:

In sex, a 'firstness' is felt as continually re-creatable. There is an element in every occasion of sexual excitement which seizes the imagination as though for the first time.

(lines 194-196)

If G. from this point in the novel can be seen as constantly pursuing the 'firstness' of sexual experience, then how can the narrator convey this in the impoverished fictional form?

Lines 236-241:

The narrator discusses his inadequacy (the inadequacy of narrative itself) in conveying experience through the medium of language. The reader and the writer 'hide' behind the creation of a 'third person' in narrative, and this 'third person' is the antithesis of the equation,

The experience = I + life. (line 235)

All narrative in this sense is a form or 'repeated experience' (line 212) and cannot therefore capture 'firstness'.

Line 242:

The writer (for we can no longer comfortably call him the narrator) now attempts to analyse the 'unfitness' of language, in experiential terms, in more detail, discussing

the role of nouns and their relationship to the most significant of shared experiences - sex:

all written nouns denote their objects in such a way that they reject the meaning of the experience to which they are meant to apply...They are foreign, not because they are unfamiliar to reader or writer, but precisely because they are their third person nouns. (lines 242-244, 250-252)

They are foreign because they operate within this 'third person' interface, the abstract space which exists within narrative, and between people, where nomenclature is a form of 'possession'.

Lines 256-257:

The above rule does not apply, in the same degree, to sexual verbs however, for example, 'fuck, frig, suck, kiss' (line 256) and this is because words such as these are connected not to objects or specific acts but to relationships, 'between subject and object' (line 259).

Sexual verbs therefore do not operate within the 'third person' interface, but in fact represent a challenge to its integrity. This promotes the sexual verb to a significant position in any narrative, and in G. suggests a possible link, or rapprochement, between language and the 'firstness' of experience.

Encounter: 'Fuck'.

There are four further uses of the word 'fuck' in different forms other than the two which initiated this discussion. The first appears on page 179:

When you describe something, when you name it, you separate it from yourself. Or to some degree. To fuck is like naming what has happened in the only language adequate to expressing it.

This suggests the Bakhtian point that any 'discussion' develops its 'own' vocabulary, and that sex, like any other form of 'communication' has its own unique modes of expression. This passage opens up a third meaning associated with the word fuck apart from the sex/ war themes already mentioned, this time linking it with the specific operation of forms of language themselves. The word 'fuck' here becomes, in relation to the sexual act, a kind of nomenclature; it names and therefore in some sense 'possesses' its object. Possesses and then in some way betrays, as through the act of possession it gains a form of independence from that object. This linguistic sense links with the themes of patriarchy and male sexuality in the novel as a whole. The verb 'to fuck' has a complex dialectical role. To fuck someone is to express desire, to take possession, yet at the same time it is also an act of

destruction, to negate, and to be negated, through the all-effacing demands of the libido. It is a powerful word in the realm of sexual experience and hugely problematic. As purely a feature of language it is no less so. In a wide sense, its use in G. alerts us to Berger's formal and aesthetic questions concerning the nature of fiction itself. Berger's intentions as a writer, on one level, is to resist the closure inherent in the 'realistic' novel form:

Never again will a single story be told as  
though it were the only one. (p.149)

In the passage quoted earlier, to fuck, in its role as a sexual verb, is to possess by 'naming', yet it also incurs loss, loss of the unmentionable, the unspeakable. 'Fuck', in both language and experience, achieves a kind of double status, it falls into the over-determined space between 'anticipation and retrospection' (G., p.179). Yet it is the only 'language' available which is appropriate to deal with the unique experience of sex.

To summarise, 'fuck' has so far been associated with:

- a/ Language (p.179)
- b/ War and death (p.332)
- c/ Sex and desire (P.337)

It is clear that it will be necessary to return to the textual sources of these occurrences in order to direct close attention to the passages involved, in order to

### Encounter: 'Fuck'

validate and explore in greater depth the claims made above. For example, in 'c', the lovers are 'fucking time', a detail which considerably alters and extends the meaning of the passage. However, before this more detailed reading of these key passages, it may be useful to conclude the 'fuck catalogue' so that all the strands can be drawn together.

The next occurrence of the word 'fuck' is located, fittingly enough, beneath the drawing of a penis:

They were fucking in the grass. Both half  
believed that they were no longer lying  
down but standing up and walking as they  
fucked; towards the end they began to run  
through tall wet grass. He had the further  
illusion that others were running towards  
him. (p.227)

This continues the temporal themes raised in the earlier quotation. 'As they fucked' suggests the 'here and now' of physical experience, closing down both the future (anticipation) and the past (retrospection) - the lovers 'fuck', that is destroy, time. Here however the word is locked within its own sexual connotation, at least at a narrative level, and importantly is centred on a mutual experience; 'he' does not fuck, 'they' fuck.

The word 'fuck', representing as it does a break within chronological time, is also closely associated with

the idea of death. There is an interesting passage on page 286, dealing with the mass killing in the trenches of the First World War, which is offset against a description of Marika's relationship to her husband:

At 4 pm along the entire attack frontage new lines of men were staggering across no-man's land, following the pipes of their band. The sound of the mad pipes was a continuation, far beyond music or reason, of the shrill parrot-cry of the officer's whistles. As they were falling, they appeared to fall in heaps rather than lines. This was because, in their last minutes, they were trying to crawl towards each other. The effect was of a crop, cut down, forming itself into stooks. (pp. 285-286)

This passage is linked to the earlier seduction scenes by the shared themes of love and death; between the sex-drive and the death-drive there is a 'no-man's land' where the two blur and become indistinct. In the midst of the mass death of war, or during the 'little death' of sex, individuals seek oblivion in the other, the idea of destruction and the idea of desire going hand in hand. Interestingly there is an image very similar to this in Berger's Art and Revolution, where Berger quotes an early poem of the artist Ernst Neizvestny:



A lull. They fell asleep in clusters.

Fell asleep instantly erased by fatigue.

The living and the corpses embracing.

In blood.

No disgust. Soon we'll all be dead. (1)

'Corpses embracing' suggests something like the dialectical image which Berger is seeking in G.. Preceding his own description of the battlefield, Berger intersperses images of conflict on the Western Front with an observation, as already located, of the relationship between Marika and her husband Von Hartmann. The effect of this intercutting between scenes is to bring the two together. The conception of space, as an external determinant of historical experience is in this way collapsed. The death of the eleven and a half thousand men, and the confrontation between Marika, Von Hartmann and G. is happening at the same time and therefore, in the widest sense, in the same place.

What Berger creates in this passage is a complex analogy between the demands of 'war', the demands of 'sex' and the demands of the workers who take to the streets of Trieste. War appears as a terrible event, like a natural force, inexhaustible, voracious. However it is clear that the course of the war is in fact a matter of strict calculation and **control**, between imperialist powers. Similarly, Marika's appetite seems inexhaustible, her sexual encounters and her gambling, however these again are

### Encounter: 'Fuck'

kept to strictly defined limits by her husband, who controls and manipulates those appetites. Thirdly, the demands of the workers, as with the demands of those who took part in the uprising in Milan earlier in the novel, will never be met, but will be manipulated and controlled by the capitalist system which apparently is there to fulfill their needs. Real sexual desire, as represented by G., destroys this idea of control, lays bare the manipulation behind the political and emotional situations he encounters. To 'fuck' here, is a revolutionary act (see previous Encounter: The Sixties), which joins all events geographically, across and through 'space'.

Again we are drawn to Berger's observations in Art and Revolution:

Prophecy now involves a geographical rather than a historical projection: it is space, not time, that can critically limit our vision. To prophesy now all that is necessary is to know men as they are. (2)

To attempt to make sense of the world we need to look not only at other people's past, but also at our own present, to follow the Brechtian maxim: 'Don't start from the good old things but the bad new ones' (3). The juxtaposition of military and domestic 'conflicts' also draws a clear parallel between the corruption at the centre of both 'events' - a corruption based upon 'possession', whether it

be of women or territories. Thus the manipulation of Marika by her Husband is described in terms of 'stratagems', of 'administrative control' and of his wife being 'subject to his control' (p.285). In von Hartmann's imagination the sex/ death link is firmly rooted:

Marika's infidelities did not disturb Wolfgang von Hartmann because the sexual act (the act which constituted infidelity) was, like the experience of death, so absurdly short-lived.  
(p.286)

Marika's husband is thus the epitome of the patriarchal system which G. is revolting against. What matters for G. is 'not being dead' (p.90), what matters is the sensuous contact with life that repeated sexual experience represents. Wolfgang von Hartmann is another manifestation of the same spirit revealed by one of G.'s earlier lovers, Monsieur Hennequinn, who also linked sex and love with possession and control:

He took the key out of the door and left the room. He took the key because otherwise she might lock him out. She had done so on several occasions after disputes; and later tonight - he was aware of it now - it was possible that he might decide to fuck her like a prostitute. (p.205)

This fifth usage of the word 'fuck' draws attention to the absolutely contrary experience and conception of sex displayed by the other male characters in the novel compared to G. himself. Here sex is a commodity (the bitter irony of Hennequin treating his wife like a prostitute, a far from unrepresentative act, is that he does not in fact have to pay) and, again unlike G.'s sexual encounters, this suggests not a mutual experience but a single act, Hennequin will 'fuck' his wife.

We can begin to see the way in which Berger sets up correspondences between themes and ideas and yet at the same time, through the character of G., creates a way of deconstructing those same links. A similar process takes place in Ulysses, where in 'Sirens' Bloom confronts, through song, the 'dialectical transpositions', represented by 'M'appari' and 'The Croppy Boy', of sexual and martial 'love' (4). Both are 'Rhapsodies about damm all' (5), just as the deaths in the trenches and the 'fucking' of Hennequin and his like are 'meaningless', in as much as they are manifestations of a corrupt and corrupting system.

However the link between sex and death, as complementary partriarchal desires, is made more apparent in a later passage, where G. witnesses the crowd assembled in London at the time of the announcement of war:

Its cheers were to become gushes of its own  
blood hurled up into the air and falling



down over its own staring eye-balls, leaving millions of bloodshot veins in them, down its own jugular choking its exits, down over its stomach interminably bayoneted to where each wound with its unquenchable thirst drank it up, only letting, inadvertently, a few drops of blood dribble from the lip of the wound into the pubic hair. There were many women in the crowd, they pushed with their hands against the smalls of the backs of the men, they pushed them out, they aborted them in blood in the Strand and in Trafalgar Square where they lay, the men-embryos, without hairs or feathers on them, all bones and fleshlings. (p.340)

This passage in some ways appears excessive. It does not 'work', and this is a question, principally, of 'a failure of form', the link between death and sex has become a 'melodramatic gesture', and 'in the negative sense of the term, rhetorical'(6). The narrative form is here unsuitable for the content, and this is because Berger is at this point attempting to translate a visual image into a linguistic one. To make this point clearer we have to consider Berger's comments on Picasso in Success and Failure of Picasso, published some seven years before G. and quite central in the later novel's construction and development (as is his Art and Revolution of 1969, already

cited). In the artist Picasso, Berger identifies the twentieth century embodiment of the dialectical relationship between creation and destruction. Consider this passage:

Bakunin was the most violent of anarchist thinkers.

'Let us put our trust in the eternal spirit which destroys and annihilates only because it is the unsearchable and eternally creative source of all life. The urge to destroy is also a creative urge.'

It is worth comparing this famous text of Bakunin's with one of Picasso's most famous remarks about his own art. 'A painting', he said, 'is a sum of destructions'. (7)

It is the recognition of the centrality of the need, the desire, to destroy, inherent in the creative act (represented by the continuous 'painting over' of canvases for example - an image which in some ways resembles G.'s sequence of seductions), which marks Picasso's relationship to art. This recognition is illustrated most clearly in Picasso's approach to the theme of war. In Picasso's 'war pictures' the representations of women as the central victims of violence starkly suggests the dialectical relationship between life and death and symbolically draws

together the link between the experience of sex and the will towards destruction:

It is through the experience of his own body that he painted erotic pictures, and it is through his own physical imagination, heightened by sexual experience, that he painted the war pictures. (It is interesting to note that in the latter almost all the figures are women). (8)

Yet, and this is something that Berger will explicitly pursue in his own novel, Picasso is, by this very juxtaposition, challenging the sex/ death duality, representing it as a form of ideological enforcement and not as individual experience. Thus Berger says of Picasso:

Just as Picasso abstracts sex from society and returns it to nature, so here he abstracts pain and fear from history and returns them to a protesting nature. All the great prosecuting paintings of the past have appealed to a higher judge - either divine or human. Picasso appeals to nothing more than our instinct for survival. (9)

This passage could be considered as one key to understanding Berger's intellectual and didactic aims in

Encounter: 'Fuck'

G. G. is a Don Juan whose 'mission' is to liberate sexuality from its domestic and patriarchal confines. He is a catalyst, he creates the space where sex can be 'abstracted from society' and this can lead to an even greater metamorphosis, an even more significant form of freedom, where the individual becomes, it seems, indistinguishable from the natural world:

You were the light which falling on the dark petals of your vagina became rose. The blood-vessel was lifted up in the lock of your flowers. (G., p.228)

Desire flows out to embrace all living things. As Berger recalls from his conversations with Ernst Fischer:

The equivalence between the beloved and the world is confirmed by sex. To make love with the beloved is, subjectively, to possess and be possessed by the world. Ideally, what remains outside the experience is - nothing. Death of course is within it. (10)

Sex is a kind of death therefore, the link is established, but not in a negative sense, not in terms of a final dissolution, of blankness, but in terms of metamorphosis, of transposition and transubstantiation. It is the dissolving of the individual ego. In Art and Revolution



Berger quotes Diderot:

Feeling and life are eternal. That which lives has always lived, and shall live endlessly. The only difference I recognize between death and life is that at the moment you live in the general mass, and that dissolved, dispersed into molecules, twenty years from now you will live in detail. (11)

For G., the experience of sex is of just such a metamorphosis, from mass to detail, it is to fuck the world, to fuck time and therefore to fuck history. The important thing for G. is not to accept death, the death of pleasure or the death of desire. His experience with the Roman girl, where the crushing of the revolt in Milan is portrayed, as in the work of Picasso, largely through the experience of the women involved, is central to his later development. The voices of the women on the barricades, '...show that their rage is solemn and passionate, precluding all answers' (p.88), and illustrates that their desires are insatiable, that they cannot be contained by either political or marital manipulation. Here explicitly is Picasso's 'protesting nature', and it is here that G. finds the spirit which will motivate the remainder of his life. G. sides not with the revolution (in a political sense), nor with conventional 'courage', nor with the

'glory' of death, nor with song, nor even with the question of 'right and wrong', but with the individual right to be. Again, the move is from mass to detail, a focusing on the individual experience. It is for this reason that the depiction of the crowd assembled in Trafalgar Square again fails - it has confirmed the life/ death/ birth/ sex thematic association by drawing them all together in one image, but it is a mass body which excludes the individual experience (it is possible to see a similar problem with the depiction of the battle of 'Auvers Ridge' on page 286, where Berger describes the death of some eleven and a half thousand men by generalising their experience, suggesting that their agony was in some way a relief from the 'burden of hopelessness' experienced beforehand. This again is to portray a 'mass response', denying any idea of individual experience within that mass. In contrast, the 'stooks' image from an earlier battlefield commentary (p.286), and quoted earlier, does suggest individuals 'acting'). What Berger has in mind is something like Picasso's 'Crying Woman' of 1937:

It is a face whose sensuality, whose ability to be enjoyed, has been blown to pieces, leaving only the debris of pain. It is not a moralist's work but a lover's. (12)

Yet this visual image which so successfully reflects the 'shared subjectivity' (13) of both artist and subject,

cannot be transplanted into narrative without losing that important 'space' or 'distance' which allows the reader to make sense of what is portrayed **through** his or her own **experience**. Berger is here too impatient to:

affect the spectator emotionally: an impatience to establish his point of view **through** a work of art instead of **in** it. Against all his wishes, works which are flawed like this become monologues from the artist to the spectator. The spectator must either accept the message or reject it: there is nothing **in** the work for him to approach; the work is only a constant flux of effect towards him. (14)

In the description of the crowd in Trafalgar Square, Berger is cursing, not swearing.

However, there is one remaining usage of the word 'fuck' in G., in a passage which analyses the very nature of swearing in a sexual context. This is where this 'Encounter' began, at the point in the novel where the narrative is interrupted by a discussion of the difficulty of writing about sex, where sexual nouns dissociate themselves from the actual experience they are employed to describe. Words such as 'fuck' become italicised, stand off from the page, distanced from their context. In reported speech the same kind of process occurs - a displacement of sign and signifier, where to talk about sex, to use the

### Encounter: 'Fuck'

language of sex, is to automatically lose touch with the essence of the experience itself. However, sexual verbs suffer less 'displacement' than nouns but still lead to the problem of 'namelessness', the dead-end of nomenclature which sexuality represents. The experience of sexuality is directly contradicted by the vocabulary which attempts to describe it. As Berger states:

At its most fundamental there aren't any words  
for sex - only noises: yet there are shapes. (15)

Yet this 'failure of language' ironically gives this sexual vocabulary a unique linguistic position, allows it a free narrative space, representing a positive void within the constraints of formal language systems. Thus 'fuck', for example, becomes a signifier of nothing, 'fuck-all', a point where language is overthrown by the experiential, by the experience of words themselves. 'Fuck' literally signifies a moment of liberation.

In Writing Degree Zero Barthes comments that:

Hebert (an activist of the French Revolution who edited a newsheet) never began a number of Le Père Duchêne without putting in some fucks and damms. These obscenities had no meaning but they had significance. How? They signified a whole revolutionary situation. Here is an example of a mode of writing whose function is

no longer only communication or expression but  
the imposition of something beyond language,  
which is both history and the stand we take in  
it. (16)

Given Berger's close acquaintance with Barthes's work, this provides a significant clue to the deliberate employment of 'obscenities' in this novel. Barthes's identification of a form of language which has 'no meaning but significance', and which marks a revolutionary 'moment', is precisely fitted to Berger's search for a narrative form which will express the revolutionary moment, both political and sexual, of the late sixties and early seventies. To use the word 'fuck' within the novel form, was at that time, to mark a distinctive point in 'sexual history' and the novelist's stand within it. This association between the sexual and the revolutionary is made explicit by Berger himself in an interview given in 1978, where he describes G. as a man who:

fucks to destroy society in his own mind...  
He only occurs at certain historical moments,  
at other historical moments that same man  
could be a revolutionary. (17)

'To fuck', to say 'fuck', is to take up a revolutionary position. In a linguistic sense, instead of naming something, you express, or bring into being that

Encounter: 'Fuck'

something. 'Fuck' represents a unique site between anticipation and retrospection, the experiential moment which resists temporal classification. It is a universal moment precisely because it denies the context of the universal. It confirms while it negates, it celebrates individual experiences by dissolving the 'representation' of that experience. To swear becomes not a way of debasing the experience of sexuality but of elevating it. Again it is Picasso whom Berger has in mind:

Spaniards are proverbially proud of the way they can swear. They admire the ingenuity of their oaths, and they know that swearing can be an attribute, even a proof of dignity.

Nobody ever swore in paint before. (18)

For Berger, G. was an opportunity to work through, in narrative form, Picasso's 'revolutionary' mode. Nobody ever said, quite so starkly, 'fuck reading' before.

## READING

Given the importance of sexual verbs in this passage it is not suprising that the most expressive, and most problematic of sexual vocabulary (fuck, fucking) should have an important role in Berger's novel, and I am pleased, if rather suprised, that the 'Encounter' attempted to discuss it at such length. It seems to me, however, that what is ignored is the importance of the word 'fuck' in terms of its function as a form of narrative 'hailing' tactic, as a way of shouting beyond the reader/ writer void. In this sense it is of primary importance during any 'first reading', which is tacitly linked in Berger's discussion with other 'first' experiences. A narrative is seldom read straight through. By this I don't mean anything to do with 'one sitting' but with the mental and intellectual 'breaks' which occur during any reading experience. Even a first reading is repeatedly punctuated by the need to pause, to consider, to compare, to agree or demur. The use of words such as 'fuck' can still operate, in terms of shock, in such a way as to arrest the attention, to divert it from the linearity of the narrative.

I think this point is missed because the 'Encounter' appears to be responding to a first reading when in actual fact the comments are the result of many subsequent readings and re-readings. The only 'outcome' from a first reading is generally the little notes or signs we make in the margins of books as we read. These represent a kind of

'map' of that first reading, a scout's trail. Second readings and analysis follow this trail, proceed from this 'shorthand' and so they are a translation of that first 'pure' reading. Notes in the margin are a kind of bridge between the 'anticipation and retrospection', to use Berger's own words, of reading. The later response to these annotations are perhaps ways of recording the first responses we make to a narrative, of transcribing that initial 'hearing' of a novel for example. However they should make this relationship clear - that although they represent a way, however inadequate, of crossing from the 'private' first reading and the 'public' second or subsequent readings (where we attempt to establish our understanding or evaluation of a work) there is a real and important break between the hoarding of the experience of a first reading (Barthes's 'pleasure' perhaps) and the formal responses we devise later. It is fair to say that it is precisely this kind of split between the private and the public that Berger attempts to heal.

Marginal notes often simply follow the 'trail' left by the writer/ narrator, for example completing Forster's 'non-classical' unity of rhythm and symbol. This develops our sense of the completeness of a novel, its continuity and its aesthetic shape (a completeness utterly spurious) - or the novel's 'sphericity' as Barthes puts it. However I would suggest that Berger develops his analysis of the function of the sexual verb into a narrative tactic which deliberately fractures this sphericity through the very



process of repetition, in this case of the word 'fuck' in its various tenses and forms. At a first reading the word 'fuck' does hail the reader, halting his or her progress through the novel (possibly different responses between male and female readings of this term would make an interesting study in itself), and my margin notes register this narrative 'signalling', supplying a map of reference, a starting point for later analysis. This is 'proven' by my own experience when coming to the novel for a second time.

On re-reading G. I found an asterix at the top of page 332 and heavy underlining of a particular passage of the text:

Its a fucking fine day to croak. \*

Further, there is a long arrow leading from 'fucking' to a note in the margin which states:

Uses this twice - once for Love and once for  
War - see p.337.

It is clear at this point, not having the gift of prophecy, that this note was made retrospectively, tracing a moment when I moved back within the narrative to a perceived repetition. Turning forwards I found indeed the link promised, with the passage 'Lovers fuck time together'. Here then is a second textual site of the use of the word 'fuck' and one which could therefore supply the basis for a

thematic analysis of the novel as a whole. However, although this does provide a groundwork for such a discussion, there are difficulties - the impossibility of recalling the precise occasion of that initial reading and the thematic speculations which prompted the margin notes. One cannot return to the exact moment of a first reading, or as Berger states:

First experiences are discoveries of original meaning which the language of later experience lacks the power to express. (p.125)

No matter how I attempt to rewrite those first impressions I cannot capture exactly the insights I experienced during that first encounter with the text. Any significant first experience changes the person so much that the experience itself becomes part of them, an insight can never be 'new' again, indeed its freshness may be transformed, through hindsight, into a cliché. I can only go back and start approximately from the same point. It is in fact curious how almost all writing (but especially perhaps critical writing) deliberately manufactures a sense of continuity. The 'organic' nature of such writing is of course a complete counterfeit, a fallacious addendum rudely pinned on to the back of that first, sensuous reading. Ideas are portrayed as following on naturally from one another, as if no real physical life had rudely intervened, as if the body, with all its nagging demands, simply did not

exist. Even G., with its emphasis on the Daedalean entanglement of time and space and with its own decidedly fractured narrative form, presents, ultimately, a unified fictional 'shape'. Yet it took Berger seven years to write! How could it be anything but fractured? All kinds of signs, images thoughts, events and voices are absorbed at every moment of the day (and night), bidden or unbidden, welcome or hostile. Angels and incubus sleep with the imagination (fuck it in fact) and will of course affect the gestation of any creative idea (am I shagged out?).

This is most significant in the case of cross-fertilization within reading itself. How many books do we read in isolation? When I made my first reading of G. I was simultaneously re-reading Ulysses, and all kinds of cross-references and comparisons of style sprang up (maybe Berger was re-reading Joyce during the writing of G.!) Later, when I was reading Forster's Passage to India for the first time, a different set of correspondences arose. This is clearly a limitless process and what is difficult, if not impossible, is to disentangle and isolate all these separate strands.

What I would just like to point out is that the 'Encounter' makes no mention of the cultural/historical context of Berger's use of the word 'fuck'. It was of course known as the 'Tynan' word, Kenneth Tynan using it infamously on television, during a debate on theatre censorship, in 1965. To some of the movements of the sixties, swearing was a part of the cultural rebellion, a

valuable shock tactic, a revolutionary gesture. Magazines, records, poetry, film - all forms of media exploited the the potential disruptive power of the 'f-word' - with the result, of course, that it became commonplace, neutralised, disempowered. It is only now that it has been reclaimed as part of a working class or nationalist culture (see the work of James Kelman for example) that the word manifests its old radical energy.

Commentary.

Lines 259-262:

The 'relation of subject and object' within the sexual act is unique, in that the 'other', here the 'sexual other', resists nomenclature, denies classification. Language is incapable of capturing its identity and thus it becomes, in a sense, universal. The object of focus fills the entire canvas of the imagination. Berger has described something similar when discussing the work of Caravaggio:

Caravaggio is the painter of the underworld  
and he is also the exceptional and profound  
painter of sexual desire. Beside him most  
heterosexual painters look like pimps  
undressing their 'ideals' for the spectator.  
He though, had eyes only for the desired. (4)

To desire something exclusively is to confer a universal status, it is to place an object, or person, beyond the confines and limitations of language. In this it is a semiological gesture, a return to a pre-linguistic conception and understanding of experience. The thematic link in the novel between the child and the lover, between the 'beloved' and the sense of self, reinforces the revolt against symbolic order. 'Revolution' is thematically linked in the novel to both political and sexual experience (the relationship between the 'Beatrice' episode and the 'Roman

girl' scene is a clear example). The sexual act itself combines the opposition to the phallocentric, the 'law giving' patriarchal code, with a disruption of that symbolic language order. G.'s first sexual experience, here with Beatrice, is concluded by the image of the boy waving at the portrait of Beatrice's father from the bed. Thus G. encounters directly the symbolic order as represented by the 'father'. His sexual liberation is simultaneously a political one. Linguistically, the verb replaces the noun as the basic unit for the language of sex, 'doing' and 'naming' become inseparable. The language of desire follows the rhythms of the body, the pulsations of sexual experiences are echoed in the narrative by silences, disruptions and denials of sense (logic). Light, colour and rhythm become alternative signifiers in a language based on inclusion, not exclusion. Yet reintegration into the symbolic order is necessary - the revolutionary moment, by definition cannot last forever. The ahistorical nature of the psychoanalytic interrogation, through the semiotics of desire, is juxtaposed with, historically, the specific political moment. There is thus some kind of dialectical movement towards a final transcendence. It would be a mistake therefore to consider the three sexual encounters in the novel as in anyway 'static', or in terms of a replication of a single experience. Alternatively, we can consider the three scenes as part of a Hegelian dialectic, involving thesis, antithesis and synthesis. Using Kierkegaard's model we can consider this as:

1. First stage - desiring one ideally (thesis)
2. Second stage - desiring the particular under the 'qualification of the manifold' (antithesis)
3. Third stage - desiring the particular absolutely (synthesis)

The synthesis in the final 'sexual' encounter with Camille (p.228) is of a complete immersion in the semiotic, where not only the individual's self, G.'s subjective conception of self, but also the 'desired other's' self is understood by G. (and by association the reader as well) in terms of Lacan's 'body in bits and pieces'. At this moment there is no distinction between linguistic communication and the physical language of the body itself. It is, to quote Eric Gill, 'the word made flesh' (5).

In 'The Screen and The Spike', an essay written in 1981, Berger discusses a scene from an American bestselling novel. The scene describes a sexual encounter of the central character:

Hockney closed his eyes, thinking of another girl, back on the East Coast. He was instantly rigid. Then he felt lips and teeth moving gently along him. Julia had never done that. (6)

In this excerpt, Berger states, the authors are not focused on the experience which they are ostensibly describing. In

Berger's words, 'They are persistently elsewhere' (7). If we compare this description of a sexual encounter with Beatrice's in G., we can readily see the kind of 'focus' Berger is describing when he talks of Caravaggio's vision. For the character G., Beatrice, as the object of his desire, 'acts like a mirror' (line 75). For the author the same process is involved. The 'increase of consciousness' generated by the narrative is achieved without losing sight of the characters and experiences which form its source. The difference between such an approach, and that of the authors of the bestseller The Spike is similar to that separating an artist such as Caravaggio (whom Berger has recognised as one of the most important painters to him personally) and the creators of the kind of sexual paintings described in Ways of Seeing, such as Von Aachen's 'Bachus, Ceres and Cupid' (8). Here the 'object' of the painting, the nude, is not 'exclusively desired'; the nude is created for an audience (the 'pimp and his spectators') and is merely part of the homosocial bond founded on the principle of ownership (9). The exceptions in the history of the 'nude', and there are few of these, represent a moment where:

The painter's vision of the particular woman he is painting is so strong that it makes no allowance for the spectator. The painter's vision binds the woman to him so that they become as inseparable as couples in stone. (10)



Berger's desire in his own narrative approach is to achieve a similar sculptural unity.

Line 263:

Here the narrator moves directly onto the issue of pictorial representation of sexual desire as a more successful alternative to the linguistic one. In contrast to the above discussion however, this is approached not through 'high art' but through what might be thought of the visual equivalent of swearing - graffiti, cartoons, obscene drawings. Berger presents two drawings of sexual organs - a penis and a vagina. Through such illustrations, it is claimed by the narrator, sexual experience is 'easier to recall' because it is 'closer to physical perception' (lines 265-267). Closer, that is, than the inherent 'foreignness' of language and cognitive interpretation. However it is not the quality, or lack of quality of the drawings themselves which creates the 'immediacy' of their impact, it is their unique 'cultural position'. They are neither 'artistic' nor 'anatomical', their function is neither aesthetic nor pedagogic, they earn no respect and require no knowledge. This absence of 'cultural load' (line 275) was a concept that occupied Berger throughout the 1960's, for example, in 1965, leading him to describe Picasso's nudes as:

nearer to drawings on lavatory walls than to

the great nudes of the past...They are nearer to graffiti because they are so single-mindedly about making love. But they differ most profoundly from most graffiti in that they are tender instead of aggressive. The crudity of the average wall-drawing is not simply the result of a lack of skill. Such drawings are nearly always a protest against deprivation, an expression of frustration. And within this frustration there is both desire and resentment. Thus the crudeness of the drawings is also a way of insulting the sex that has been denied. The Picasso's, by contrast, praise the sex they have enjoyed. There for everybody to recognise are William Blake's 'lineaments of satisfied desire. (11)

If Caravaggio's paintings represented the exclusivity of desire it was still within a specific context, still locked within some form of 'narrative' - the human relationships presented in those paintings. To represent sexuality itself, free from all such contextual 'framing' took until the aesthetic revolutions of the twentieth century. It is Picasso's 'graphic' technique which opened the door to the pictorial 'embodiment' of desire. It is in fact a cross-fertilisation of aesthetics and anatomy which Berger analyses closely in the work just preceding G. - Art and Revolution of 1969. In the work of the artist Neizvestny,

Berger observes the image of the human body becoming the exact opposite of the 'erotic':

Eroticism, at the level at which it is generally understood, is as superficial as nudity. Neizvestny is not interested in artificial sexual provocation. What interests him is the opposite - the natural, inextinguishable power of sexuality.

...By means of his interiorization of his body, Neizvestny places a value on sex which is in total opposition to the aphrodisiac values of commercialised sex. For the latter, sex is reduced to aesthetics. For Neizvestny sex is, above all, a form of energy. (12)

The rough drawings at line 263 are a kind of visual vernacular, a form of swearing, a shock tactic, a necessary 'interiorization' of the sexual moment. Berger's 'firstness' can be clearly linked to Neizvestny's 'energy' of sex, and in this exists a further link between the sexual/ political (and personal/ historical) themes described earlier. Technically, the placement of these drawings operates as a kind of defamiliarization. They are a further example of a Brechtian 'epic' stance, demonstrating the pure energy of sex in a way that language alone could not hope to achieve. The drawings 'mean' sex. This is demonstrated in the narrative of the novel itself, where earlier in the story G.'s father

Umberto recalls a moment when he had visited a friend who owned a commercial flower business and had several large greenhouses and had seen some graffiti which passers-by had drawn on the painted glass. This was a series of crude drawings and symbols, with the largest and boldest drawing depicting,

a cunt with hair above it and below a cock with hanging balls. It is inconceivable that he himself would ever draw like that. But he recognizes that the two of them have become the subject for such a drawing. (p.22)

The graffiti detailed at the end of this passage is exactly like that pictured at line 263. The drawings develop the themes of the preceding moments in the novel, a development centred on the locating of the 'energy' of sex. But why do the 'rough drawings' have such power for the characters of the novel and for the reader? Berger attempts a meditation on this very problem in an essay written just two years after the publication of G.. In 'One Night in Strasbourg' Berger recalls an evening waiting in a cafe and boarding a train home. At the time he is attempting to write down in a notebook some thoughts on the essence of sexual experience and desire. Excerpts from this notebook are interspersed with descriptions of the cafe. Finally, his two fellow travellers on the train start a kind of game, with one creating a crude image, torn from paper, of

a sexual act. The juxtaposition of Berger's own ruminations on sexuality and the 'game' he witnesses is revealing:

The totality of passion overlays (or undermines the world. (As one might say with their hearts or with their caresses.) The world is the form of their passion and all the events which they experience or imagine are the imagery of their passion. This is why passion is ready to risk life. Life appears to be its only form.

...Then very delicately he tears a piece out of its centre and folds the whole again. It has become a man, four inches high. When he pulls the folds open a penis stands up erect. When he closes them, the penis goes down. Because I am looking, he shows it to me. Otherwise he wouldn't have done so. The three of us smile. He says he can make it better than that. Almost gently he crumples the figure in his hand. (13)

The 'crude' figure, the sexual sculpture, somehow encapsulates the 'energy' of sex far more successfully and completely than Berger's own attempts at a philosophical or poetic interpretation of the roots of sexual desire. The final crumpling of the figure again more directly captures the transience of sexual desire. The figure carries 'a minimal cultural load' (line 275) and therefore is more 'transparent' (line 274) than words can ever hope to be.

Lines 277-280:

With the addition of words, the narrator demonstrates how the cultural load of the visual image increases, for example with the words 'big' or 'his'. This process is always true unless the words, '...do not qualify the drawing or use it syntactically' (lines 284-285). Words **can** therefore have an ancillary role in the representation of sexuality but not a primary one. Words cannot exclude a sense of narrative. If we place the word 'Beatrice' above the drawing of the vagina, as the narrator suggests, then the meaning of that drawing is instantly altered, it is 'exteriorized'. As readers we become spectators rather than active partners in the dialogue of desire. This can be retrieved to an extent by placing the personal pronoun above the drawings. By doing so we return in part to the 'interiorization' of desire, to the sexual energy which the drawings originally promised. That is, we return to the 'firstness' of sexual experience which is, in essence, a physical and sensual process and not a cognitive one. Berger circumnavigates the problem of writing about sexuality by implicating the reader. We, as readers, are forced to question not only the way in which we 'write sex' but also how we read it.

Lines 296-300:

This passage reminds us of an earlier scene in the novel,

already discussed, where the young G., then only a boy of eleven, is taken by his mother to Italy to meet his father whom he thought was dead. G. slips out of a hotel in Milan where the three are staying, and gets caught up in a workers' protest. He meets, and is saved by a Roman girl, who has a profound, 'pre-sexual' effect on the youth, and whose 'look' for the first time, suggests that a moment can be shared between two individuals. (see 'Roman girl' Commentary).

Line 306:

This line is a good example of the way in which Berger uses phrases and metaphors which are 'intrinsic' to the scene depicted - a part of his remaining, as narrator, within the imaginative framework of what he is describing (again like Caravaggio's 'exclusive' vision). The suggested rhyme of 'breadth' with 'breath' allows an intimacy with the exclusivity of desire. The sensuality of hair itself underlines the intimacy of the scene as a whole, and is developed symbolically throughout the novel in the various encounters. At the opening of the episode, Beatrice's hair is, 'loose around her shoulders' (line 21), and again, at the beginning of the 'Leonie' scene, G. observes the 'coarse stringy wisps of hair escaping from under her maid's cap' (p.147). In the final scene, a further example of the use of hair as a symbol of sexuality is given, when Camille is described as 'sitting in the grass. Her hair falls over her shoulders' (p.225). The 'hair's breadth' of

the above line (306) therefore directly keys us into the sexual imagery which permeates the book as a whole.



## READING

Again there are all kinds of problems with this passage. What does Berger mean by saying that a look which is 'purely grateful' (line 314) and is 'dear to the male as provider and master' (lines 315-316), which is also at one and the same time 'appealing and grateful' (lines 317-318) somehow represent a kind of freedom for a woman? There is nothing to suggest that the encounter is anything other than one-way (within the terms Berger employs). The equation suggests that the male 'provides' and 'controls' the sensual satisfaction, and further that he stands at both ends of the temporal experience of sex - he is the retrospective source of gratification and the anticipated provider of any subsequent pleasure. To 'appeal' - to entreat, to plead (but also to attract, stimulate or lure) is hardly the foundation of a truly 'shared' experience. The actions of the lovers may be depicted as being equal, as 'mirroring' the other, however the intellectual presumption remains intact. In Ways of Seeing Berger describes art from non-European traditions as frequently presenting:

...sexual love as between two people, the woman as active as the man, the actions of each absorbing the other. (see 'Chapter' 3))

Here, without an explicit indication that the language

'codes' are the same for the male and the female, the sexual and political argument remains supine.

Within this context we can fairly safely say that the 'voice' speaking at line 339 is meant to represent 'Beatrice'. As G. himself has remained conspicuously silent throughout the scene so far it is unlikely now to be him. On the other hand, Beatrice had made four discernible 'utterances':

1. I cannot remember...any lilac having a  
scent like this lot. (lines 104-105)
  2. Sweet, sweet, sweetest. Let us go to  
that place. (lin 137)
  3. You see. You see. (lines 332-333)
  4. It should go on forever. (line 386)
- ('Don't stop, my sweet, don't stop' (line 311)  
only 'what she may have said' (line 311) so  
cannot strictly be counted)

Ignoring the first statement (number one above) which is 'pre-sexual', the 'Say now to me' of line 379 fits in thematically and characteristically with Beatrice. Thus we have four statements corresponding to (1) an invitation, (2) an explanation/ revelation, (3) a proscription and (4) an idealisation. Thus linguistically it is solely Beatrice who is 'undressed'. The central structure of her monologue (there is clearly no dialogue) is based on the 'appeal' -to join her; to believe her; to follow her; to share

with her. G.'s responses remain physical, of the body, rather than linguistic. G.'s silence creates an imbalance at the heart of the experience. Beatrice's 'voice' brings her into sharper focus. Although there is a shared sensual experience this imbalance in terms of speech places the reader 'alongside' the narrator and G. as 'external' to the scene. As the narrator states in the 'Leonie' scene:

Armed with the entire language of literature  
we are still denied access to her experience.  
There is only one possible way of, briefly,  
entering that experience: to make love to her.  
(p.150)

We are immediately aware of the preposition 'to' rather than 'with'. Beatrice's words can in fact be seen as metaphysical questions which G. can only respond to physically. As far as the language of the sense go, and in terms of gender, we are still only eavesdropping.

Encounter: 'Kierkegaard'. (1)

'Pursuing the firstness of sexuality' is a suitable description for a Don Juan figure. G.'s resemblance to the traditional seducer is hinted at (and directly referred to on a couple of occasions) throughout the novel. The connection between the Don Juan character and the limitations of language as a medium for communicating sexual experience has clear associations with the work of Kierkegaard. In Either/ Or, Volume 1, of 1843, and particularly in the essay 'The Immediate Stages of the Erotic', the narrator 'A' (another nameless character) expresses the opinion that the figure of Don Juan can only be fully represented through music. This is because Don Juan represents the,

most abstract idea imaginable...sensuous  
erotic genius when expressed in all its  
immediacy. (2)

It is this very immediacy which, according to the narrator, cannot be expressed in words:

Hence it cannot be represented in poetry. The only medium which can express it is music. Music has, namely, its moment in time, but it does not pass away in time except in an unessential sense. It cannot express the

historical in the temporal process. (E.O., p.55)

The Don Juan hero continually strives to re-encounter the newness of experience, to face again the 'abstract' idea, the erotic moment of non-time. Berger's Juan is an embodiment of 'firstness', whose sexual experiences create the possibility of breaking down the 'Nacheinander' of chronological time:

He experiences every orgasm as though it were simultaneous with every other. All that has occurred will occur between each, all the events, actions, causes and consequences which have and will separate in time woman from woman, surround this timeless moment as a circumference surrounds the circle it defines. All are there together. All despite all their differences are there together. He joins them. (G., p.158)

The joining of experience through time, or in despite of time, is achieved by G. through the heightened awareness of what his senses tell him. The smell of lilac in Beatrice's bedroom; the sound of Camille's voice which G. likens to the 'corncrake' or the 'cicada' (p.219); the way G. looks at women in a special way - searching for the unique particulars which make each woman an individual, for example in the various textures of women's hair (p.118 and

189); and sexual anticipation is associated with taste - 'a taste of sweetness in their throats' (p.119) (we have already noted that the five senses are represented in a single scene also). The old poetic conceit of 'lover's time' is extended by the Don Juan figure, the senses providing a way of destroying the boundaries of time completely.

Berger's argument is that 'first experiences' are in a sense renewable, re-creatable, whereas the expression of that experience in language is by its very nature inadequate. At one level this alerts us to the possibility that G. as a novel is not about experience, but rather about its absence, not about sensuality but about the 'desensitised' space which is narrative reflection. That is to say that when we come to translate experience into words, all we have for certain is the loss of 'sensation'. We cannot recreate experience, especially sexual experience, through the medium of language, we can only gesture towards the vacuum which that experience has left. In the same way, Mozart's Don Giovanni could be said to replace sexual with musical energy. The opera does not recreate sexuality, but sexuality's desertion. Thus in G. we do not trace the 'hero's' journey through sexual experience but rather his gradual but steady distancing from it. For Kierkegaard, when it comes to recreating the sexual moment, the 'abstract idea', language is practically the antithesis of the sensual:

Language becomes the perfect medium just at the moment when everything sensuous in it is negated. (E.O., p.66)

Compare this statement to Berger's narrator in G., who comments:

Applied to the central moment of sex, all written nouns denote their objects in such a way that they reject the meaning of the experience to which they apply. (pp.125-126)

For Berger it is not that language cannot express sexual experience, or even sensuality or love. Language itself does not present an insurmountable barrier to understanding experience, but rather the divide between 'unique' private language and 'literary' language is sometimes impossible to bridge. For example, Leonie's reaction to her experience with G. is certainly inexpressible:

To express her experience it would be necessary for us to reconstruct around ourselves her unique language. And this is impossible. Armed with the entire language of literature we are still denied access to her experience. (p.150)

It is not the nature of words themselves but the form of their communication which presents the problem. Berger's

### Encounter: 'Kierkegaard'

own failure, as described in Another Way of Telling (3), to relate his own experience of love through words and photographs, underlines the problems of language as a medium for presenting the sensual, while at the same time conceding the desire, and the 'need' to 'speak' about sex. A similar 'experiment' is conducted in G., where the two sketches, of a 'cock' and a 'cunt' (p.126), are described as more successful at recreating the quality of 'firstness' than any sexual words could ever be. This is because, as Kierkegaard points out:

Language has time as its element; all other'  
media have space as their element. (E.O., p.67)

and thus language cannot but find itself looking 'backwards' on experience (unlike a picture which can represent the ever-present) and in so doing, like Orpheus, loses all that it had hoped to retrieve:

Language involves reflection, and cannot therefore, express the immediate. Reflection destroys the immediate, and hence it is impossible to express the musical in language; but this apparent poverty of language is precisely its wealth. The immediate is really the indeterminate, and therefore language cannot apprehend it, but the fact that it (the immediate) is indeterminate is not its perfection but an imperfection.



(E.O., p.69)

In G. however, Berger is concerned with the indeterminacy of experience and with resisting the 'determining' nature of language. This is connected to Berger's narrative style and its reliance upon metaphor as a way of escaping languages 'enslavement' to 'time'. Berger seeks:

A method which searches for co-ordinates  
extensively in space, rather than  
consequentially in time. (G., p.152)

Language turns the indeterminate moment of sexual experience, for example, into a 'moment' of 'history' (whether personal or social - but either way part of a chronology) in a way that the sketches of the sexual organs do not. However, if we carry out the author's instructions and place a name, Beatrice, above the drawing of a woman's 'sex':

What the drawing now represents has become  
Beatrice, Beatrice is part of a historical  
European culture. In the end we are left  
looking at a rough drawing of a sexual part.  
Whereas sexual experience itself affirms a  
totality. (p.127)

Language, or in this case language collaborating with

visual images, forces the 'totality' of experience into isolation, the universal is fragmented into the particular. Language separates each relationship and experience from its predecessor, whereas for G. all experiences, at the moment of orgasm at least, are 'there together' (p.158).

There is no celebration in the novel therefore of language's capacity to make 'determinate' through reflection the 'indeterminacy' of experience, but rather to emphasise the gap, the void, which opens up between sexuality, for example, and representations of sexuality. At the moment of orgasm, life becomes 'instantaneous' (p.159), at the 'moment of literature' on the other hand, life becomes retrospective. Leporello's 'Catalogue Aria' in Mozart's Don Giovanni represents a literary attempt to particularise and make formal the indeterminacy of Don Giovanni's cumulative sexual experiences and all attempts to convey the sexual experience are condemned to become mere 'catalogues'.

In G. the experiential and the historical are placed side by side in an attempt to at least locate 'firstness', if not to convey it, and also to place the notion of experience within some kind of framework of 'succession'. The conquests of the Don Juan figure take place within a temporal construct, but each experience, as we have seen, becomes part of the totality of 'firstness' and thus desire (experienced as a lapse in conventional time) 'punctuates' history. In 'The Immediate Stages of the

### Encounter: 'Kierkegaard'

Erotic' Kierkegaard establishes three stages in Mozart's representation of sensuality, in the Marriage of Figaro, The Magic Flute and ultimately Don Giovanni. It could be argued that Berger's novel follows the outlines of Kierkegaard's three stages in the construction of its narrative.

The first stage, according to Kierkegaard, is 'contradictory' in nature, in that it involves two distinct, but equally balanced 'halves':

the desire is so indefinite, its object so little separated from it, that the object of desire rests androgynously within the desire, just as in plant life the male and female parts are both present in the blossom. Desire and its object are joined in this unity, that they are both of neuter gender.

(E.O, p.76)

This image of the flower, representing both male and female sexuality, is used by Berger throughout the novel (see table of 'flower imagery' in the first scene in the 'Beatrice' commentary). The 'symbol' of G.'s first sexual encounter is the lilac in Beatrice's bedroom, linking with repeated flower imagery to describe sexual organs:

Thus a cyclamen opening. And thus too, greatly accelerated, the sensation of his penis becoming erect again and the foreskin again withdrawing

from the coronal ridge. (p.129)

G. thus passes through the 'first stage' of sensuality, defined by Kierkegaard as 'dreaming' (note the dream sequence which concludes the 'Beatrice' scene) and moves into the second stage of 'seeking':

The seeking desire is not yet the desiring one;  
it only seeks that which it can desire, but it  
does not desire it. Therefore this predicate will  
perhaps describe it best: it discovers.

(E.O, p.79)

Following this analysis, G.'s experience in the second section of the novel (the section dominated by his relationship with Camille) can be described as a process of 'seeking': it is only in this part of the novel that G. actually seeks out experience, as opposed to passively allowing experience to 'happen'. The pursuit of Leonie, prior to his encounter with Camille, is described precisely in terms of a 'search':

I had already come to find you. (p.161)

and the eventual meeting with Camille is presented as a 'discovery':

She awaits him as he expected. And yet he is

surprised. (p.225)

G. has not yet become the tired and cynical figure he appears at the end of the novel. But if this is so, how do the closing scenes of the story fit into Kierkegaard's model? Kierkegaard sums up the three stages thus:

The first stage desired the one ideally, the second stage desired the particular under the qualification of the manifold; the third stage is a synthesis of the two. Desire has its absolute object in the particular, it desires the particular absolutely. (E.O, p.83)

This takes us back to Berger's discussion of 'firtness', where first experiences are described as creating the 'original meaning' (p.124) by which later experiences are judged. A synthesis of the two, first and subsequent experiences and their 'meanings', where the particular replaces the ideal, is experienced through sexual desire. If Beatrice can be seen as representing a 'first experience' for G., the one 'ideally' desired; and if Camille is pursued for 'her solitariness alone - that he recognizes and desires' (p.225), then the final part of the novel, and particularly the relationship with Nusa, may be seen as a true synthesis of the two earlier stages. The end of the novel involves denial and rejection, as opposed to acceptance and pursuit. G. rejects Marika when she is

### Encounter: 'Kierkegaard'

offered to him by her husband, and denies his own desires and impulses, that is towards seduction, in his dealings with Nusa - he 'keeps his bargain' even though he knows (if not understands) that it will cost him his freedom. It is this very act of submission which in a way releases G. from his, up till this point, insatiable need to pursue experience. That is to say, it releases him from Kierkegaard's second stage, the phase marked by 'seeking'. In the final scene, before G. is accosted by the men sent to kill him, he sees a woman on the road ahead of him:

The woman's air of vague familiarity increased his interest in her. Between the two of them he saw his past self hurrying forward to draw level with her. He saw her interest being aroused by his past self. Yet he did not quicken his pace to discover who she was. Whatever it was that separated him from his past self was very slight, amounting to no more than a whim...' (p.347)

The synthesis here is one of past and present. This vision of his own self in the act of pursuit leaves the observing self free to experience the particularity of the specific 'moment'. Here, arriving just before G.'s own death, that moment is the final 'binding' vision which all other moments have led up to. The earlier experiences of G.'s life were not in fact 'stages', implying some kind of observable and understandable development, but

metamorphoses, which as Kierkegaard states:

taken together constitute the immediate stage,  
and from this we may perceive that the  
individual stages are rather a revelation of  
a predicate, so that all the predicates rush  
down into the wealth of the last stage, since  
this is the real stage. (E.O., p.73)

That is to say, that all G.'s earlier experiences, from the  
'Roman girl' to Beatrice, from Leonie to Camille and from  
Nusa to Marika, were 'signs' which foretold the novel's  
conclusion. Life, sexuality and pursuit meet their  
antithesis - death, solitariness and rest in this final  
'stage', which is the summation, the last part of the  
'equation'. The 'real' stage in G. occurs at the hero's  
death, which resembles Don Giovanni's flash of  
understanding and recognition before he is carried off to  
hell. At the end of this story however, G. does not desire  
Kierkegaard's 'particular absolutely' but rather the  
'absolute particularly', and it is the 'absolute', the  
'cloud of unknowing' (G., p.348) into which he is finally  
carried.

### COMMENTARY.

Line 351:

This can clearly be connected with the traditional romantic notion of 'lovers' time', the moment when the sexual encounter destroys normal temporal limitations. If lovers 'fuck time' (p.337) then they do so in order to arrive at a personally created (discovered) 'timeless' zone. Although this is a highly conventional image in itself, it is developed here by the disruptions of the narrative treatment. These disjunctions and interruptions provide a sense of the nature of sexual experience, which in the context of hours and minutes would seem to defy measurement:

All are there in their own time and at the  
same time. (p.227)

The individual's sense of time becomes like a nucleus within historical time, they are part of the same 'reality' yet are separate. This sense of a 'personal history' is not only connected to the sexual moment however. It is significant that a similar disruption of time occurs when G., as a young boy, is injured in a riding accident. The body, in response to pain, in a similar way to the response to pleasure, 'invents' its own timescale, its own private codes of measurement (14). This is a way of the body 'protecting itself' (p.63) when all the established rules,



and thereby all established responses, are destroyed:

In the time which his fall and his pain  
arrested, he found a home. (p.62)

When Beatrice says 'Sweet, sweet, sweetest. Let us go to that place' (line 137), a similar kind of 'home' is suggested, a place of safety but also somewhere the individual's identity is reinvented and developed.

Line 352:

There now follows a digression by the author/ narrator reflecting on a personal experience or dream. It is significant that these 'intrusions' into the narrative always take the form of such remembrances, either through similar dream sequences or specific memories which illuminate the past. Regardless of such moment's content, they are always given a mystical, mythical or magical quality, either by way of their narrative shape and form, or by their juxtaposition, usually shocking in its incongruity, within the narrative of the novel itself. Here the opening lines of the passage are again deliberately vague; we are told of a 'forest', a 'woman' and a 'large plain'. The lack of specific detail gives the story a symbolic power, a mythical status which again elides the limitations of time. Further, the form of this intrusion, a personal reminiscence but devoid of any biographical detail, is in stark contrast to the other central form of

intrusion in the novel - political/ historical reportage. Thus the two kinds of intrusion mirror the two 'forces' which the central character himself has to confront - that is the personal and the historical. Thus we have a three layered structure to the novel as a whole:

1. Narrative - the story of G.
2. 'Intrusion A' - political/ historical fact  
or reportage
3. 'Intrusion B' - subjective meditation (memory/  
desire)

This 'technique' or strategy creates a highly effective method of rupturing the novel's form, a transgression of the text which does not follow a set pattern or rhythm. The three layers intercross like a plaid; the political shades the personal, the personal frames the fictional - all are joined in a complex design. This may be true of most writing, yet here it is explicitly 'acted out' - the 'alienation' which the intrusions create sharpens the reader's awareness of the relationship between these various 'levels' of narrative.

Line 353:

It is possible to accept this as a straightforward description, however simple and unfocused, of the woman involved in the story, yet it is difficult not to consider it as in some way an attempt to present some form of 'symbolic' figure, which forces us to consider the employment of the term 'blonde' itself. As a descriptive

term this carries a large 'cultural load'. Indeed it is an accepted shorthand suggesting a particular representation of a female 'type'. In the context of the passage above, and within Berger's other writing, we cannot accept the word as simply meaning 'fair'. Berger has employed the word on previous occasions, for example in Success and Failure of Picasso, where he states:

On one level, Picasso is claiming here his  
right to adore blondes - in the flesh.  
baskets of fruit notwithstanding, no painter  
has ever had to stop himself painting  
blondes! (15)

The exclamation mark is significant, it is the equivalent of a raised eyebrow when speaking, it is intended to help convey, and at the same time render inoffensive, phrases such as 'adore blondes' and 'in the flesh'. In his later work Berger has continued to use this term. In Once in Europa, in the story called 'Boris is Buying Horses', an entire narrative centres on a mysterious 'blonde', who is never actually named. The title 'blonde' replaces any specific or unique personality - the opposite of what G. searches for in his sexual encounters. The woman is defined, described and delineated by her hair colour alone, and it is meant to suggest something quintessentially 'feminine'. The protective, dominant role of the male character in the 'dream sequence' in G. suggests a similar

cultural representation.

Line 355:

The passage here continues the thematic parallel between animals and sex which runs throughout the sequence and indeed throughout the novel as a whole (see the discussion of animal imagery in the first part of the commentary).

The 'Beatrice' scene itself begins with Beatrice sitting cross-legged and the imagery used is again that of an animal:

Her foot lay on her hand as though it were  
a dog's head, whose gaze was concentrated  
upon the door. (line 3-5)

Here, as in the later dream sequence, the image of an animal's head represents a symbol of hope or fortune, a sign to 'continue'. However the animal's skull in this passage has a confused symbolic presence due to the ambiguity over the specific type of animal it belonged to - either 'a fox, a donkey, a deer' (line 357). The skulls of these various animals could scarcely be confused, in terms of relative size if nothing else. More significantly, they have entirely different symbolic values. The fox and the deer can, conceivably, be placed together, within the context of the forest and in terms of the 'hunt'. They can be taken to represent violent death, martyrdom, 'the prize'

and as such are further reminders of Berger's 'mediaevalism' (see *Encounter: 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight'* later in this commentary for a full discussion of this). The donkey, however, which separates the two forest creatures, has no such associations (a Biblical one seems of little use here). We must assume that the very vagueness concerning the type of animal and the incongruity of the animals listed represents a deliberate attempt to underline the dream-like quality of the story related, signifying a place where memory and dream collide, throwing the various symbols and images of the sub-conscious into strange relationships. Thus the passage is not to be taken as 'personal history' but as a metaphorical 'space'.

Lines 362-383:

Where the killing of the horses earlier in the novel was clearly a negative 'sign', creating a revulsion 'stronger than his fears' (p.59), here the dead animal's head is a positive sign, a symbol of encouragement, stronger than fear again but not based upon repugnance. In the dream sequence it is a portent of good luck, it provides strength. The passage describes the couple's continued journey, and is carefully built up through a series of hesitations, qualifiers and ambiguities, for example:

The sky was dark and purple **but** the plain  
was pure gold. (364-365)

The 'but' here stresses the particular (and peculiar) colour of the landscape. Yet even these colours are not 'fixed'; later in the same paragraph the sky is merely 'blackish' (375). The colours of the plain itself,

made me (and I think her too) entirely happy.

(366-367)

The parenthesis emphasises the couple's separateness, even isolation from each other. We do not find here the complete union of mind and body examined in the earlier passages of the 'Beatrice' scene. The male narrator only 'thinks' that his partner is happy - feelings and emotions are as unsure as the landscape which surrounds them. Nothing is fixed or rooted, and later, the girl's fear in comparison to the narrator's confidence serves to heighten the distance between them.

The mention of 'stables' (line 368) reintroduces the animal/ human correlation, setting up a number of thematic oppositions; house/stable, domestic/ wild for example. The socialized background (the 'traders') is in contrast to the freedom of the charging animals. Yet, again, both background and foreground are left indistinct; the men wear 'long whitish robes' and the animals are a 'herd of white cows (bison?)' (lines 371 and 373). The 'concretization' of the moment depends not on phenomenological detail but on existential experience. This experience is synonymous with pleasure, for, as with the heightened moments of desire, it

is inextinguishable from the external event. Later in G. the narrator states:

sexual acts, like dreams, have no surface appearances; they are experienced inside out; their content is uppermost and what is normally visible becomes an invisible core. (p.342)

Here too the dream-like event is experienced 'inside-out', the 'core', the meaning or significance is invisible. In the 'Camille' scene, the lovers imagine themselves transformed into a 'wood-nymph' and a 'goat', and that within the sexual moment,

they were no longer lying down but standing up and walking as they fucked; toward the end they began to run through tall wet grass. He had the further illusion that others were running toward him. (p.227)

The sexual event leads the imagination to a mythical plain, where the senses, and not reason, provide the data for understanding experience.

### Encounter: 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight'

#### Encounter - 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight'. (1)

It is possible to extend what at first appears to be merely an interesting echo into a full textual comparison of G. and Gawain. A close reading of the Gawain-poem reveals striking thematic and structural similarities with the novel G., and tells us more about what we describe as Berger's 'medievalism'.

Firstly, what might one mean by describing Berger as a medieval writer or by considering his novel to correspond to the medieval Romance? Let us first consider a definition of the medieval writer and then consider how this might apply to Berger himself. The medieval poet was not an isolated figure but very much part of society. Of course there were exceptions, however most writing served some social or religious purpose. There were changes in this sense of identity and role, Chaucer was already beginning to think of himself in terms of the Renaissance artist - as an 'important' poet, however the Gawain-poet certainly fits this earlier description. There is nothing autobiographical in the Gawain-poem, medieval poets rarely spoke of themselves in their work, or perhaps only as part of a group of characters and there was little desire to claim individual fame. The Gawain-poet appeals to esoteric knowledge, the details of armour, hunting and so on, and recondite knowledge is deliberately employed wherever possible. The Gawain-poet analyses and appraises at the same time important social concepts such as 'courtesy' whilst



### Encounter: 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight'

telling an exciting and entertaining story.

We can perhaps think of Berger as being within this category, of artists whose main purpose is not to explore their own ego but to question the values of the society at large, who expects art to fulfill a social function and not merely an aesthetic one. Berger uses the form of the novel to explore our modern responses to various themes such as war and sex. Like the Gawain-poem, G. is a story of 'whilom' rather than 'now-a-days', both are set in the past but a past set firmly in history, and a past which raises specific questions about the present. Medieval writers liked casuistical thinking, and this often took the form of the 'test', for example in Chaucer's Clerk's Tale with Griselda, or Perlesuaus from Arthurian Romance. In the Gawain-poem, Gawain faces two tests, the 'beheading challenge' set by the Green Knight and the challenge of the 'gifts' set by his wife (both of course are set by Morgan the Fay). These tests involve three 'contests' for the hero:

1. courtesy versus truth
2. cleanliness versus sexual desire
3. virtue versus passion (for one's own life)

In this sense, the poem represents a moral experiment, within which the hero will either 'pass' or 'fail'. Eventually the poem relies, as do many of the tales of the time, on a form of 'release', Walter eventually releases Griselda, the Damsel releases Gawain in Perlesuaus and here of course the Green Knight releases Gawain from their bond,

Encounter: 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight'

I relece þe of þe remnaunt of ry<sub>3</sub>tes alle oþer  
( G.K., line 2342)

In the same way G. could be said to be 'released' at the end of the novel, experiencing a form of 'reincorporation' similar to that experienced by Gawain - by receiving of the wine offered by one of the crowd he has joined (sacramental absolution) and by taking charge of the firing of the newspaper offices (lay version) just as Gawain receives absolution from priest and Bertilak alike.

Like the Gawain-poem, Berger's novel is based around periods of 'misrule', when the old rules of society no longer apply and the unexpected can, and does, happen. This is represented by Christmas and New Year for Gawain, the change from the 19th to the 20th century for G., with particular focus on times of revolution and war. However one of the central links between the two works is around the image of hunting, which in both cases can be considered as representing the male homosocial world and as a metaphor for desire and sexuality. Let us consider the hunting scenes in 'Gawain' first and then analyse the ways in which the hunting scenes in 'Berger' conform to a similar pattern.

The hunting scenes in the Gawain-poem have a central place both structurally and symbolically. The full significance of these scenes may be augmented by information drawn from medieval hunting treatises, bestiaries, heraldry and from popular mythology. In medieval times, game animals

### Encounter: 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight'

were split into two separate classes: 'beasts of venery' and 'beasts of chase'. In the first group were animals such as the stag, hind (both species of red deer), the boar and the wolf. In the second and lower group were the buck and the doe (types of fallow deer), roe deer, marten and fox. This division into distinct classes was no arbitrary act but had important practical implications. The 'beasts of venery' were additionally considered to be 'beasts of the forest' and as such were protected under 'Royal Law', whereas the second group belonged to the enclosures and thus only enjoyed protection under common law. Within these 'beasts of chase' it was the fox which in particular had the lowest 'social' position, being considered simply as a form of vermin. This attitude is expressed throughout the literature of the time, where deer and boar are commonly found in works of Romance, whereas the fox appears infrequently. The fox's presence in the Gawain-poem as the object of the third hunt would therefore have been unexpected and immediately significant to a medieval audience. Bertilak himself reflects this disgust for the fox, a disgust based on that particular animal's supposed underground cunning and deceit, describing the creature's pelt as 'pis foule fox felle' (G.K, line 1944). The fox is mentioned on three occasions in Berger's story, the first time when discussing G.'s cousin Jocelyn who hunts for fox throughout the winter and thus, in this context, debasing him as a character very early on. The second occasion occurs in the Beatrice episode as part of the dream sequence, where a

### Encounter: 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight'

severed head is encountered

(remembering that in the Gawain-poem the huntsmen bring back the heads of their prey) which may have been '...a fox, a donkey, a deer' (p.129) and which acts as a sign of hope or symbol of reassurance. Later in the novel the third reference to the fox will appear in the form of Gabriel d'Annunzio, an Italian nationalist poet who is described as 'an old hungry fox' (p.279). In each case the fox marks a moment of transformation and unreality, Jocelyn transformed into a 'Knight', the narrator transported into a dream or visionary state, and the famous poet metamorphosised in a surreal way into a fox mounted on a horse. These images underline the mysterious and magic presence of the fox, just as its presence in the Gawain-poem marks the final stage in Gawain's 'bewitchment'.

The narrative techniques in the hunting scenes in the Gawain-poem also have a strong allusive value, helping to define character and develop themes. Thus the woods Bertilak hunts in are alive with the sounds of pursuit and violence, the baying of the hounds, the blowing of the horns and the cries of the animals and men. This narrative detail helps define the setting and creates atmosphere, here emphasising the physical vitality, the brutal energy of the hunting scenes in comparison to the idle languor of Gawain's bedchamber. The Gawain-poet weaves the hunting scenes into his narrative tapestry to create a vivid and dramatic focus which also acts as a point of reference for the thematic development of the poem as a whole.

### Encounter: 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight'

The idea, or the image of the hunt, has an exact parallel in Berger's version, with the hunting activities of G.'s cousin Jocelyn, activities into which he unsuccessfully (like Bertilak with Gawain) attempts to initiate the 'hero' - into 'the company of men' (p.98). Jocelyn believes that the hunt confers a kind of moral superiority on those who take part, and that he is enacting some noble and mythical event:

To be mounted is already to be a master, a knight.

To represent the noble (in the ethical as well as the social sense). To vanquish. To feature, however modestly, in the annals of battle. Honour begins with a man and a horse. (p.41)

These are Jocelyn's sentiments. However it is hard not to detect a sense of approval on the part of Berger here as well, particularly when one considers his later personal and literary move into the natural and mythical world of the French peasant. The hunt is the opposite of committing a crime - both have consequences which stretch far out from the act itself, one for good, one for evil. The hunt is also the opposite of war, the freedom conferred by the hunt in total opposition to the trenches and barbed wire of warfare. The 'gigantic horses' (p.42) which Jocelyn imagines seeing in the sky link him with a legendary past, a mythical inheritance which is on the point of vanishing (the scene of the killing of the horses by the two strangers in front of

Encounter: 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight'

the young boy will enact this very process). G. rides well, is a 'thruster' (p.64) and is already anticipating the 'man's world' (p.43). However this world will fall apart later in the novel, where the 'conspiracy' between the boy and the man is fractured, as Jocelyn recognises that G. has other interests, alternative inclinations:

Do you know why you have bad dreams, said Jocelyn,  
it's because you spend too much time indoors. You  
don't exercise yourself enough. Too much in the  
house. It's a woman's life that. Not a man's.  
(p.95)

Like Gawain, G. would prefer to be inside and to seek out the company of women. It is very soon after this that G. will be seduced by Beatrice, his world forever transformed. The language of the hunt, the 'Hup Hup' of male association (p.96) is replaced by the experience of sexuality and a new sexual vocabulary - the 'luf-talkyng' of Gawain (G.K, line 927). The repetition of the language of the hunt at the close of the novel ('Hup Hup' repeated on page 336) signifies G.'s readmittance to that company of men, and of course his journey towards death.

However this explicit reference to the hunt is only one aspect of the novel's symmetry with the Gawain-poem, the second and arguably the more important is the use of images of war and revolution, later in the novel, as a violent and physical counterpoint to the seduction scenes themselves.

### Encounter: 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight'

This is enacted in the Gawain-poem by the comparison of Bertilak's hunt in the forest and his wife's pursuit of Gawain in his bedroom. These hunting episodes continue over three days, corresponding chronologically with the three temptations of Gawain. The scenes in the bedroom are continually intercut with scenes from the hunt. In this can be seen a careful symmetrical structuring of the plot, a controlled juxtapositioning of separate episodes, a balancing of events which reflect the structural harmony of the poem as a whole.

Within each scene is a highly conscious narrative structure, an example of which lies in the continually shifting focus and viewpoint. The careful detail of the hounds in each hunting scene is important for example as it serves to suggest a wider thematic significance within the poem. Bertilak and his wife could both be seen to be the hounds of the hunt in pursuit of Gawain, with Morgan the Fay as leader of the hounds. There is a deliberate focus on the part of the poet to create parallelism and symbolic contrast. When reading the hunting scenes we must be aware of the parallel wooing scenes. Hunting was a well established metaphor for sexual pursuit both in medieval times and through to the Renaissance and therefore it is easy to see Bertilak's wife's wooing as another form of hunt, with Gawain as the prey. Structurally the poet encourages us to compare the two scenes on each consecutive day. As Burrow states:

### Encounter: 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight'

It is obvious that the author expects us to observe and enjoy the symmetry of his plan - and at the same time keep an eye open for significant variations in the repeated pattern. (3)

The hierarchical sequencing of the animals hunted in the forest could be said to find complementary images in Gawain's behaviour over the three days of his moral temptation. Bertilak's wife at first finds Gawain to be 'noble game', as Gawain at first shrinks and flees, then turns and artfully defends himself against her advances. Then on the third and final day the close comparison between Gawain and the fox is clearly made, with Gawain being 'deceitful' and cunning in attempting to save his own life, and we are encouraged to see a real parallel between the 'fall' of Gawain and the death of the fox. Whether these scenes constitute a thematic parallel or a dramatic contrast, the final effect is the same, a vital relationship is forged between the hunt and Gawain's 'seduction' and eventual act of betrayal. The relationship between the hunt and temptation underlines a significant change in attitude on the part of the Gawain, as he begins to behave instinctively, with the emphasis on self-preservation, as opposed to living within the strict rules of chivalry. As Bertilak comments, Gawain's actions were not the result of any material desire, 'Bot for 3e lufed your lyf'(G.K, 2368), a statement which significantly marks a further stage in



### Encounter: 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight'

Gawain's absorption into another, greener world.

Now this can be used to illuminate the similar juxtaposition of images employed by Berger. Gawain's 'love of life' is similar to G.'s realisation early in the novel, when his life is saved by the 'Roman girl', that 'What matters is not being dead' (p.90). This realisation is forged by the juxtaposition of death and love, of the 'hunt' and of desire. In the novel as a whole there are five central encounters (three that might be termed sexual encounters and two which we may call 'political') - that is "Roman girl"/ Beatrice/ Camille/ Leonie/ Nusa. During each of these encounters there is a dramatic counterpoint of some kind, a thematic parallel which runs concurrently with the 'wooing' or seduction scenes. Let us look at these individually:

1. Roman girl: the events on the streets of Milan are juxtaposed with 'domestic' images of G. and the Roman girl together, as 'man and wife' (p.84) - the 'normality' of that relationship in stark contrast to a world turned upside down by the uprising. The relationship (emotional) formed at this point will govern G.'s relationship to women (and his attitude to life) for the remainder of the story.
2. Beatrice: The Beatrice scene, where G. is seduced by his Aunt, is punctuated by a discussion of the Boer War and European imperialism. It is also interrupted

Encounter: 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight'

by a frank discussion of sexuality itself, and features a dream sequence which includes the image of beheaded animals in a forest.

3. Leonie: this episode is regularly punctuated by Chavez's historic flight over the Alps - forcing a close comparison between the seduction scene and the flight in terms of their relative place in history. The flight may also be read as a kind of medieval 'test' or 'marvel', Chavez taking on the role of the 'hero'.
4. Camille: this encounter is played out against Chavez's subsequent success at crossing the Alps and his tragic crash thereafter. The scene is also offset by G.'s own narrow escape from death after being shot by Camille's husband.
5. Nusa: this relationship is placed within the context of the outbreak of the First World War and the rise of Italian Nationalism. G.'s 'immersion' into these world events leads directly to his own death.

We can see that the 'romantic' scenes are therefore always placed either within a specific historical context or in juxtaposition with parallel historical events, producing a simultaneity of events which links the private with the social, the personal with the political. Like the Gawain-

### Encounter: 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight'

poet, Berger introduces historical facts and historical heroes (Brutus for Gawain, Garibaldi for G.) as a form of 'levelling realism', which tells the reader that G.'s story is not to be considered as 'pure fiction', just as the Gawain-poem is not simply a story from the world of 'faery'. If this is a matter of fixing the narrative in time, then it is also placed in terms of space, that is geographically as well as historically. The 'world' of the Gawain-poem is split into three distinct spheres; time, space and the 'marvelous'. In both stories the narrative represents a journey across these three spheres. In medieval literature geography was generally a vague concept, legendary rather than factual, such as in the work of Malory. However the Gawain-poet 'maps' his story quite carefully, the hero journeying from North Wales, through the Wirrall and on to his destiny. This is not arbitrary realism but plays a significant part in the narrative of heroic failure, the hero transported into an unknown land, absorbed into a different world. G. is faced with a similar absorption into a different world of political and historical reality, the specific geography of the narrative reinforcing this idea of the 'journey'. G. moves from a 'mythical' England (geographically unspecified and a-historical), where the old traditions still hang on, to a Europe in the process of dramatic change, finally meeting his destiny in Trieste, absorbed into the mediterranean world. This is what the detailed geographical mapping achieves, serving as a constant reminder of the 'real' world

### Encounter: 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight'

the fictional character is created from, the geographical place that the readers themselves inhabit.

A similar process is worked through with regard to time, the narrative placed against a specific sense of history. However time is seen as more ambiguous than space, more subjective and difficult to quantify. In the Gawain-poem, no attempt is made to relate cyclic time to linear time, in the manner of an almanac. Gawain is in this sense not an 'everyman', not a pilgrim, whose journey would be depicted as linear. Gawain's journey, by comparison, is cyclical and repeatable, a journey of self-discovery of which Christian eschatology is the mythic projection or final form. The Gawain-poet moves from the historical time of the introduction to the poem, to the cyclical time of individual experience and of nature. Time of year and time of day become the main focus, the 'here and now' outside linear time but firmly within the cyclic. A similar transference can be detected in Berger's tale,, a shift from the linear time of history to the experience of time within the individual ( a more thorough investigation of Berger's use of time in the novel is undertaken in the 'Genette' encounter). Like Gawain, G. will find himself a 'victim' of time - Gawain must give himself over to the Green Knight within the agreed time limit, G. finds that time has run out on him in the final moments of the novel. The narrator frames this in the context of a 'contract' - like Gawain's agreement - in the passage entitled 'The Stone Guest' (pp. 330-331), where the image of a young boy disguised as an old

### Encounter: 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight'

man is a symbol of the bargain which time makes with us. These passages conform to the 'marvelous' in the Gawain-poem, the supernatural or magical which is the final component in the time/space equation.

The sexual encounters Berger describes, as we have already noted, are interlocked with images of violence, destruction and tragedy, which also serve to reinforce the male/female divide. This again can be compared to the story of Gawain, where the hunting scenes run parallel with the events taking place in the bedroom, forming a commentary and criticism of the ethics and values inherent in the chivalric code. It achieves this through a representation of what can be termed 'grotesque realism' (6), a realism which serves to sharpen the ironic perspective which is already aimed at King Arthur's court. The Green Knight represents a direct challenge to the frail structure of medieval chivalry, representing the 'natural world' and its laws as opposed to the artificial codes of the court. Within the overall structural harmony of the poem, the detail of the hunting scenes might be considered to represent symbolically the events in Gawain's bedroom. When these two scenes are placed together, the images of slaughter, dismemberment and food are mixed with those of sex, money and possession. If, as Bakhtin states,

...debasement is the fundamental artistic principle  
of grotesque realism (7)

### Encounter: 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight'

then this juxtaposition of images serves to debase some of the fundamental principles of the 'chivalric code', the spiritual view of sexuality for example, the concern with class and the rights of possession. All of these are important themes within the poem, and through the activities of Bertilak and Gawain, the poet re-emphasises their close inter-relationship, attacking the cosy chivalric ethos so proudly celebrated in the opening scenes. The idea of the hunt is central to this suggestion of opposition, of another more sensual and physical world to that of medieval morality. The poem presents a sense of reality through experience which Gawain must meet as part of his personal trial.

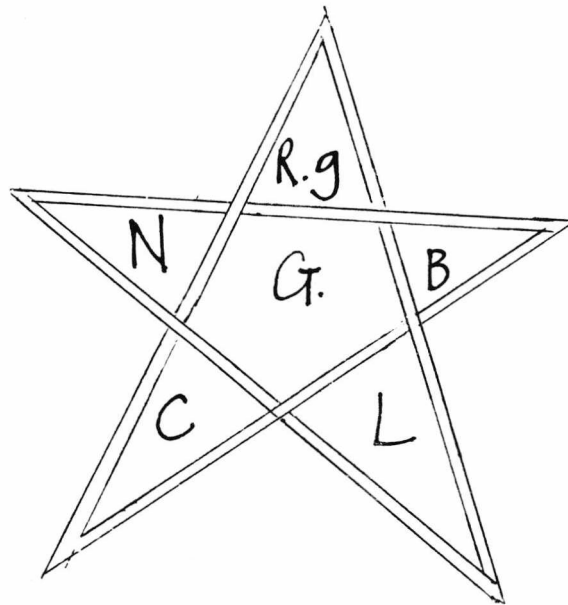
Berger's complex juxtaposition of scenes, contrasting the themes of sex/death and love/war, serves a similar purpose, debasing the morality of a capitalist society about to embark upon a century of war, a morality which similarly links love, violence, aggression, possession, money and sex. G. is the focaliser for an understanding of how these relationships function, caught as he is, like Gawain, between two worlds.

It could be suggested that Berger is, like his medieval counterpart, caught between two moments in time, and that the hero enacts the complexity of this alternation in modality. Berger is writing between two fixed points -the commitment and political certainties of the 1950's on the one hand and the experimental plurality of the 1960's on the other, the confidence in the role and purpose of art growing

Encounter: 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight'

from the one and the doubt concerning the nature of narrative and language itself from the other. Both are considered in the novel, both worked through in terms of the hero's own journey. The narrative reveals, through its juxtaposition of images and through its structure, a new form of 'realism', where ambiguity replaces certainty, where questions replace answers.

The novel as a whole could be considered diagrammatically in the form of a pentangle (that central medieval symbol). In G. the pentangle represents the limits imposed on the body 'by the five senses within whose pentagon each man is alone' (G. p.139). This is the 'realism through experience' which Gawain discovered, for like Gawain, G. discovers that despite moments of empathy, each individual is ultimately alone, having to make sense of their place in society and within history. The book might be represented thus:



### Encounter: 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight'

G. is at the centre with the five women he encounters starred around him - Roman Girl, Beatrice, Leonie, Camille, Nusa. The figure represents the complexity of the relationships between these characters, the individuality and interdependence of each individual, brought together through the alchemy of sex. As the narrator tells us of G.:

He experiences every orgasm as though it were simultaneous with every other. All that has occurred will occur between each, all the events, actions, causes and consequences which have and will separate in time woman from woman, surround this timeless moment as a circumference surrounds the circle it defines. All are there together. All despite all their differences are there together. He joins them. (p.158)

There is no straightforward way of unravelling this 'endeles (sic) knot' (10), it stands for truth and integrity but also represents the complexity of experience, the combination of moral, physical, spiritual and social qualities which make up each individual.

G. and Gawain are both lovers, both can provide 'sum tokene<sup>3</sup> of trweluf craftes' (G.K, line 1527). Their joint targets are the unobtainable woman, their art to make them obtainable. G., like Gawain, is 'at first renowned, later notorious, for his amorous conquests' (11). Both are represented by symbols of birds and flowers, Gawain's



Encounter: 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight'

embroidered 'vrysoun' a constant reminder of his status as a lover, G.'s sexuality always placed within the context of the natural world (see detailed discussion of these features in the 'Nusa' commentary). At the end of Gawain the hero blames 'women' for his downfall, citing historical precedent to 'prove' their deceitfulness. For G. however, the women are 'called back' at the end, not to receive blame but in order to complete the pentangle, to make whole the figure which symbolises G.'s experience from boyhood to manhood.

Happily this study too is based upon a pentangle, the commentary based around the five points R, B, L, C, N with G. in the middle. The pentangle supplies the model for a form of criticism which seeks not to travel as a pilgrim (Christian eschatology!) on a linear journey, but as a figure of Romance. The commentary, like the pentangle, should be,

...a perfect figure, balanced and integrated, each line interlocking with others without overlapping them, unbroken and equally meaningful in any position, reversed or otherwise. (12)

The pentangle, in other words, is a medieval figure which provides us diagrammatically with a vision of the Barthesian mode, both formal and playful at the same time, a complex interweaving of commentary and criticism, whose ultimate aim is 'trawpe'.

Commentary.

Line 383:

In contrast to the couple in the dream-sequence above, the lovers here are finally 'abandoned'. Beatrice, now only gripping two fingers of G.'s hand like someone hanging over a precipice, emphasises the ultimate isolation of each individual. This process of 'abandonment' is traced through in each of the sexual encounters. Thus in 'Leonie':

He lay on his back beside Leonie, holding her  
her hand. (p.159)

and in 'Camille':

He and Camille lay alone, dishevelled, side  
by side on the slope of the vine. (p.228)

The isolation of the individual, the boundary that exists even between lovers, is re-established. Their separation is almost instantaneous, underlining the temporality of the sexual moment:

She knows that the pace of time is reverting  
to normal. ('Beatrice' lines 381-388)

As in the later scenes, it is Beatrice, the female lover, who first becomes aware of this drift back to 'normal'

time, and in this sense it is possible to locate the act of 'abandonment' as beginning with the male partner. G.'s inability to embrace, to hold onto that new identity born within the void of sensuality, except during the sexual act itself, is indicative of his emotional repression.

Lines 395-405:

G.'s newly discovered 'horizontal' view - the view from the bed - defeats the vertical, phallic world, renders impotent the flat plains of the portrait of Beatrice's father on the wall. In contrast to the dead animal's eyes in the dream sequence, the portrait's eyes are 'blankly fixed' (line 404) and not 'peaceful'. The painting is like a 'childish stereotype' (line 402) which links it to Beatrice's own 'childish' drawing earlier in the novel (p.120) (significantly this drawing is of a cow and thus represents a further link with the later dream-sequence). G.'s wave to the painting is simultaneously a gesture of greeting and dismissal. He greets the patriarchal through his own sexual attainment and in the same gesture dismisses that patriarchal symbol through his transgression of the laws of ownership; fathers/ daughters, husbands/ wives, brothers/ sisters. It is a gesture which begins G.'s career as a Don Juan.

Line 406-417:

This is the 'companion piece' to 'Poem for Beatrice' which appears at the beginning of the scene (p.114). These two

poems stand at either end of the formative encounter between Beatrice and the young G., and are, in a sense, pauses, free spaces, which loosely frame the experiences of the two lovers. They are like semi-permeable films which isolate the encounter, yet allow other events and experiences through, but only in a 'dissolved' form, by way of memory and dream. Both of these poems are, at one level, about language, about expression and non-expression in connection with sexuality and sensual experience. The poems themselves represent an attempt by the author to find different ways of relating the experience of the characters which will defeat the 'silence' imposed by reflection and narration. In this sense they resemble arias, they are extricable from the narrative mechanics of the 'libretto', and attempt to convey, in condensed and emotionally heightened form, the 'moment' (or 'firstness') of experience. The two poems may also be described as fugatos - the theme of sexuality is offered by one to be taken up, and answered by the other. They further resemble the fugue in its secondary meaning, that is a 'flight from reality', a kind of emotional amnesia which breaks down the normal sense of self, in this case a flight from narrative.

Finally, and most significantly, they have the same structural purpose as the songs in Brechtian drama, underlining the thematic tensions of a scene whilst at the same time revealing the narrative structure, emphasising its 'fictive' status. The poems increase the emotional power of the scene but also make the reader aware of how

the text is 'working'. However each of these 'moments' is only a temporary delay in the narrative progress, and the pressure of history, the force of the 'story' is ultimately inescapable. Yet it is only these disruptions which somehow exist beyond chronological time, that allow any escape from the confines of 'history'. This 'escape' is made possible through the complex relationship between writer, text and reader. As Berger explains in his contribution to About Time:

What separates the story-teller from his protagonists is not knowledge, either objective or subjective, but **their** experience of time in the story he is telling. (if he is telling his own story the same thing separates him as story-teller from himself as subject). This separation allows the story-teller to hold the whole together; but it also means that he is obliged to follow his protagonists, follow them, powerlessly, **through** and **across** the time which they are living and he is not. The time, and therefore, the story, belongs to them. Its meaning belongs to the story-teller. Yet the only way he can reveal this meaning is by telling the story to others. (16)

It is when the reader forms the final 'link', through that act of 'telling', that the timeless is achieved. Yet it is

not only or exclusively through this special relationship that the temporal is disturbed, it also happens within the structure of the story itself, as Berger describes with reference to a folk-tale:

When this story is being told there are at least four different time-perspectives or tenses in play. There is the present which the young man is living. There is the historic past - all this happened a while ago. There is the infinite future, the promise of which prompts the young man to try and outwit death. And then there is the time of the listener's imagination which has already seized the whole and all its tenses. (17)

The narrative and 'all its tenses' contains within itself the atemporality which eludes history. It is the journey through these 'time-perspectives' which will form one part of G.'s 'heroic' quest.

Commentary - 'Leonie'. (G., pages 142 to 162)

Lines 2-4:

'Among them is the principal protagonist of this book...'

Prior to this moment, the 'principle protagonist' has only been referred to as 'boy' or 'he' - this eventual 'naming' however, leads not to a greater identification of (and with) the central character as might be expected, but rather to a deeper sense of ambiguity. Although we know his location, his age, even his appearance, we do not know what his full name is - he remains a 'stranger'. This illusiveness is central to the narrator's intentions and the phrase 'for the sake of convenience' is highly ironic. Instead of feeling surer of the protagonist we are led to speculate more about his character. Instead of telling us who G. is, this 'manoeuvre' forces us to consider who he is not (Giovani, Garibaldi ...).

Lines 19-23:

In this passage we have the first suggestion that G.'s lifestyle is in some sense 'dissipated' - he is rich, idle, brave and unambitious. There is a kind of vacancy which lies behind his social existence, and it is this vacancy his friend Weymann confronts. We are also given a rare description of G., with his 'large nose' and 'leer'. These facial characteristics align him with the women he encounters, each singular in their appearance (and not

joined by any conventional sense of beauty). It is this quality which will help make G. appear unique to women, as when Leonie considers, 'He had a face like a man in a story' (lines 165-166).

Line 28:

Weymann asks two important questions here, to which G. merely replies 'I travel' (line 31). This answer is a simplification for Weymann's sake, yet at the same time it does describe G.'s life accurately. For G. is in one sense a 'Romantic hero', and travel stands as a metaphor for his sexual exploits. However G. is also a traveller in the 'picaresque' sense, where the sexual encounters are only part of the hero's adventures, which can be both political and moral. More accurately we should say 'anti-hero' for here, as in the picaresque tradition proper, the central character is a transgressor, an outsider and a deviant, a self-seeker in the largest sense. If we are to consider G. in this way we have to establish that a clear division exists between an idealised vision of the world and the grimmer 'reality' of actual experience. G.'s sexual encounters are enacted within a kind of 'ideal universe', where sex is creative and liberatory. Their juxtaposition with images of war and death could be interpreted as disrupting this idealised moment with the 'truth' of historical experience. In addition, the suggestion that sex is a revolutionary activity is not borne out by the experience of the women whom G. seduces. Arguably none of



these women are 'liberated' by the sexual encounter with G., indeed they have to contemplate a difficult 'return' to 'real' life thereafter. We can perhaps thus locate a division between the ideal and the real within the narrative and an unexpected level of moralism (and indeed religiosity) on the part of the author himself. G., as a 'picaresque delinquent' reveals the conflict between the two opposing realms of experience as in some sense an opposition between the romantic and the picaresque - G. as Giovanni and G. as Guzman de Alfarache. In another sense he is a modern Gulliver, recording both fascination and disgust, pissing on the burning house of bourgeois hypocrisy.

Line 39:

G. reveals that what most concerns him, at this moment, is the maid at the hotel in which he is staying. Here, for the first time in the novel, is the suggestion of G. as a Don Juan, whose real interest is in seduction. The narrative plotting of the following scene reinforces this connection, which is phrased in terms of 'strategy' (line 111) and 'pursuit' (line 113).

Encounter: 'Don Juan'.

'Who are you really?

Don Juan.

I have met men who thought they were Don Juans, none of them was.

The name is much usurped.

Why do you claim it then?

Did I?

You are right. It was I who asked you, and I believe you.'

(G., page 293)

Why did John Berger choose to create a fiction around a Don Juan figure, in the late sixties and early seventies and dedicate it to 'Women's Liberation'? What potential did the Juan legend hold for the novelist for discussing themes of gender and sexual experience in a period of radical change in the attitudes towards female sexuality? It will perhaps be useful to give an outline of the Don Juan legend as it has developed over the last four centuries , comparing Berger's 'version' to that tradition, before attempting to answer these questions.

The first accepted literary treatment of the Don Juan story is Tirso de Molina's Burlador de Sevilla, written and performed between 1613 and 1630 in Spain. This was primarily a morality play, and dealt with a central character who was not so much a seducer, as later versions would come to emphasise, but rather a practical joker, a

### Encounter: 'Don Juan'

'rake' - the burlador of the title. As a religious work the theme of 'procrastination', suggested by the repetition of the phrase 'Que largo' is significant(1). In this drama, the 'hero' continually puts off repentance until it is too late, and he is carried off to hell. There is a repetition of this theme in G. (note the linking suggestion of procrastination suggested by the repeated reference to 'lilac' (2) and the 'hero' of Berger's book has various opportunities to 'change his ways' but declines to do so. An example might be the scene where Weymann, a fellow aviator, comes to visit G. in hospital after he has been shot by Monsieur Hennequinn, Camille's husband. Weymann is angry at G.'s behaviour and attitude, especially after the death of Chavez, an event which appears to leave G. unmoved. Weymann speaks to G. 'in the voice of the priest whom he often resembled' (p.232) and G. is expected to show some signs of remorse and repentance, but instead jokes about his own near death, very much in the Don Juan character.

The Don Juan of Tirso's play, like the Juan of Berger's novel, does not repent for he still seeks experience 'for its own sake', he has no moral or political 'conscience'. However there is a difference between the two 'heroes', as it is fairly certain that G. is in revolt against society as a whole, that his 'seduction' of women is part of a wider 'attack' on 'law' and 'morality'. As Berger states, G. is 'a man who fucks to destroy society in his own mind' (3). In Tirso's version the hero does not

directly confront the structures of power, at least not in any deliberately planned way - the fractures and disruptions are always achieved through women, whereas at the end of *G.*, *G.* does take an active part in the uprising on the streets of Trieste. However the two works do share a basic narrative structure. There are four central 'adventures' in Tirso's play, two involving ladies of 'high class' backgrounds, and two with peasant girls. This corresponds with the plot of *G.*, where *G.* also has four central sexual encounters (we shall discount the relationship with the 'Roman girl' as this was pre-sexual and therefore not part of *G.*'s career as a Don Juan). Thus we have; Beatrice - an English country 'lady', Leonie - a Swiss chamber maid, Camille - the wife of a rich industrialist, and finally Nusa - a Slovene peasant girl. Thus Berger's novel is, at least in terms of fundamental plot, linked with the earliest Don Juan tale.

However, it should be pointed out that many of the basic plot elements from the original story are missing from the Berger version, for example; the theme of patricide, the killing of the lover's father, the retribution/ hell revelation at the end of the story, the statue come to life, the great feast and the 'criminal'. This does not represent a problem in terms of developing a comparison, for *G.* is only ever partly linked to the Juan myth, and also the tradition of literary 'Don Juans' is one of synthesis and omission, as writers include within the basic narrative framework the psychological,

philosophical or political concerns of the period. As with myth in general, the Don Juan legend is supple enough to assume different emphases in different times.

From Spain the story travelled to Italy, where the comic 'business' of Tirso's play was exaggerated and developed. The Italian troubadours took the play to France, where the theme was taken up by Dorimon and by Villiers, both producing dramas entitled Le festin de pierre ou le fils criminel (1659 and 1660 respectively). In these plays the figure of Don Juan becomes increasingly brutalised and cruel. Much of the emphasis is placed on Juan's cruelty to his father, and his insulting of the 'stone guest'. As the title insists, the story concerns the son of a criminal, a 'wrongdoer'. This is significant, in that it extends Juan's transgressions for the first time to outside the bedchamber. His 'threat', his deceptions and malice, are directed not only at the female 'targets', but at society in general. However it is not until Molière's Don Juan ou le festin de pierre (1665) that the story really gains in depth. It is clear from the change in title, Molière dropping the 'fils criminel' of his predecessors, that Juan begins to change from 'villain' to 'hero'. In Molière no seductions take place within the time-scale of the play itself, and for the first time Juan becomes eloquent about his own actions (in G. the first part of the novel concentrates on seduction and sexual 'possession', a fact made more stark by its complete absence in the later stages of the story). In Molière a newly dignified and

### Encounter: 'Don Juan'

intellectual Juan is given the gift of speech, and can demonstrate, in both words and action, his philosophy. This creates a new and influential tradition of the eloquent and witty Don Juan as opposed to the rather simpler 'man of action' of the older tradition. This trend is to some extent overturned by Mozart's opera Don Giovanni, where the central arias are all given over to the other characters. Berger's 'Juan' has similarly very little direct speech within the novel, with most of the 'interpretative' commentary coming from the narrator (as opposed to the servant in Mozart - a point I shall return to later).

If Berger's Juan differs from Molière's in terms of 'eloquence', then his treatment of the theme as a whole also lacks the high comedy of the French version. However there are certain structural similarities - the 'settings' of Molière's play are echoed in the structure of Berger's novel:

<u>Molière</u>	<u>Berger</u>
Palace	English estate
Sea-coast	Trieste
Woods	forest
'Rooms'	bedrooms - Beatrice, hotel, Nusa.

Perhaps this merely serves to reinforce the fact that Berger's novel, for all its radical structure and narrative

Encounter: 'Don Juan'

'experimentalism', in some respects, as already suggested, fairly closely linked to earlier Don Juan schemas.

However the connection with Molière is clearly slight, and it is perhaps more interesting to consider Brecht's version of Molière. Thus we can witness Brecht's decision to adapt Molière's play as part of an attempt to reconstruct a classical repertoire for the German theatre - the Berliner Ensemble first producing their Don Juan in 1953. The play in fact has little Brecht in it mostly being the work of Benno Besson, Brecht's bilingual collaborator at the time (4). However the play's inclusion in the repertoire is justification enough for its discussion here, as Berger must have certainly been familiar with it. Brecht's adaptation made several significant alterations to the original, while at the same time sticking fairly closely to the broad outline of the French version (the same kind of process of adherence and alteration we have noticed in G.). There is the 'traditional' episode where Juan seduces the peasant girl shortly before she is to be married. This scene is represented in G. by the affair with Leonie, the hotel maid:

she, the promise of her beloved Eduard, she,  
the bride of her bridegroom in two months  
time. (p.149, the same scene in the Brecht  
version takes place in Act 1, scene 3)

### Encounter: 'Don Juan'

In Brecht, the churchyard and the Commander's statue is replaced in G. by 'Hölderlin's Garden', a museum site, where the ghost of a mad epic poet displaces the betrayed father, a form of 'Bloomian' transference (5).

There is also a development of the master/ servant theme, as you might expect, in the Brecht adaptation, with Signarelle becoming more and more the 'narrator' of Juan's life, and, to some extent, his conscience:

I can see how the land lies without his breathing  
a word. Sometimes I know better than he does  
himself. Experience! (6)

However perhaps the most interesting aspect of the Brecht Juan is the change in emphasis at the end of the play (and again the pivotal character for the understanding of this scene is Signarelle). In Molière's play Signarelle explains how everyone is happy and satisfied with Juan's punishment and eventual death, in that all the other characters are vindicated or simply avenged when Juan is carried off to hell. In the Brecht version **no-one** is in fact happy with Juan's fate, for all the characters wanted, and had received, something from Juan - they had 'fed' off him. This change in emphasis implicates all the characters in the guilt of Don Juan, and more implicitly, the reader and audience too. We are forced to question our own relationship and response to the Juan figure and to what he represents, the way in which he lives (or loves) - is he



for us or against us? In G. this theme takes yet another turn in that G.'s death goes 'unmarked', there is no-one either to lament or rejoice at his passing. His death is merely the final step in a journey back towards extinction, in a personal and in a social sense. This makes the reader's position even more ambiguous, what do we make of the void that was G.? (of course his death also has a Kafkaesque barrenness to it, however this will be considered in the final commentary).

The other significant development of the Juan story by Brecht is the invention of the 'boatmen' - some 'working-class' characters that Juan enlists to help him in his plans for seduction and murder. When this plot turns sour, the boatmen's determination to be avenged on Juan is a cause of real fright to him, as opposed to the calm and insolent indifference with which he greets the threats of his fellow noblemen - 'crossed' husbands, fathers and brothers of those he has seduced. The potential (and somehow rawer) violence locked into the characters of the boatmen is sufficient to make Juan run for the very first time. Juan has neither the background nor the strength to meet these men (he cannot 'brawl' with such lowly 'classes' of men, nor can he match their **combined** strength). This theme is repeated in G. where the hero's repeated confrontation with 'mob' violence eventually leads to his own death. He is disposed of in a violent and uncereemonious manner (similar to the manner in which the two men kill the horses earlier in the novel, p.57), the basic brutality of

which succeeds where the pistol of the cuckolded husband had failed. In both the Brecht and Berger versions, Juan attempts to involve characters from a peasant class in his own personal schemes for seduction and/ or revenge, only to find them figures in his eventual downfall.

In the eighteenth-century the Molière character was eclipsed by the rouè, but the theme of 'conflict' in the widest sense continued to expand, in terms of both the relationship between men and women, and between the individual and society (although almost entirely within the context of seduction). In England this is represented by works such as Samuel Richardson's Clarissa Harlowe (1747), with its hero announcing:

the new eighteenth-century theme, which changes  
from the unilateral attack by the seducer to a  
contest between the sexes. (7)

However this sense of contest and conflict can only occur, according to both Weinstein and Berger, at specific historical moments:

Don Juan is at his best in a society that keeps  
its women behind barred windows and permits them  
to go out only in the company of chaperones.  
That is why Don Juan was born in seventeenth-  
century Spain... (8)

Only, as Berger himself has commented, where women are the undisputed property of men - where men act and women appear - is he a subversive force. He cannot flourish where women themselves are struggling for emancipation since his promise is, ultimately, an intense expression of patriarchal power. (9)

This is one of the reasons that Berger, writing in the late sixties and early seventies has to look back to a different historical period in order to find a suitable 'moment' for Juan's reappearance.

Of course it is Mozart and Ponte's Don Giovanni which dominated the latter part of the eighteenth-century. We have considered how Berger has worked from Kierkegaard's interpretation of Mozart, however to what extent does G. follow the narrative structure of the operatic version? Again, we have seen that Berger does follow, to some extent, the basic outline of the Juan story as it appears in the earliest versions, but does he make use of Mozart's model? A central feature of Mozart's Don Giovanni is the way in which the central character 'inhabits' the opera (52), so that all the other characters 'speak through' him, while he himself is left free to fulfill the action of the story. This feature is also true, in a kind of a displaced way, in Berger's G., where 'independent' characters such as Chavez, or Nusa's brother Bojan, have a thematically linked relationship to the central character.

### Encounter: 'Don Juan'

However the problematic centre of the novel is the relationship between the narrator and the 'hero'. This relationship can be viewed in terms of the traditional roles of the master and the servant in the Don Juan legend. Don Juan has always had, in most of the central versions of the story, a servant who acts as a 'voice' for the hero. This role is particularly emphasised in Mozart's version, where Leporello's famous 'Catalogue Aria' reports the history of Juan's conquests to Donna Elvira. Leporello thereby becomes the chronicler of his master's life, narrating the history of Juan's sexual past for the other characters and for the audience. Even more than this, in later versions of the tale, the servant will admit openly to falsifying and exaggerating the evidence of Juan's life, making the servant in fact the creator (or master) of the Juan character as we understand him. In Rostand's La dernière nuit de Don Juan, the devil slowly reveals to Juan the fact that his life was always only a fiction created by others; in Bernard Shaw's short story Don Giovanni Explains the ghost of Don Giovanni appears before a 'contemporary' English lady and is surprised to hear of his fame, or infamy, most of which, it appears, is due to his servant's imaginative inventions (11). Similarly in G. we can look at the relationship between servant and master in terms of narrator and 'hero'. On Leporello's 'catalogue' Kierkegaard had this to say:

If Leporello were character, or a self-reflective

personality, then it would be difficult to imagine such a monologue, but precisely because he is a musical figure who is submerged in Don Juan, this aria has so much meaning. He is a reproduction of Don Juan's whole life. Leporello is the epic narrator. Such a one should not be cold or indifferent toward what he tells, but still he ought to maintain an objective attitude toward it. This is not the case with Leporello. Consequently he is fascinated by the life he describes, he forgets himself in telling about Don Juan. (12)

The narrator's autobiographical intrusions and anachronistic slips in the narrative of G. are instances of the narrator 'forgetting himself', losing the objectivity which his role as chronicler demands, in the fascination with the 'hero'. It is not satisfactory to assume that these moments represent the voice of 'Berger' - the relationship of the narrator to the fabric of the novel is far too complex for such an assumption, the relationship between author and storyteller is too tightly intertwined to distinguish clearly. This in itself is a reflection of the traditional master/ servant relationship in the Don Juan story, where identification of the two characters is often deliberately blurred. For example, in many of the Juan versions, the master and servant exchange clothes in order to carry out a deception. In G. the narrator and the hero both 'see', and react to, the same experiences, to the same

stimuli. Discussing G.'s first meeting with Camille, the narrator admits,

I am scarcely less interested in her than G....

(p.175)

Je t'aime, Camomille, comme je t'aime. That is what he must say. (p.181)

This 'I' could refer to Berger himself (or indeed the reader) but it certainly serves to implicate the narrator further in the actual 'persona' of the hero. Like Rostand's Cyrano to Christian de Neuville, the narrator is eloquent on behalf of G., he must help create the 'script' for another's experience:

together we will make one hero... (13)

In terms of the overall aesthetic structure, the narrator and the hero must at times seem indivisible.

The next significant development of the Juan story is Hoffman's interpretation of Mozart, with the publication of his short story Don Juan: eine fabelhafte Begebenheit of 1813. Hoffmann introduces for the first time the idea that Don Juan's series of seductions are in fact symbolic of a 'quest' for an ideal - here the ideal woman who will be 'all women'. Significantly he also becomes, in Hoffmann's account, a kind of 'révolté' (14), turning his

disillusionment with the impossibility of his quest into an anger against the whole of bourgeois society and its sexual codes. Centrally, Hoffmann's Juan himself offers motives for his actions, no longer leaving them to speak for themselves. This follows on from the Molière tradition rather than from Mozart, where, as I have suggested, the hero needs, and relies upon some kind of interpreter or moderator to supply the 'voice'. Hoffmann's Donna Anna, the physical embodiment of the 'ideal woman' (an ideal which ironically Juan will pass over or fail to recognise) is not reflected in Mozart's version, and not taken up by Berger himself, the notion of the 'ideal woman' itself constituting one of the central pillars of a bourgeois patriarchy which the character G. is in the process of attacking.

Hoffmann's real importance in this context is perhaps his position as precursor of the Romantic re-assessment of the Don Juan figure. Hoffmann's story was written around the same time as Byron's Childe Harold, therefore predating Byron's Don Juan by some six years. With the Romantic movement in general, the identification of the author with the hero (as opposed to just the narrator) really begins, as personal experience becomes intertwined with fiction. In Byron's epic poem, the question of who is in fact the 'révolté', or the 'ideal-seeker', the poet or the fictional hero, becomes increasingly confused. For Weinstein it is clear:

It is obviously not Don Juan who represents the *révolté*. This role is assumed by Byron himself, who in long and numerous digressions expresses his own revolt by criticizing and satirizing social attitudes that are either stuffy (as in Spain) or hypocritically prudish (as in England).

(15)

Similarly the suggestion of a possible revolt, in a wider sense, or the vision of some kind of 'ideal' (social or individual, psychological or political) comes through the author and not the hero himself. The hero is a kind of unmanned satellite, sending back pictures of other possible worlds; the poet organises and interprets this data. However the pressure on the Juan character steadily grows as the tradition develops, pressure to take more responsibility for his actions, pressure to make decisions, to take sides:

So long as Don Juan merely rebels against the laws governing the relations between the sexes (as does the Burlador), his character is still clearly defined; but when he adds to this a rebellion against family and religion (as does Molière's hero), and against society and therefore laws in general (as does Hoffmann's hero), he must become either an outlaw or a reformer. In either case his burden has multiplied and women become



merely one among many preoccupations in his life.

(16)

We can see something of this process in G., where the initial emphasis on the relationship with women is slowly displaced as G. becomes increasingly involved in situations where the 'target' of his actions are social or political. However, he still resists taking 'sides', his actions are always individual ones. It is this move from the sexual to the political which will lead to his death, but to some extent this is true of even the earliest versions of the Juan story. It is Don Juan's insulting of the murdered Commander's statue, the 'stone guest', which leads to his final retribution and not the various 'seductions' themselves. Berger's Juan finally 'acts' therefore, by taking part in the Slovene uprising, but resists any wider responsibility for the events surrounding him. It is left to the narrator to try and make sense of the relationship between the personal and the social, between experience and history.

Two other major developments of the Don Juan theme occur in the nineteenth-century, with the appearance of Zorilla's Don Juan Tenorio (1844), and with the association of Faust and the Don Juan legends (an association which raises the theme of Don Juan as 'Titan' (17)). The Zorilla play raised for the first time the notion of Juan 'saved', as repenting at the last moment and thus saving himself from damnation. This occurs through the intercession of a

'pure woman' (18), who offers herself as a sacrifice to God if Juan can be forgiven. This is a 'modernised' version of the Don Juan legend, and it entirely reverses the moral thrust of Tirso's original, and indeed the whole history of Don Juans through the preceding centuries. Despite the play's popularity, there are obvious criticisms to be made regarding Zorilla's dramatic structure, both in aesthetic and theological terms. However, Zorilla's version does at least offer the first fully rounded portrayal of the central female characters.

The link between Faust and Don Juan during this period is of more significance for our discussion however. Many of the dramas of the early nineteenth century featured these two characters in some kind of oppositional relationship. The best of these, according to Weinstein, is perhaps C.D Grabbe's Don Juan and Faust of 1829, where the two 'heroes' fight it out over the love of a woman. Faust and Juan represent the two opposing poles of experience, Juan as the spiritual and sensual egoist, seeking experience for its own sake, and Faust as the puritan materialist, seeking knowledge in order to 'gain' the world. There is another polarity here also, Protestant North versus Catholic South, and the clash between these two 'types' produces a fertile ground for the working out of problems concerning theological dogma and, in an existential sense, the nature of individual 'responsibility'.

Faust and Don Juan are closely associated in Berger's own work and in his writing of the late sixties he moves from the explicitly Faustian A Fortunate Man (1968) to the Don Juan influenced G. (1972); from a book about the quest for knowledge, and the burden that this quest carries, to one concerning the quest for sensual experience and the problems of recording and understanding sexuality. In A Fortunate Man, Berger describes Dr Sassall, the central character of the title, as a kind of modern Faust, who strives for the 'universal' (the exquisite isolation of each individual experience for the Don Juan denies any such 'universality'), and for a 'fraternity' (19) between himself and his patients. However both this fraternity and the dream of universality turn out to be at best partial, at worse entirely false:

The position can be described more crudely.

Sassall can strive towards the universal  
because his patients are underprivileged.

(20)

It is only Sassall's privileged position that makes it possible for him to contemplate the very notion of universality. Similarly the fraternity which he seeks can never be fully achieved, because Sassall must always be in 'control' of any relationship formed:

but this fraternity is not mutual: it is an

imaginative projection on Sassall's part, as true, but also as artificial as a work of art: nobody fraternally recognizes Sassall: and this makes him the commander. (21)

The use of the word 'commander' here is particularly interesting, raising the notion of guilt/ retribution as represented by the Commander in the Don Juan legend. In G. the ghost of Faust is always in the background (remembering that Sassall committed suicide not long after Berger's book was published), a reminder of G.'s own lack of commitment to any goal or vision, his quest for experience being his only motivation.

The placing of Juan alongside his 'alter-ego' Faust in the early nineteenth-century was to prepare for an increasing emphasis on the more negative aspects of Don Juan's character in later treatments of the theme. If Faust was seen as representing intellect and heroic striving, then Juan, as his opposite, was simply the personification of base cunning and a kind of raw sexuality. Hence the rise of 'Don Juanism', with its focus on the 'wit' or the 'fop', and the seduction, through convoluted plots, of 'high-society' ladies. Hoffmann's 'seeker of the ideal' had finally been eclipsed by the rake and the roué. In Bernard Shaw's short story referred to earlier (Don Giovanni Explains), Mozart's hero returns as a ghost and personally destroys his own legendary image. His life, he tells us, has been fictionalised, he was never the seducer but the

seduced. This is almost a rough draft for the later scene in Man and Superman, where the central character, Tanner, dreams of Hell, a hell where he is cast as a Don Juan. The main emphasis on this Juan character, as with Byron's version, is that of prey and not hunter. This reversal leads to an elevation of Don Juan to the position of 'victim-hero', a transformation developed in other twentieth-century adaptations. Further, he begins to be seen as no longer simply satisfying his desires, but rather as a figure who satisfies the desires of others, who reflects the deepest wishes of those he encounters. Tirso's 'burlador' has been turned 'inside out'. In Berger's G., the central character, the Juan figure (the product of seven years work throughout the 'liberated' sixties and early seventies) is seen, significantly, as **both** satisfied and giving satisfaction. It is a significant development.

Later in the century, Spanish writers began to return to the Don Juan theme, most notably perhaps José Ortega y Gasset, who portrays Juan as the epitome of potent manhood (22), who is now so far above the 'common man' that he can dispense with idealism altogether. However it is in France that the greatest developments within the tradition again occur. Two central features of this development are; the attempt to find a female 'equal' to stand opposite or alongside Don Juan, and secondly the attempt to turn Don Juan into an existential hero. The first fails to produce a truly dominant female characterisation, perhaps because the Juan story rejects such a notion outright. The second theme

was to be of greater significance and influence. In Albert Camus, the 'absurd' hero of Le Myth de Sysphe, as described in the section 'Le Don Juanism', is an outsider, one who moves from experience to experience, from woman to woman, not as a result of ceasing to love or 'feel', but only in order to love and feel again. Camus dignifies Juan's life by supplying a supporting philosophical framework:

there is no love but that which recognizes  
itself to be both short-lived and exceptional.

(23)

Love itself, for Camus's Juan, is only part of something greater:

Loving and possessing, conquering and  
consuming - that is his way of knowing.  
(There is significance in that favourite  
Scriptural word that calls the carnal  
'knowing'. (24)

Seduction for this Don Juan is a way of knowing the world, a way of gaining a hold on experience itself. No single experience could provide access to 'knowledge', it can only come about through repetition, through the 'sequence'. We can recognise in G. some of the elements of Camus's 'Don Juanism'. G.'s series of seductions do not represent the search for a single 'ideal' love, but the need to capture

again and again the unique moment, the 'firstness' of each sexual experience. As Camus states:

It is ridiculous to represent him as a mystic in quest of total love. But it is indeed because he loves them with the same passion and each time with his whole self that he must repeat this gift and his profound quest. (25)

Similarly G. reflects the objective distance of Camus's hero, the individual granted the vision to see the 'absurdity' of life. G. does not believe in 'the great causes' (p.266), and the juxtaposition of World War One battle scenes with G.'s seductions suggests the absurdity of conflict. Even at the end of the novel, where G. participates in the uprising, he remains ultimately distanced, unmoved by the events, from the historical moment, concerned only with the individual and personal experience. This is not to say that he is unaware of the situation of which he has become part:

Was his uneasiness partly the result of a premonition of the vast historical changes under way - changes which would transform social and private life and death in Europe to such a degree that he must become unrecognizable to himself? (p.265)

Perhaps G.'s uneasiness is due more to the fact that his final involvement, actively and politically, in the events of the 'Great War', dissolves the barrier he has so far maintained between 'absurd distance' and the 'real' event or historical moment.

The other central figure still to be discussed is Otto Rank, who throughout his career wrote (and amended) several works on the Don Juan theme. His is perhaps the only significant psychoanalytic interpretation of the story (Freud, although interested in Mozart's Giovanni, never attempts any critique of the Juan character as such). Rank himself was later to disown his analysis of the Juan legend, after his 'split' from, and renunciation of, Freud's 'school'. However, in his early versions, such as the 1924 edition considered here, Rank provides clear outlines for a psychoanalytic 'understanding' of the Don Juan myth. Some of the themes raised by Rank seem almost too widely known, if not always fully understood, to still seem useful in a contemporary sense. Ideas such as the 'Oedipus' complex and the 'death urge' have become part of our own cultural 'mythology' and Berger seems to stretch the interpersonal relationships in G. so as to make any simplistic reading of the novel in these terms more problematical. However, there is, in Rank's analysis, a framework of ideas which provide another way 'into' Berger's story.

The first striking feature of Rank's interpretation



### Encounter: 'Don Juan'

is the emphasis on the master and servant relationship. Rank presents Leporello as a fractured part of Don Juan himself, a divided constituent of the hero's 'ego ideal'. This ego ideal is the sum of both the internal and external pressures which the individual faces, and which combine to form such things as conscience and guilt and help mould a sense of mortality. Freud was to come to call this the 'super ego' but Rank employs this earlier phrase. The significance of this theory for the Don Juan legend is that it emphasises the importance of the servant in any attempt to fully understand the Juan character. The servant is an intimate part of the master, in fact at times representing the master's only 'positive' aspect. As Rank states:

it would be impossible to create the Don Juan figure, the frivolous knight without conscience and without fear of death or the devil, if a part of that Don Juan were not thereby split off in Leporello, who represents the inner criticism, the anxiety, and the conscience of the hero. With this key we can at last understand why Leporello must represent his master precisely in all the painful situations, and why he is permitted to criticise him and, as it were, to take the place of the conscience that the hero lacks. We can understand, moreover, that the enormity of Don Juan's wickedness is due to the splitting off of

the inhibiting element of his personality. (26)

Thus not only are the two characters joined by a kind of psychological necessity, but also their relationship is central to the 'wholeness' of the story itself. By taking Leporello and Juan to be two parts of one single individual we gain an,

intuitive sense of their psychological connection as a poetic effect. (27)

Rank's thesis is that most of the 'great' works of literature have at their centre this sense of a character split in two, the hero and the 'negative hero' (28), and in the case of G. this negative hero is the narrator himself, who 'journeys' with the central character through the novel, acting as a kind of 'alter ego'. What gives the novel its particular power is precisely this complex and 'dynamic' relationship between the hero and the storyteller, Rank's 'poetic effect' made manifest.

Rank goes further and suggests that the 'stone guest' is also part of Juan's 'ego ideal', that is the part representing guilt. Thus when the three eventually appear together at the end of the traditional story, usually at some kind of feast or celebration, Juan is 'fully' represented for the first time, his shattered ego ideal comes together to form a unified whole. Indeed Rank places great emphasis on the 'stone guest' in his analysis. As he

points out, many of the earlier versions of the story used this figure in their main title (29). So what happens to this important theme in Berger's G.? There is, near the end of the novel, a passage entitled 'The Stone Guest', where the narrator intervenes in the narrative with another 'autobiographical' story. He describes his experience at a friend's house, where he is startled by this friend's young son who supprises him whilst wearing the mask of an old man. The main reason for the narrator's supprise, and fear, we are told, is that the 'old man's' presence seemed to remove, by its suddenness and unexpectedness, all 'causality' from the moment, creating a space where anything could happen (G. p.330). The 'old man' had:

Sought me out in the darkness of my ignorance  
...had come to claim what that claim had  
promised him. (p.331)

Is this claim to do with old age, or death? It is an ambiguous passage; does he represent the ghost of those betrayed or deceived throughout the years, or in Rank's terms is he part of the ego ideal, demanding fulfilment of the individual's ego? In the Don Juan legend, the 'stone guest' traditionally represents, in terms of plot, the statue of the murdered Commander, a father figure who returns to punish the errant son, not for his own murder as much as for his lack of respect for the dead. In terms of Berger's novel, perhaps a clue to the meaning of the 'stone

Encounter: 'Don Juan'

quest' is given early in the story, in the passage called 'Taking a Fall' (p.60), where G. as a young boy is knocked from his pony (again linking horses with violence and death) and is found by an old man who lives in a poor cottage on the estate. G., lying on the old man's bed, injured but safe, senses a fracture in his experience of time. As he concentrates on his breathing:

The old man comes to the bed and sits on it. In face of the arrested time just ending, the boy may be as old as the man.

The old man was there as the boy emerged from his estate. They met as equals. No rules governed their encounter. Bone to bone. But when the boy's sense of time began to revert to normal, he became young again. (p.61 and p.63)

In that 'space' created by the sense of fractured time, the normal rules governing experience are destroyed, temporarily, and for that moment anything can happen. Causality has been removed. Only the sense of time's return can break the spell:

The sound of the buggy, and his uncle in the doorway. His uncle makes the old man look as small as a dwarf. (p.63)

### Encounter: 'Don Juan'

In the narrator's reported experience near the end of the novel, in that significant 'half-second', the old man and the boy are again one and the same person, 'bone to bone'. In that moment, the three parts of the whole meet for the first time. The servant (the narrator), Juan (G.) and the 'stone guest' (time/history/memory) complete the super ego, and as traditionally told, this first 'meeting' of the ego heralds the last moments for the Don Juan. The 'claim' that the 'old man' represents, the contract that he has come to fulfil, is at least in part, the death of G., the end of the narrative. Yet this 'tryst' must occur outwith normal time and thus the passage 'The Stone Guest' emerges in the narrative 'non-time' of the narrator's commentary, not in the historical time of the story itself. Ironically, it is this 'free space' which the narrator creates which actually foretells the novel's own closure.

Finally, it is worth considering Rostand's Le Dernier Nuit de Don Juan (1921) as it provides an opening into a wider discussion of the nature of sexuality as represented in G.. In Rostand's verse drama, Don Juan and his servant - his 'only heir' (30) - are in Venice, pursuing seduction on 'that rose and chocolate sea' (31). Don Juan is waiting to attend yet another ball, when a puppeteer arrives and offers to put on a show. Of course the puppeteer turns out to be the Devil in disguise, come to claim Juan's soul. Don Juan, when confronted by the Devil, attempts to construct a 'defence' of his own life,

Encounter: 'Don Juan'

but at each stage of this defence, the Devil demolishes his case. Juan's first defence is that he 'possessed' the women he seduced and that through this possession he came to know them in a way that no others could possibly achieve:

Juan -

I acted alone,  
However, and having acted on my own  
I possessed alone.

Devil -

What is that  
"Possess" That's the word for it I guess.  
Well then, tell me, dear immoralist,  
What have you possessed?  
I'd like to have that active verb defined.

Juan -

'And then he knew her' as the Bible says.  
To 'know' - that is the meaning of possess.  
I have pressed their naked souls against me.  
No one better knows their ecstasy. (32)

In essence, this is the same kind of claim that Berger's hero makes. What we are left to decide is whether G. has any more right to this claim than Rostand's sad and misled creation.

## READING

All very interesting, but does it help me understand G.? Taking up that last point, maybe if Rostand's Don Juan had told the Devil that he had 'fucked women' he could have escaped. Surely Don Juan's *raison d'être* is transgression, and perhaps the fundamental transgression is the failure to 'create' - no paintings, no poetry, no memorial and most importantly, no offspring (Foucault identifies this as Juan's greatest threat). In Frische's Don Juan the final devastating blow to Juan's power and self-esteem is the news that he has just become a father (this makes me think of Brecht's Baal and his morbid fear of babies!). Juan represents a threat to society's overwhelming concern with sex, its desire to ensure population growth and to maintain social stability. To 'fuck' in this context is to 'fuck up' society, it is here that you could claim that Juan revolts against 'history' and against 'linearity'.

It's not entirely clear what is being suggested in this 'Encounter' - a clear connection between the Juan myth which would have to assume, without any proof, that Berger was familiar with its history or a development of a kind of logic at the heart the text of G. itself. There certainly would be some logic in seeing G. as a Juan-figure if considered as being at the 'end of the line' (in this connection it would have been useful the 'Encounter' had described Tirso's depiction of Don Juan, for example, rather than just the structure of the play itself). In

G. we see the eclipse of the Don Juan, he meets his death and the narrative, which has just been so carefully outlined, faces its final closure. A novel written in the 1970's which centres on a Don Juan figure **can** only see that character's demise. As a character, G. remains elusive and ambiguous precisely because he has become politically passé; he can only thrive in times (as pointed out in the 'Encounter') when women are not themselves active in the fight for their own emancipation.

I like the image of the narrator/ writer as some kind of Cyrano, hiding in the 'bushes' and prompting the hero as 'alter ego'. However there are points with which I would to take issue. For example, to take a factual point first - the so-called 'missing themes'. The 'killing of the father' may indeed be missing from Berger's version, however absent fathers abound, and the 'wave' to Beatrice's father's portrait can be taken as a symbolic 'killing' - thereafter there are no 'father-figures'. For 'criminals' there is a steady stream of capitalist crooks in true Brechtian mode - bankers, financiers, diplomats - a veritable rogue's gallery of murderous corruption. Camille's dinner party may safely stand in for the 'great feast'. I am sure I could find further examples to fill in any remaining blanks - however that would be to miss the point rather. If we think of The Odyssey compared to Ulysses then we get the idea, Berger, like his hero Joyce, expands or shrinks incidents from the original to fit his own theme. It would be quite wrong to look for exact analogies between the two stories.



The discussion of Sassall ignores the fact that he too faces 'repetition' - the cycle of sickness and care, birth and death. In this he is linked to the Don Juan character. It should also be pointed out that Juan's (G.'s) dream of 'universality' and 'fraternity' (made possible by repeated sexual encounter) is as equally spurious and hopeless as Sassall's (Faust's). Both ultimately have to be in 'control', it is not a meeting of equals, the women in the story do not have the same freedom, the same rights as G. (equally, to suggest that the 'central problem' in the novel lies in the relationship between the narrator and the 'hero' is to ignore the relationship of the narrator to the women he creates, and this certainly might be the 'central problem' in terms of a feminist reading. Remember that the novel is dedicated to 'Anya', Berger's first wife, and the echo with Donna **Anna** is another link with the Juan theme).

The discussion of the work of Otto Rank did bring up some interesting ideas. Could it be taken to suggest that Berger himself had to 'split off' a part of his personality, part of his 'unacceptable' ego (to feminists at least) to form 'G.', in order to allow himself to develop, as a novelist, the role he craves as a detached observer? The master and the servant inhabit different time-scales, and this same relationship is obviously apparent in the relationship between the narrator and the hero (1968 and 1918). This could be worth teasing out. Rank seems at first an odd choice here - however the 'Encounter' does seem to be in some sense in step with our 'times'. The

University of Florida Institute for Psychological Study of the Arts has recently published a report showing a marked increase in interest in the work of Rank - with 48 books put out between January 1991 and March 1992 mentioning him. Just to get a sense of this in context, here is a quote from an article in the Times Literary Supplement, July 24th 1992 (by Liam Hudson):

...this rating (Rank's) is still puny compared to Lacan's. Of the 947 publications listed, Lacan is mentioned in no fewer than 333. On the other hand, Rank is now running neck and neck with Melanie Klein (50); is nudging ahead of Winnicott (42); and has left Laing (12), Barthes (7), and Chomsky (1) well to the rear.

Just thought it might be interesting to know.

The central trouble with the 'Encounter' as I see it is that again it takes written 'history', in this case literary history, as fact. As with the David Cauter book earlier, Weinstein is not treated as another text but as a source of verified 'truth' - 'from here the story travelled to France' etc. What does this really mean? One has to question the 'truth' element of any of these 'Encounters'. Aren't they simply ways of compensating for the loss of the 'firstness' of that first reading of G., attempts, in the words of the ever-popular Lacan, to replace the 'body in bits and pieces' (the text when first sensually

experienced) with an erroneously solid figure? Take a look in the mirror - it's not you, the novel G. is not the sum of Hardy/ Brecht/ Lacan/ Weinstein/ Cauter. Why use the plural 'we' in the text of the 'Encounter' - is this following a formal critical pattern, or does it show an awareness of the multiplicity behind the critical voice? As Berger makes clear, when he discusses putting 'I' above the sexual drawings earlier in the novel, you let the ego enter the equation and you change the meaning of the text entirely. Why is there no 'I' above the commentary?

And finally, an anecdote. A friend of mine once told me of someone they knew who worked in a newspaper office. This man had stapled together the pages of a Sun newspaper calendar, a 'page three' version. When asked why he had done this his reply was that it prevented him from taking a 'peek' ahead. This, in a way reminds me of Berger's Don Juan - 'All despite all their differences are there together. He joins them.' (p.158) Perhaps this is rather unfair, however both of these examples involve the pursuit of pleasure within a temporal framework, a framework which can be stretched and broken by the orgasmic moment. Both involve the objectification of women, who are treasured for their uniqueness only because they are part of a discrete 'series'.

I think the image of the stapled calendar is also useful in thinking about 'conventional' narrative, as opposed to the self-consciously experimental text. The 'classical' narrative, in Barthes terms, has its own kind

of internal 'staple' (performs its own kind of striptease) a narrative mechanism which prevents you jumping around within the story, forcing you to move progressively through the pages towards a final 'disclosure'. I am not suggesting that conventional narrative is a kind of pornography (am I?), merely that this form of narrative transforms Barthesian jouissance into a form of masturbatory rite. Berger, at all levels, strives for the unpornographic, often by being graphic, even at times diagrammatic. Honesty is the enemy of pornography (sorry, a bit of a Bergerism that!) and G. is a transparent book about sexuality, not opaque (it is not a 'G string', it discloses entirely). Berger does not disallow pleasure (and there is pleasure in his writing and in the reading of his writing) but it is not the pleasure of 'firstness' (ironically, pornography would, in a sense, be nearer this) it is the pleasure of conscious interpretation of visual and sensual experience.

COMMENTARY.

Lines 69-70:

The scene between Leonie and G. is intercut with Chavez's attempted flight across the Alps (in the same way in which the later scene with Camille will be juxtaposed with descriptions of the battlefields of the First World War). This association of events creates a strong thematic unity binding the scene; the two events are not isolated but in some sense part of the same 'moment'. The socio/historical and the subjective and ahistorical merge to intersect chronological time. The peasants who have come to see the flight of Chavez believe they will be taking part, by association, in a 'historical occasion' (it is worth noting that this association by observation also takes place in the Camille scene when the lovers in the woods are watched by a passing peasant). For the crowds assembled to watch Chavez's flight:

This is a very primitive satisfaction,  
connecting the time of one's ancestors  
and descendants. The great pole of  
history is notched across at the same  
point as the small stick of one's own  
life. (lines 96-99)

One is forced to ask why Berger should employ such relatively inert images here - 'pole' and 'stick' - objects

which have been 'created', chopped, lopped, made to 'fit', rather than a more 'natural' metaphor such as tree or branch. 'History', it seems to suggest, is not an 'organic' development, it is an artificial construct, as is the individual's life which is dependant upon it. The very awkwardness of the narrator's metaphor has in fact served to draw attention to, and reinforce, the meaning of the passage. There are events, moments in time, when the social and the personal meet and cross and at this time is born a passage in history in which the individual can feel an integral part. This is one of the reasons Leonie is willing to follow G. to his room. The juxtaposition of Chavez's 'historic' flight and G.'s particular presence creates a moment in which Leonie herself feels both unique and a 'part' of something greater:

She followed him because the unusualness of  
both the things which were happening confirmed  
that the occasion was exceptional. (lines 117-119)

Leonie's seduction becomes in part a symbolic act, with a direct relationship with the event happening outside. G. makes this explicit by not closing the bedroom to the outside world, by opening the French windows from where the couple can see,

the silhouetted head and shoulders of Chavez,  
smaller than a boot-button. (lines 129-130)

The comparison here between the figure of Chavez and an item of clothing draws a firm line between the two events, the heroic flight and the sexual encounter, between the sky and the bed. However G. is not consciously forcing the comparison, still caught within his strategy of seduction he is as much the passive bystander in this 'historical moment' as Leonie (or alternatively, as much its creator). Indeed G. will quickly close the windows again as soon as they are no longer needed as part of that stratagem and it will be Leonie who, like Chavez, tests life's gravitational pull.

Lines 135-136:

The reader is here invoked as part of the 'dialogue' of the novel, through this narrative device. The effect is dramatic - we have not been addressed in this way before, and here it serves to challenge our 'sympathetic reading' of the novel, a reading which would misinterpret the actions of the characters. The narrator, predicting such a misprision, reveals a far more complex set of emotions and motivations behind the narrative progression. This description of Leonie's reaction to G.'s seduction is placed within parenthesis, as if the narrator is taking us aside to gently explain that nothing is ever as simple as it appears, in life or in fiction.

Lines 143-146:

What G. recognises in Leonie (as later with Camille) is not her outward social appearance, an appearance which in society will be defined in terms of binary oppositions - beautiful/ugly, rich/poor for example, but the specific and particular aspects of her character which make her unique. These features, which if viewed from the narrower field of such constricting oppositions would be considered defective, would be placed on the negative side of the equation, are here revealed as those very things which isolate, and thus render exceptional, Leonie's specificity. Leonie is described as having 'large fingers' (line 146), 'a 'broad squashed-looking nose' (146-147), 'coarse stringy wisps of hair' (147), a 'peasant's unpowdered complexion' (148-149), on her chin a 'pale slight discolouration' (149) and 'rounded shoulders and bosom' (150). These are not 'negative' features which G. transforms, through his gaze, into 'positive' characteristics, for G.'s friend Weymann has already identified the maid as 'sweet', that is attractive in a commonly acceptable way. G. is in fact doing something more complex, and that is seeking out, beyond the meaningless surface of appearances, the real physical and sensual body beneath, the individual's sexual 'signature'. This capturing of the real essence of the perceived is dependant upon a conceptualisation of the body within space and time. When Weymann describes Leonie as 'sweet' he is invoking a primarily static image of the girl, an image which does not attempt to represent the complete sensual



'awareness' of an individual but translates that image, through a kind of shorthand, into the most basic information (in the same way that the narrator's use of the term 'blonde' earlier in the novel misrepresents the character he is attempting to define). As Berger states in Ways of Seeing in terms of a Rubens nude:

Her body confronts us, not as an immediate sight, but as experience. (1)

For this experience to be 'real' it must focus on that which is exclusive to the viewed body, on the intimate details of the perceived which Berger describes as 'banal':

Apart from the necessity of transcending the single instant and of admitting subjectivity, there is, as we have seen, one further element which is essential for any great sexual image of the naked. This is the element of banality which must be undisguised but not chilling. It is this which distinguishes between voyeur and lover. Here such banality is to be found in Rubens's compulsive painting of the fat softness in Hélène Fourment's flesh which continually breaks every ideal convention of form and (to him) continually offers the promise of her extraordinary particularity. (2)

Leonie's 'extraordinary particularity' is similarly relayed through the banality of the narrative description. Later Camille will be described in the same manner, through those features which by virtue of their ordinariness - 'small', 'thin', 'stiff legs', render her unique to the lover's (as opposed to the voyeur's) gaze. The narrator invites the reader to make the jump from a voyeuristic to a loving reading of the text.

Lines 155-156:

The wooden and 'banal' language used by G. deliberately distances the reader from the sexual experience itself, or at least challenges the reader to step, once again, beyond the role of voyeur. For although the words seem, to the narrative 'eavesdropper', trite and commonplace, for G. and for Leonie they have an 'outrageous eloquence' (line 158). Again it is by virtue of their banality that this eloquence is achieved. The 'true' and the 'exclusive' are features of 'ordinary' language, not poetic language. Their eloquence derives from their refusal of any conventional meaning (like Rubens's breaking of 'every ideal convention or form') or interpretation and have their context, and function, within the higher vault of heightened sensory experience.

Lines 165-187:

This first line locates G.'s peculiar power - the ability to pull all those whom he selects into a narrative

framework or imaginative world - where the established rules of the 'real' world no longer apply. The last line confirms this romantic image, of both 'players' in the seduction 'scene' as being in some way 'chosen', their relationship existing outwith the normal limitations. Yet the intervening lines attempt to stress these particular powers of G. in terms of his refusal to 'disguise' himself in any way, certainly not as some kind of romantic hero. In contrast to the image of G. coming to claim Leonie, the passage underlines the way in which G.'s main focus is upon himself, in presenting himself 'as he is' (line 185). Similarly, 'Leonie was able to distinguish between sincerity and insincerity' (lines 179-180) and has no illusions as to her own place within the moment she is entering. Yet the power of that moment lies in precisely this friction and conflict between the romantic power of the Don Juan figure and the heightened sense of the 'real' which the revolutionary moment of sex inspires. It is a dichotomy at the centre of the character of G. himself - part mythical character and part earthly lover.

Lines 188-206:

The reference to Zeus brings up all kinds of significant associations. G. himself is constantly becoming the 'stranger' (hence his own 'namelessness'). In order to present himself 'as he is' he must first 'alienate' the encounter between lovers from all that is culturally imposed. G. as the 'constant stranger', as the mythical

'other', brings together the intimate and the alien and so presents the possibility of each woman experiencing herself 'as she actually is'.

Lines 207/209:

G.'s answer to Weymann's question 'I travel' again links G. with the picaresque, 'The constant stranger must continually travel'. For G. this is not a question of 'escaping' from anything (as Weymann might expect) but rather a matter of rushing towards new experience, always seeking out new horizons. G. is far closer to Chavez than his fellow aviators can ever know, and perhaps closer than G. himself realises.

Lines 210/213:

Leonie can see the sky from the hotel window and significantly it is blue (see final commentary for a detailed analysis of Berger's symbolic use of colour). Here it is image of hope, a sign of 'possibility', a herald of change and metamorphoses. The sight of the blue expectant sky will lead Leonie to question 'gravity', to dare to challenge all the social restraints which 'keep her in her place'. For 'a moment longer' Leonie keeps her arms pinned to her sides, however we feel that any moment she will raise them as if in flight. It will be G. who physically picks her up in his own arms, however it is Leonie who has taken the decision to fly.

COMMENTARY.

Lines 219-220:

This is a statement upon which the novel (and indeed much of Berger's writing as a whole) rests and could mean one of three things:

a/ that each story could be told from a variety of viewpoints or through different 'voices'.

b/ that no story exists on its own but only has meaning in terms of its relationship to other stories, i.e a Barthesian model of inter-textual signification.

c/ that from a 'politically correct' viewpoint no story should take precedence over another, there is no 'meta-discourse'.

Every story, like every life, is encompassed, and given meaning, by all the other stories and experiences going on simultaneously, so that, for example, the experiences of Leonie and Chavez are in some sense intimately connected:

that self which was surrounded by life other  
than her own as the receding roar of the  
aircraft was surrounded by silent air.

(lines 139-141)

Just as sculpture and architecture requires, indeed only exists in relation to, the possible space it 'fills', so the story has its being in the relational space it forces from the imagination. The narrative sculpts a

representative form from the flux of thoughts and experiences which make up the imaginative air we breathe.

In many ways it is a profoundly ambiguous statement. Does the 'never again' reflect the narrator's own decision with regard to the narration or does it reflect an idealistic belief in the impending transformation of fictional modes of which this text is to be the blueprint? In either case, the statement includes all three of the possibilities described above, and represents a kind of manifesto for Berger's own development as a writer.

Lines 230-246:

Here the narrator uses a technique which he will repeat later in the novel when discussing Camille's encounter with G.. Then we have the repetition of the word 'her' to focus on Camille's own sense of self. Here the narrator repeats the word 'she' to represent all the images of Leonie which conceal the 'real' individual. These are in the form of an 'interior dialogue'. G.'s method of seduction is always to simply arrange to be alone with a woman and to allow the social/ moral 'arguments' to be confronted by the woman herself. Thus Leonie is 'forced' to consider her social self (lines 230-237). G., as the stranger, as the romantic lover, brings none of these rival claims or representations to their encounter, and seems to desire Leonie 'as she really is'. As important as the removal of clothing, this is a stripping away of the rival claims which would smother the real self. G. as a nameless 'other' provides a free

space where the 'I' takes precedence over the 'she'.

Lines 252-253:

G., in almost every sense is a 'negative hero', it is not what he brings to an encounter which is important but what he takes away, not what he adds on but what he removes. As a Don Juan he removes the clothing which obscures and masks the body, as the 'stranger' he allows the abandoning of all the prescriptive selves which are socially imposed, and here, as a lover, he shatters the strictures of time and space.

Line 272:

At the end of the scene Leonie will again call out G.'s name, but for different reasons. Here his name connects Leonie to him. It is the only connection, for nothing else is brought to the experience, his name will become the experience. It is of course significant that Leonie knows this name and we, the reader do not. We are kept outside the experience, having to accept G. as unknowable, and perhaps more importantly, as unchanging. Unlike Zeus, we do not see G.'s transformation through various guises and persona. He is as 'strange' at the end of each encounter as he is when he begins. Unlike the women he 'seduces', G. does not change from the 'he' to the 'I'. Whether this is significant in terms of G.'s status as the stranger and the Don Juan, or whether it tells something about the difference between male and female responses to the sexual

experience, or whether in fact it is a failure of the novelist to expose himself to the same penetrating gaze as the female characters he creates, is an important question and will be considered in more depth during the 'Camille' commentary.

Lines 273-286:

In this passage the narrator raises the question of other 'levels' of language which are personal/individual and as such resist any attempt at interpretation, and returns to the theme, discussed in an earlier scene, of the inability of language, especially 'literary' language, to express the experiential and sensual in any meaningful way. As Gabriel Oak discovers, in Hardy's Far from the Madding Crowd:

he would as soon have thought of carrying an  
odour in a net as of attempting to convey the  
intangibilities of his feeling in the coarse  
meshes of language. (3)

Thus the narrator in G. warns us that:

Armed with the entire language of literature  
we are still denied access to her experience.  
(lines 281-282)

To 'make love to her' (line 284) is seen as the only way of sharing her experience, albeit temporarily. This suggests



that the repeated encounters which the narrator creates for G. are sites of an attempted closer understanding of the 'other's' uniqueness, an experiential understanding of their subjective 'history'. However this only emphasises G.'s own 'emptiness' as a character. He is primarily a device for the narrator to pursue his own consciousness of this 'other' and thus the confusion, at various times, of just who is speaking (for example at lines 284-289). The narrator 'loves' the character Leonie because she is beyond narration. To attempt to describe her experience is itself an act of love.

Lines 303-311:

The emphasis throughout the scene is on 'seeing' and on perception, despite (or because of) the narrator's agonizing over the possibility/ impossibility of verbal and cognitive understanding. Indeed the narrator describes this act of 'seeing' as the only true form of sharing and comprehending sensual experience. However, of course, there are different 'ways of seeing', ways which can misread the individual, trapping them within pre-ordained images and conventions, or ways which truly recognise and liberate them from the culturally enforced. Thus even as a baby, the girl can be defined in negative terms as being that which is 'not a boy', and from that point all looks will reaffirm the individual in terms of their gender and social 'role'.

Line 315:

This would tend to reinforce the phallocentric nature of the preceding passage. Ultimately all experience seems to lead back towards the phallus, all feelings and perceptions finally find their 'solution' there. As with Lawrence's Women in Love, a new self-image and self-realisation is discovered through male sexuality, through their 'divine' creative power:

After a lapse of stillness, after the rivers  
of strange dark fluid richness had passed over  
her, flooding, carrying away her mind and  
flooding down her spine and over her knees,  
past her feet, a strange flood, sweeping away  
everything and leaving her an essential new  
being, she was left quite free, she was free  
in complete ease, her complete self. (4)

This sense of the male phallus representing a kind of renewing fire finds its parallel in G., where Leonie, like Ursula, is 'returned to herself' (see lines 318-321).

Lines 323-348:

This 'confession' by the narrator, and its significance for reading G. (and indeed all of Berger's work) is considered in another commentary.

Lines 349-512:

The next five pages deal with Chavez's crossing of the

Alps. It is a heroic story, but one told from two perspectives which provide a different focus and interpretation of the events; from the viewpoint of the gathered crowds and from the viewpoint of Chavez himself, the experience from within the 'cell' of his plane. The connection with G.'s simultaneous experience in the hotel bedroom is suggested by the correspondence between 'Monte Leone' and 'Leonie', between the conquests of the mountains and the seduction of the maid. One constitutes a historical moment, is public, social and shared and for this reason will become 'immortal'; whereas the other is private and personal, it exists 'outside' history. However, both Chavez and G. are in some way violating the 'possible'. G.'s seduction and Chavez's flight are both forms of 'transgression' (line 382). If G. resembles Zeus in that he changes his 'form' in order to seduce his prey, then Chavez reminds us of Icarus, testing 'his wings' (line 431) in defiance of nature. Both characters pursue the experiential moment, rather than 'sex' or 'heroism'. Chavez may appear as a great hero from the ground, whose bravery is an inspiration for all those who watch, however his actions are more a matter of survival than heroism. This is reminiscent of Berger's comments in Art and Revolution, where he states:

Today the hero is ideally the man who resists  
without being killed...To be among the living  
is to be the living. (5)

As with the 'Roman girl' scene, the central thing is 'not being dead'. For Chavez the mountains take the form of a mythical beast which attempts to devour him, like Adamastor, a Titan transformed into a rock, prophesying disaster to all those who would venture past. That Adamastor was transformed by Zeus, as a result of his own lust, forms a further interesting link with the parallel scene with G. (the two characters are also of course linked by their shared initial). However the scene rests primarily on the dialectic between earth and sky, between flight and burial, between the possible and the ordained. To the crowd below, Chavez's achievement signifies hope, thus when they wave and cheer the approaching plane, they are at the same time gesturing towards their own possible futures, exulting in their own potential, and thus it is a bad portent that Chavez does not wave back, does not acknowledge the moment. For it signifies that somehow the event as witnessed is not in fact the same as that experienced, that the crowd do not have a share in a moment that would appear to offer the possibility to be 'part of history' and that the ordained and prescribed are more powerful than the individual's desire to escape them. Chavez will crash, the spectators will not achieve 'greatness' and Leonie will return to her family and bridegroom.

Line 518:

The narrator describes the climax of the sexual encounter. It is significant that throughout the scene hands again

play an important symbolic part (see the earlier discussion in 'Beatrice' and a further analysis in 'Camille'). Here there is a link between Chavez's refusal to wave and the image of the 'fists' in this subsequent passage. The scene is in fact 'strung together' by a series of hand images and actions. Weymann begins the scene by recounting the aptitudes necessary for the potential flyer, using his fingers to number them (line 35). Then when G. first locates Leonie in the maid's quarters he beckons with his hand for her to come down and join him (lines 108). Leonie herself is described as having 'large fingers' (line 146), whilst on her face she has a discolouration 'the size of a small fingernail' (line 150). Later it is G.'s **touch** which will provide the sensation of a loss of gravity. G.'s hands are a central part of his seductive power and encourage Leonie herself to explore G.'s body with her fingers, in order to 'destroy the mystery' (line 554). The hand is the mediator between all the other senses, it replaces words where language has lost its primacy. Thus when shouting is heard outside on the terrace, reaffirming the symbolic order represented by language, the first thing Leonie does is to 'pull her hand away' (line 574). It is an instinctive abandoning of intimacy, a recognition of the impossibility of maintaining the wordless sensual state, a hurrying back towards isolation. In an attempt to bring Leonie back to him, G. places 'a hand on her shoulder' (line 626). The hand is the primal communicator and in the 'Camille' scene we will see the narrator use the image of the hand in an

even more complex way.

Lines 523/531:

This returns us to the discussion of 'firstness' which arose in the 'Beatrice' scene. If Beatrice represented the first of G.'s sexual encounters then it was an experience which signified a discovery of 'original meaning' (p.125). The subsequent repetitions of that experience will represent ways of unlocking the 'language' of that first experience. As each orgasm is experience 'outside' time, they are all, in some sense, 'all together', they defy chronology. The final three sentences of this scene are repeated exactly in the 'Camille' scene which follows (see page 228). The repetition of these lines underscores the theme of rediscovery of 'firstness', the repetition which does not mark the passing of time but rather its disruption. It is a working back to 'firstness' and it is at the very heart of the lover's quest.

Lines 532/544:

Sex is here described as a meeting point between our 'beginning' and our 'end', between life and death, and it is this central moment which conveys the sense of the 'instantaneous'. It is as a constant seeker after this 'instantaneous moment' that the narrator 'explains' the hero of the book. Here again, in a different form, is the dialectic between flight and burial, between the earth and the sky, between life and 'not being dead'.

Lines 559/560:

The image here picks up on the two previous moments in the scene. As a sexual experience of 'illumination' it is in contrast to the 'blackness' perceived before the sexual encounter. The 'blackness' of sexual arousal, which conceals and distorts, gives way to the 'whiteness' of perception. It is also thematically linked to Chavez's flight and his experiences when approaching Monte Leone, where the snow 'both emphasizes the presence of the mountain and transforms it into a kind of absence' (lines 385 to 387). Chavez escapes the dark 'jaws' of the mountain, flying up into the bright blue sky. For Chavez too, the journey is one from darkness into light, and like G.'s final immersion in the 'white light' of the sea (p.349), it is a journey towards death.

Lines 600/601:

Here G. reminds Leonie that time will always return to enforce its dominion and that the only truly 'free' moment, like the moment of orgasm, is that which, however temporarily, denies time. The moment of sex is an attempt to step outside time's continual progression. At the end of the novel G. repeats this idea, 'We have no time' he tells himself and Nusa (see p.337), recognising that time will assert its authority. Sex, for G., is the only 'device' which can defeat this, 'Lovers fuck time together' (p.337). During the novel, G.'s conception and boyhood, his sexual

encounters and eventually his death, are described in detail, however no other biographical information is provided, leaving huge gaps in G's 'biography'. This is because these are the only moments when G. as a character truly exists, at the moments of birth, sex and death. Sexual experience, and the feeling of 'firstness' it creates, is rediscoverable, but no such repetition is available to specific historical moments. That is why when Leonie asks whether G. does not have any feelings for his friend Chavez and his possible fate, G. can reply, 'No chance ever comes twice' (line 605). The moment of firstness, represented by the sexual act, may be repeatable but the 'event' which is 'Leonie' is not. In G.'s quest, no such opportunity to defy time and to bypass history, can be overlooked.

Lines 610/611:

Leonie's sudden concern over just who G. is, seems to trigger an uncertainty in G. himself. Although Leonie does not mention her fear of G.'s possible demonic nature, much later in the novel, when G. is lying in hospital after being shot by Camille's husband, he asks the nurse if he reminds her of the devil (p.230). It is another thematic link between light and dark, between transgression and pleasure. If Chavez is like some fallen angel, then G. too must contemplate the descent into hell.

Lines 653/671:



The comparison here of Leonie's body to a landscape again creates a link between the maid and the mountain, between the seduction and the flight. Yet it is also part of Berger's thoughts on the female body at that time. We can, for example, compare this passage with another in Art and Revolution, where he describes a cornfield disturbed by the wind:

The way the wheat is ruffled is reminiscent of hair. The yielding of the wheat, revealed by the waves of light and shade, is reminiscent of the softness and resilience of thighs or shoulders. (6)

In this sense, G.'s sexual encounter with Leonie can be seen as an attempt to reaffirm his connection with the 'land'. Chavez's challenge was to negotiate the air, to put himself beyond 'time' by entering 'history'. G.'s challenge, by contrast, is to escape both history and time. Their journeys are inverted images of each other, one through the heavens, the other through the body which is the earth.

Commentary: 'Camille'. (G. pages 212 to 228)

Lines 1-5:

'Madam Hennequin and Mathilde Le Diraison are riding..'

The first five lines of this scene, forming a single, separate paragraph, set the background for the journey and encounter about to take place. It is a partially detailed picture of the two women travelling towards an unknown destination (although we know almost precisely where they are). Both women are named in full, formally, and place names are given precisely - 'Via al Calvario' (line 3), 'San Quirico' (line 4), 'Domodossola' (line 5). The paragraph is a kind of narrative map of reference, it 'plots' the characters in narrative space. Other details fill the picture - the carriage they ride in is 'dilapidated' (line 2), the carriage hood has 'holes in it' (line 2), and the driver wears a 'straw hat' (line 3). These descriptions are given in one long sentence (like a drawing formed by a single line). The detailing of time and place forms an axis upon which the characters move, for although we do not know the time of day when we meet the two women, their distance from Domodossola, and therefore from G., is given in terms of time - 'ten minutes from the centre' (line 4). This axis is constructed in such detail precisely to emphasise the collapse of all geographical and temporal structures at the end of the scene. In a movement we have now come to expect, this detailing in time and

space, is placed against the dissolving of these external reference points through the sexual experience. The lovers 'fuck' in a clearing in a forest. It is a nameless place, one could not pinpoint it on the map, it exists almost only on an imaginative level. It reminds Camille of a 'Renaissance painting' (line 448); their encounter will be 'framed' by this setting which will isolate them from the continuum of 'history'. The scene's visual context will be highlighted by the figure of the voyeur at the end, the passing peasant (lines 537-540) who reinforces the contrast between the 'spectator' (here of course including the reader) and the total absorption of the couple themselves. The sexual encounter between G. and Camille frees them from the limitations of time (or so it will seem) - 'All are there in their own time and at the same time' (lines 525-526). The 'realism' of the opening paragraph is thus challenged by the 'modernist' dissolution of the final lines. 'Form' (the map) is overcome by 'formlessness' (the abstract painting).

This opening paragraph also has an interesting role structurally. The point where the narrative joins the two women follows that, in terms of story order, covered by the second paragraph. G.'s appearance and discussion with Camille in lines 6-12 provoke the journey undertaken in lines 1-5. Here then is a formal anachronie - a disruption between the story-order and the narrative order.

Encounter: 'Gèrard Genette'.

It is important at this point to take the structural analysis (as generated by the commentary) a stage further - to work from an analysis which is based on 'story' to an analysis which focuses on the mechanics of the narrative itself. As Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan points out:

...story and narration may be seen as two metonymies of the text, the first evoking it through its narrative, the second through its production. (1)

Or, to put in another way, we have;

Events	Verbal representation	Act of telling
STORY	TEXT	NARRATION
events abstracted from text, chronology, paraphrase.	discourse	real author fictional narrator

Only one of these is directly available to the reader, we know 'story' and 'narration' only through 'text', however the 'text' is only made possible 'through' the two others.

We now have to turn our attention to 'production' and Genette provides the necessary tools for exploring the text through structures which control and influence our

reading. It is useful to consider Genette in comparison to Roland Barthes, whom we have previously invoked, a 'high' to a 'low' structuralist approach. We leave the 'life class' of Roland Barthes and enter the 'anatomy class' of Genette.

Before commencing, it should be remembered that Genette's approach is not to be considered as exclusive of the kind of wider interpretative analysis attempted elsewhere in this study. Wider analytical strategies are built upon the structural subframe, a fusion of micro and macro-text:

I must recognize that by seeking the specific  
I find the universal, and that by wishing to  
put theory at the service of criticism I put  
criticism, against my will, at the service of  
theory. This is the paradox of every poetics,  
and doubtless of every other activity of  
knowledge as well. (2)

It is along the contours of this paradox that important readings can be made. One of the central areas where the text of G. and Genette's theories crossover is around the notion of time. In Genette this is one of the primary sites of the analysis of narrative and principally we can observe two distinct time 'spans' within any novel - 'Story Time' and 'Narrative Time' (or 'pseudo-time' as Genette additionally calls it)(3). Genette quotes Christian Metz on

the subject of the relationship between these two time sequences - '...one of the functions of narrative is to invent one time scheme in terms of another time scheme' (4). We can, from this, consider the narrative of G. from the point of view of this time 'inversion'. We have identified such inversions as being central to the development of the novel, which centres around the question of the relationship between personal experience and social history. We can consider individual passages in terms of Genette's 'disruptions' of time, anachronies - both analeptic and proleptic, flashback and anticipation (5).

Let us consider the opening lines of the 'Camille' episode (G., page 212). These are proleptic and represent a disruption between story-order and text-order. They serve to replace the question 'What will happen next?' with 'How will it happen?' (6). The reader is well aware of the probable sexual encounter about to take place between G. and Camille. There is no need for any kind of narrative tension, therefore no need to emphasise the chronological sequence of the events. Instead, the narrative, by disrupting the chronological progression, places the emphasis on the causes, the origins and the context of the following scene. It is a 'historical' scene, we know what 'will happen', its future is foretold. The question is 'How can we trace the circumstances by which these events came about?'. Can we follow the quite complex procedures which finally led to G.'s and Camille's encounter?

This is why lines 1-5 appear, in terms of 'narrative

time' after lines 6-12. We can see that although the first five lines of this scene seem straightforward enough, they are in fact part of a more complex network of narrative relationships. However, slightly later in the scene, we have a more submerged and authentic example of this form of narrative disruption than the above rather simple one. This is the passage from lines 22-41 (page 213) where Camille considers G. once more within the context of her husband's death threat - and by doing so is forced to reconsider her own marriage and ultimately her own identity. What is interesting are the movements 'within time' that this introspection leads to. Let us examine the passage closely, after Genette's own commentary on Proust (7). First then, the scene itself, with annotations which will be discussed subsequently:

When Camille heard that her husband had threatened him with a gun<sup>A</sup>, she was reminded of her wedding day<sup>B</sup>. Her anger at the injustice of her husband's action, her shame on her husband's behalf<sup>C</sup>, her resentment at the fact that her husband had ignores her protestations and appeals<sup>D</sup>, made her acutely aware that she was his wife<sup>E</sup>, or, more accurately, that she had become his wife according to her own choice<sup>F</sup>. Up to this moment<sup>G</sup> being Madam Hennequin had seemed to be part of her natural life<sup>H</sup>; her marriage was part of the same continuity which led from childhood through young womanhood<sup>I</sup>

to the present<sup>J</sup>. There had been misunderstandings and disagreements between her and her husband<sup>K</sup>, but never before had she felt that the course of her life was out of control, that what was happening was unnatural to her<sup>L</sup>. She remembered how, at their wedding<sup>I</sup>, Maurice and she had knelt, isolated, alone, in front of the entire congregation, but side by side so that she could feel his warmth, in order to receive communion. He had knelt shyly and with what she then believed to be true humility<sup>M</sup>. Now she imagined him getting to his feet with a pistol in his hand and a look of blank unfeeling on his face<sup>N</sup>.

In this passage there are fourteen constituent elements or narrative sections (lettered accordingly), and there are two different time phases. If we extract these notations and, after Genette, order them into one formulaic line, we arrive at;

<      >      <      +      +      <  
A1(B2)C1(D2)E1(F2)G1(H2/I2)J1(K2)L1(M2)N1

Where:

1 = the 'present'      2= the 'past'

< = external analepsis      > = internal analepsis

+ = 'mixed' analepsis

We can immediately see from this that far from being a



haphazard approach, or a simple case of 'flashback', the narrator actually constructs a highly complex system of analeptic progression, forming a kind of 'zig-zag' which cuts across personal memory and the experience of the 'here and now', linking past and present in an intimate configuration. By so doing it displays the tactics of G. as a Don Juan, forcing the character Camille to go through a whole series of retrospective motions, making her confront and reconsider not just the present situation but the whole of her life which has led to this situation. This is the secret of G.'s 'success', gaining access to each woman's own sense of personal history and unsettling it at the foundations. This is the pattern also of G.'s own life, moving forward into the future only through a series of renegotiations with his past.

The passage is a model of how the novel operates as a whole - linking dream, memory and history with an existential sense of the 'moment'. As suggested throughout the novel, time is not a straightforward concept and in some sense can be seen as an ideological construct. Therefore the rupturing of that notion of time can be considered as a revolutionary act, whether it be through the 'fucking' of time by a Don Juan or through the 'stoppage' of time initiated by the barricades of the people on the streets of Milan. Berger tampers continuously with succession and chronology and this is clear from the formal devices he employs throughout the novel - flashback, authorial intrusion, historical account and so on. However

it is also the disruption of time within specific scenes, like the one outlined above, which undermines our expectations as readers with regard to chronological development. Although the example above is based around analepsis there are examples in the novel of prolepsis as well, for example when the narrator describes what happened to Nusa's brother Bojan after he escapes from Italy using G.'s passport (pp.338-339).

By employing these various devices Berger fulfils his Brechtian goal focusing the attention of the reader on the narrative itself, that is on 'production' as opposed to 'product', that is, the story. In order to achieve this Berger has to confront the Hericlitean metaphor of time as being like a river:

You cannot step twice into the same river, for  
other waters and yet other waters go ever flowing  
on. (9)

Berger has tackled this very notion directly in an essay entitled 'Drawn to that Moment' where he suggests that art has the power if not to reverse this process, then at least to temporarily halt it:

Disappearances opposed by assemblage. If, for  
convenience, one accepts the metaphor of time  
as a flow, a river, then the act of drawing,  
by driving upstream, achieves the stationary. (10)

The same claim could be made for narrative, at least narrative which consciously confronts our expectations of time. As Rimmon-Kenan points out, 'Time is, paradoxically, repetition within irreversible change' (11). It is this Viconian world which Berger tries to inhabit (or populate), a move towards a spatial world rather than one governed by the notion of time:

The relations which I perceive between things  
- and these often include causal and historical  
relations - tend to form in my mind a complex  
synchronic pattern. I see fields where others  
see chapters. And so I am forced to use another  
method to try to place and define events. A  
method which searches for co-ordinates extensively  
in space, rather than consequentially in time. I  
write in the spirit of a geometrician. ( G., p.152)

Berger achieves this narrative geometry by constantly shifting the 'story' into different temporal spheres and by using different forms of narrative focus. The time of 'reading the novel' becomes equally important as the 'text time' or 'story time', indeed that 'reading time' becomes the central measure, the other two in fact only representing pseudo-time. As Rimmon-Kenan points out, the text has:

...no other temporality than the one it metonymically derives from the process of reading. What discussions of text-time actually refer to is the linear (spatial) dispositions of linguistic segments in the continuum of the text. (12)

What we have to consider therefore is the 'second narrative', which exists alongside the 'first narrative' - the story of G. himself, and how this controls our 'production' of the text. Some of the ways in which Berger manipulates this second narrative is through accelerating and decelerating the text, using ellipsis (omission/maximum speed) and descriptive pause (minimum speed) (13). For example the narrator leaves out several years in the life of G. (maximum speed) and uses long passages to describe a city or a landscape or even the contents of a dream (minimum speed). Between these two 'speeds' are summary and scene, representing the compression of a given story period or using dialogue or narrative information to bring story and text together.

Thus although 'reading time' is fairly well fixed, that is by the linearity of linguistic signification (we could watch Berger's film Salamander backwards but we could not read G. backwards), the reader can be encouraged, or forced, to be conscious of the process of time itself. It is made explicit throughout the novel that time is not something which can be measured, only experienced, is

subjective rather than objective (see pages 60, 165 and 306 for example). Berger associates time with 'dark' and 'mystery' - the opposite of the rationalism with which the concept is normally dealt. 'Coincidences' are examples of moments when the false imposition of our social time-sense is ruptured and revealed to be the artificial construct which it is. However, art has a role in forcing us to reconsider our sense of time by bringing together a 'multitude of moments' (14). Berger has said that as painting is static 'because it encompasses time' (15), the novel is static because it includes within itself a multitude of time phases. The narrator positions the reader between the text and narration, making the reader, for the duration of the reading, like G.'s father Umberto 'lost in time' (G. p.17). As Berger states elsewhere:

A story is seen by its listener or reader through  
a lens. This lens is the secret of narration. In  
every story the lens is ground anew, ground  
between the temporal and the timeless. (16)

The lens in G., it could be argued, is G. himself; through him we move 'through' time freely, repetition, for example, constantly taking us back into the story, back into a personal history which slowly takes on the timelessness of myth - for example the repeated image of the sound of a clock:

Its promise of a seemingly endless time lulls  
him; but the way the ticking fills the time,  
whose passing it records, oppresses him.  
(p.55 and p.84).

The two moments are linked, both in terms of the boy's subconscious and also in the reader's 'version' of the narrative, forcing a kind of textual recollection similar to the memory/dream experience of the main character. Of course for the character G., it is sex which provides the main focus for the disruption of time, the repeated orgasm the central linking moment which ties together all the sexual encounters at once. Sexual desire is inextricably linked to our whole experience of time, it represents a way of arresting time and understanding it at one and the same moment:

At the moment of orgasm these two points in  
time, our beginning and our end, may seem to  
fuse into one. When this happens everything  
that lies between them, that is to say our  
whole life, becomes instantaneous. It is thus  
that I explain the protagonist of my book to  
myself. (pp. 158-159)

It could be said that G. embarks upon a journey which involves the creation of a new 'poetics' - a sexual poetics. If Genette can be seen to lead us to 'experience

the strangeness of the text' (17),, then G. could be considered as forcing us to reconsider the strangeness of sexuality and the experience of time which this enfolds. As Genette states:

the general is at the heart of the particular,  
and therefore (contrary to the common  
preconception) the knowable is at the heart of  
the mysterious. (18)

G.'s focus on the particular features of all the women he encounters sexually is part of the attempt to locate the 'general within the particular' and to penetrate the mysteriousness which surrounds sexuality and, as the narrator makes explicit, the experience of time itself. Like the Lacanian 'mirror stage', the sexual moment is a 'temporal dialectic', at once 'anticipatory and retroactive':

Not only does the self issue from it, but so  
does 'the body in bits and pieces'. This  
moment is the source not only for what follows  
but also for what precedes. It produces the  
future through anticipation and the past through  
retroaction. And yet it is itself a moment of  
self-delusion, of captivation by an illusory  
image. Both future and past are thus rooted in  
an illusion. (19)

G. is caught in a similar illusion, locating himself only in the sexual 'event', finding his identity only in the repetition of sexual desire, in the 'instantaneous' moment. When this moment is finally denied him or is overtaken by a stronger desire (the desire for revenge at the close of the book) then even this 'false' identity is lost and the 'time' between birth and death is finally destroyed. However, it is time to leave Genette's anatomy class, the body of G. in bits and pieces, and return to the open studio of the text.



Commentary: 'Camille'.

Lines 1-5:

The first five lines of this scene, forming a single, separate paragraph, set the background for the journey and encounter about to take place. It is a partially detailed picture of the two women travelling towards an unknown destination (although we know almost precisely where they are). Both women are named in full, formally, and place names are given precisely - 'Via al Calvario' (line 3), 'San Quirico' (line 4), 'Domodossola' (line 5). The paragraph is a kind of narrative map of reference, it 'plots' the characters in narrative space. Other details fill the picture - the carriage they ride in is 'dilapidated' (line 2), the carriage hood has 'holes in it' (line 2), and the driver wears a 'straw hat' (line 3). These descriptions are given in one long sentence (like a drawing formed by a single graphic line). The detailing of time and place forms an axis upon which the characters move, for although we do not know the time of day when we meet the two women, their distance from Domodossola, and therefore from G., is given in terms of time - 'ten minutes from the centre' (line 4). This axis is constructed in such detail precisely to emphasise the collapse of all geographical and temporal structures at the end of the scene. In a movement we have now come to expect, this detailing in time and space, is placed against the dissolving of these external reference points through the

sexual experience. The lovers 'fuck' in a clearing in a forest. It is a nameless place, one could not pinpoint it on the map, it exists almost only on an imaginative level. It reminds Camille of a 'Renaissance painting' (line 448); their encounter will be 'framed' by this setting which will isolate them from the continuum of 'history'. The scene's visual context will be highlighted by the figure of the voyeur at the end, the passing peasant (lines 537-540) who reinforces the contrast between the 'spectator' (here of course including the reader) and the total absorption of the couple themselves. The sexual encounter between G. and Camille frees them from the limitations of time (or so it will seem) - 'All are there in their own time and at the same time' (lines 525-526). The 'realism' of the opening paragraph is thus challenged by the 'modernist' dissolution of the final lines. 'Form' (the map) is overcome by 'formlessness' (the abstract painting).

This opening paragraph also has an interesting role structurally. The point where the narrative joins the two women follows that, in terms of story order, covered by the second paragraph. G.'s appearance and discussion with Camille in lines 6-12 provoke the journey undertaken in lines 1-5. Here then is a formal anachronie - a disruption between the story-order and the narrative order.

### Commentary.

Lines 7-8:

This is the start of the scene proper. The first words G. speaks, apart from an unspecified greeting, are:

Your husband with a pistol in his hand has  
just threatened to shoot me if I speak to  
you again. (lines 7-9)

Here is perhaps a narrative version of Ibsen's 'gun on the table'. The sentence certainly alerts us to the violent close of the episode with Camille, and 'jumping in front of', as it were, the first actual words G. uses (the unreported greeting) they emphasise the functionalist nature of these two paragraphs, which clearly are intended to 'set the scene' - in place and time. Yet both paragraphs do contain a symbolic element as well. In the first paragraph the carriage is described as 'dilapidated', with 'holes in its hood', emphasising the unlikely nature of the liaison for one such as Camille, who is both rich and sophisticated. The carriage also suggests a time 'gone by', the carriage is part of a world which belongs to the past. This will be contrasted directly by G.'s motor car, the engine replacing the horse (another recurring theme). Camille's passive journey to meet G., full of doubts and anxieties, will also be contrasted with her gradual assumption of control - helping start the car (symbolically

taking responsibility for her own actions). In addition, the mention of Monsieur Hennequin with a 'pistol in his hand' starts off a whole new chain of hand imagery (as described in the previous scenes) which runs right through, and forms a supporting structure for the scene as a whole.

It should be borne in mind that G.'s first encounter with Camille, in any intimately developed way, is in the glove shop in Domodossola (pp.190-192). Here G. offers to purchase a pair of long white leather gloves for Camille. The Italian shop owner blows into the gloves in order to allow Camille to try them on. For Camille the glove is so clearly a symbol of her own sexuality, a repressed and frightened sexuality which G. is offering to confront. The glove represents everything that is artificial and 'bloodless', the lifelessness of social conformity. It is the opposite of the sensual and the naked. This is suggested later in the scene, when on her way to meet G., Camille 'rests her gloved white hand on Mathilde's arm' (line 111). At this stage Camille is still 'dressed', she has accepted the clothing which is the symbol of her repressed life. Yet at the same time, the gloves, which G. himself has purchased, are a token of the opposite - the possibility of freedom. When G. and Camille are alone, G. kisses her arm between her glove and her sleeve. G. explicitly points towards the conflict between 'culture' and 'nature', between what is 'feminine' and what is 'female'. At each moment, with her friend Mathilde and with G., Camille betrays her emotions with an accompanying

gesture - touching Mathilde's arm or laying her hand upon G.'s hair. The hands are again at the centre of the sensual 'dialogue'.

With this in mind, Camille stares at her own hand, enjoying its smallness and delicacy. Her gaze serves to reassure her of her own self-image - how she wants to appear to G.. In this sense Camille is still focusing on an artificial image, on a false version of herself. Camille's satisfaction with the look of her leather-gloved hands for example, can be contrasted with G.'s description of her hands later in the scene - 'her thin rakelike hands with their bitten fingernails' (lines 238-239). This is the 'real' Camille, at least to G., this what makes her unique and 'locates' her. Camille's view of herself is part of the cultural load G. constantly attempts to evade, it is part of the self-idealisation (the viewed implicated in the act of viewing). Against this 'misreading' is placed the true interpretation of signs, of which the hand is represented as one of the most physically suggestive, and which forms a communicating link between the imaginative and the sensual. Earlier in the scene the narrator meditates on just this dialectic between the imagination and sensual experience. Imagining all the potential acts which Camille's hands might perform, the narrator reflects on the dissonance between these two 'realms', 'a moment of incongruity between two different systems of thinking' (p.180). The hand represents a meeting point of the imaginative and the sensual, it is both gesture and

symbol. Throughout the scene the hand joins these two 'systems', making a connection between the symbolic and the real.

It is also worth remembering that G.'s earliest sexual memory, when he was just five years old, is through his personal tutor, whose hands have a profound emotional effect:

Her hands on the keyboard. Pale hands with thin fingers, and very short nails. On Sundays she wears white gloves: when they walk back from the church he takes her hand. He is fascinated by the old fascination.. (p.48)

However it is the specifically dual nature of women's hands, both sensual and practical, which Berger returns to again and again. In his second novel The Foot of Clive, Berger introduces an Italian called Pepino who also experiences, like G., a vision of death. Later as he recovers in hospital, he remembers the experience and juxtaposes this with memories of his wife, triggered by her photograph. However it is her hands which are the most symbolic, the most suggestive features:

They are hands which, when they are still, curl up like babies' hands because they are so unaccustomed to holding nothing. She is only thirty yet they are already

worn with work. They are not, however, stiffly practical with the stiffness which the hands of hard-working English housewives usually acquire. Nor are they elegant, a bracket for the face. Nor innocent. They are equally used to holding Pepino's prick, a flask of wine, scraps of gossip, emotions from her own heart, peppers, the hands of other women in childbirth, and an iron. All this experience, somehow made visible in the hands, makes them at the same time very feminine. They appear almost as provocative, Renata's hands, as a bare breast or a flashed thigh. (1)

Clearly many themes from G. are already present in this novel written some ten years previously and it easy to presume that Renata is a kind of prototype for the female characters in G.. Women's hands somehow are capable of embodying both labour and love, they guide and direct even as they caress.

Camille has already compared G.'s hands with her own by reflecting on their size - G.'s are 'smaller than average' (line 86). The first thing G. does when Camille and Mathilde arrive is to kiss Camille's hand and then to take Mathilde by the arm, making a double gesture of sensual promise to one and of intimacy and complicity to

the other. Later, when G. has succeeded in being alone with Camille he takes her by the arm and feels the warmth of her flesh. Here the cross-over, from the sensual to the imaginative is explicitly achieved. At the close of the scene, when Camille has run from the car to await G. among the trees, the landscape itself echoes the hand imagery (lines 416-417), again driving home the inevitable connection between the imagined and the real. Here the landscape is a symbolic mirror-image of Camille's own experience. Beyond the trees, which like her own 'fists' are covered, clothed in 'fur', is the 'improbable' peaks, that is the improbability of Camille's own self. Beneath the landscape's blurred lines and impossible heights lie ribs of stone, real earth. Camille unclothed too becomes 'real', that is, goes beyond the idealising vision which chains her to all that is artificial, and frees her from the possession of 'the men she hates' (line 464). In the final lines of the scene, the hand becomes the focal centre for the sensual experience of the body, abolishing distance, in terms of both time and space, and bridging the gap between the imaginative and the experiential.

Lines 11-12:

This line is almost ironic in tone, suggesting the machinations of conventional 'romance' narratives. This mood of mock-adventurism is picked up by the two women as Camille tells Mathilde 'No, I do not feel serious' (line 21).



Lines 22-47:

The following paragraph is marked by the repeated use of 'her', placing Camille in the context of her social position, as a 'possession' of her husband and family. It is this idea of possession which G. will directly confront. (and see 'Genette' Encounter for detailed analysis)

Lines 75-93:

Here Camille, after the restructuring of her husband's image, begins to redraw her 'vision' of G. as well, from the 'hundreds of details' she has previously observed. This is a direct result of the 'threat' of G. being shot, and the image of the gun lurks at the back of the scene throughout. In the centre of this detailed picture is a vision of G.'s hands and this, as mentioned previously, serves to draw a connection between Camille, as she herself depicts herself, and G. who has become everything that her husband is not. As she discovers each 'physical characteristic eloquent of his nature' (lines 91-92) so Monsieur Hennequin's physicality becomes evidence of his culpability. There is also an interesting reminder of the 'mother' relationship, which runs, like an undercurrent, throughout the novel,

She found each physical characteristic eloquent  
of an aspect of his nature, as a mother may find  
the characteristics of her infant before it can

walk or sit up.

In other words, before Lacan's 'mirror stage', it is again a return to the body in 'bits and pieces'.

Lines 117-125:

Camille here visualises herself in two separate 'environments', the natural landscape through which she and her friend are travelling and the city streets of Paris which are her home. The context for this self-visualisation is pictorial - the painting she remembers of the girl on a swing in Montpellier - and it is significant that this visual 'source' is an enclosed garden, as opposed to the wildness of the wooded hills into which she will run later in the scene. This repeated dialectic between the wild and the cultivated returns us to the Beatrice episode where we saw Beatrice in the walled garden becoming entangled in the overgrown foliage. In the final episode of the novel, G. will first encounter Nusa in the 'garden of the Museo Lapidario'. Thus a complex pattern of association is built up throughout the novel between the opposing images of the 'garden' and nature in its wild and free state. The garden itself becomes an ambiguous metaphor for female sexuality, representing at one and the same time the 'containment' of women through cultivation and ownership by men and a secret place of sensuality and desire (we need only think of Chaucer's Merchant's Tale to see how old this concept is). The theme of the garden also links up with the

recurring use of flower imagery in relation to the sexual organs, the flower and the penis for example at the end of the 'Beatrice' scene (see 'Beatrice' commentary). Again at the end of the Camille scene, flower imagery is employed as a sexual metaphor (lines 551-553). At times these will form a metonymic pulse which drives the narrative, so that the 'naturalness' of the sexual encounters become indistinguishable from the sense of Nature itself.

In Berger's first novel, A Painter of our Time, we can detect a similar repeated use of flower and plant imagery. They are frequently used, for example, to suggest the idea of loss, both in personal terms, that is through relationships with those he has been close to, and in terms of his development as a painter. Taking the latter first, flowers are often used to signify a refusal or inability to attempt or achieve the lyrical or poetic:

In front of me is a rose in a tumbler. Susan brought it. As it unfolds, it turns like a hub of an air screw; each petal as it falls back appears to propel it a few degrees farther round - the petals as blades.

I cannot paint flower pieces, any more than I can paint dancers dancing or actors acting. The subject is too obviously there. (p.18)

For Janos to accept the flower he must first absorb it into his own aesthetic, he must link it with the idea of

progress, of power (the phrase 'dancers dancing' also links this moment with a quotation from Mallarmé in G., see page 176). This theme reappears later in the novel when Janos visits his friend Michel's exhibition and is confronted by the canvas entitled 'La Machine á fleurs'. Janos is unable to understand the painting for to him the machine cannot be considered 'remorseless'(2). However, this Lèger- like devotion to the machine, and the belief in its beneficial and harmonious relationship to man, does at the same time represent a turning away from the lyrical side of Janos's vision as an artist, and again is connected to the desire for rebirth and renewal:

Once this would have seemed the very summer of  
the night and the dawn a year's ending. Prosperine  
returning only to the underworld of her sleep,  
from which she could be brought back by a single  
kiss. Now, I would like to believe that it is  
only an interval between two working days. (3)

The poetically charged 'the very summer of the night' gives way to, and is defused by, the prosaic and austere 'working days'. The image of renewal is replaced by an image of simple repetition, again bringing to the fore the conflict between the relentlessness of the machine as opposed to the organic decay and reflowering of nature.

Linked to this is the representation of Janos's wife Diana, who is,, at least through the narrative voice of

'John', always associated with flowers:

When she had married Janos at twenty-five, she must have had that quality of English upper-class girls which is accurately called flower-like, but derives, as even in Elizabethan poetry, from laid out lawns and beds tended by whole teams of gardeners. (4)

The image of the secluded garden is developed to suggest a whole outside world kept at bay, to imply a naivety which is a form of ruthlessness.

On Janos's wall is a reproduction, amongst others of symbolic importance for the novel, of Poussin's 'The Court of Flora' and the resemblance of Diana to the figure of Flora in this painting is marked:

Her breasts press against the printed flowers on her dress. Her always clean arms are white. Her innocent sense of order, unlike a child's, promises security. Her nakedness assures safety.

(5)

In Poussin's painting Flora dances in a summer garden while scenes of sorrow are enacted around her. Similarly, Diana is to Janos a pure and innocent figure from another 'world'. In Janos's old world his first wife was described as 'lean', here Diana would be described as 'slim'.

In the difference between those two words  
lay a little of the difference between the  
Europe from which Janos had fled and the  
English garden Diana had walked out of. I  
imagine that it was Diana's simplicity  
that struck him. She was in fact a highly  
complex character; but she had witnessed  
and experienced little that was fatal, and  
the fatal complicates as does nothing else. (6)

So as Ajax falls upon his own sword, Hyacinthus grasps his  
mortal wound and Adonis bears his bloodied leg, Flora  
dances, innocently, with her putti. Diana is not Flora, but  
is part of the innocence and optimism which Janos still had  
some reserve of when he first came to England. His life in  
the West comes increasingly to resemble a kind of secluded  
garden, outside the walls of which friends are executed,  
comrades slain and hopes remorselessly crushed. Janos is  
caught between two worlds and his sense of guilt at not  
returning to Hungary grows with the seasons. The garden  
becomes the symbolic centre for Janos's emotional and  
political sense of conflict. We are reminded of Brecht's  
own sense of aesthetic anguish:

Inside me contend  
Delight at the apple in blossom  
And horror at the house-painter's speeches.  
But only the second

Drives me to my desk. (7)

The lifeblood of Janos's art is the political struggle, without which his inspiration, his creative energy will wither and die. For G. the garden represents a false enclosure - a trap in which sexuality and sensual experience is pruned and trained into grotesque and unnatural shapes. The garden is the antithesis of the real and the free. G's quest, in part, is to lead sexual desire out of the garden and back into nature. Beatrice was the symbolic figure trapped in the garden, bound in by its walls, and for G. she will always be the image he strives to free.

Lines 126-133:

The meeting first takes place outside the church, bringing together several themes at once - the lovers' 'tryst' is in sharp contrast to Camille's memory of her own marriage ceremony. On this occasion, however, the church is locked and it is the surrounding woods which will form the setting for the couples' 'joining together'. The paragraph is highly pictorial in style - details of movement supply the gaps in the narrative - the driver lies down in the long grass, the two women point their umbrellas in opposite directions. We cannot help but think here of Lawrence's Women in Love, where he describes Ursula and Gudren on their way to the Criches 'water-party', both sisters wearing white dresses but distinguished by their sashes and

hat bands. This close attention to details of dress heralds, in both novels, an immanent casting off of such cultural artefacts, and immersion into the natural, physical world. Similarly, there is the same juxtaposition of themes in both the Lawrence and the Berger, such as: love/ death, beds/ gravestones, union/ separation.

Lines 134-194:

It is clear from G.'s actions that the meeting has been carefully planned and there is the same sense of 'cunning' which had marked him out as a seducer earlier in the novel with Leonie. G.'s behaviour is pre-meditated, confirming his identity as a Don Juan. He at once convinces Mathilda of the need to be left alone with Camille and at the same time provokes Camille into wishing to speak to G. herself. This 'stratagem' succeeds - Camille leaves her companion to be alone with G. and in so doing moves from the carriage to the motor car, from one world to another, from the slow but predictable world of her husband Monsieur Hennequinn to the strange, mechanistic, modern world which G. represents. It is the same 'romance of the modern' which Chavez represented, Chavez who is the hero of a new age. G. also represents this new age, and this is part of the 'liberation' he offers. It is also the same mixture of power and uncertainty Camille finds in the poetry of Mallarmé. G. has already discussed the fairground roundabout with Monsieur Hennequin, 'le petite chaise' as he refers to them, using this as a sexual metaphor -



couples joined briefly together in one timeless moment, fleetingly freed from the constraints of a repressed society (and again there is a link with Chavez, with the idea of defying gravity). Now the car becomes the focus of this charge, this power of the new. The carriage Camille and her friend arrived in was explicitly described in terms of its age and its clumsiness:

...a dilapidated carriage (lines 1-2))

...a hood with holes in it (line 2)

...dusty leather upholstery (lines 110-111)

...crookedly suspended over its back axle (line 191)

Compare this with the description of G.'s car, the same car which G. had used to drive Monsieur Hennequin and his friends out into the mountains earlier, with its 'brass lamps dazzling in the sun' (line 363). The car will later in the scene provide the opportunity for Camille to demonstrate her independence, her own will, as she takes over the controls to start the engine. The noise of the throbbing engine and the shaking of the car create the complete antithesis to the silence and stillness of the surrounding landscape. Instead the car generates its own environment, its 'own cool breeze' (line 363). The car alters the landscape it passes through, each view has never been seen quite like this before. As Chavez's flight

altered the image of the very Alps themselves, changing human geography as much as history, so G.'s car alters Camille's world, destroying the old sureties, the old rules and perspectives. The landscape caught between the fast-moving gaps between the trees creates, 'the setting for their conspiracy' (line 368). We are forced to think of Lawrence and the 'Excuse' chapter in Women in Love, where the motor-car again is the creator of a new environment, allowing the lovers to escape to a new world. The speed of the car drives a wedge between the passengers and the 'real' world:

After a few hours of driving across the  
countryside, you feel you have left behind more  
than the towns and villages you've been through.  
You've left behind certain familiar constraints.  
You feel less terrestrial than when you set out.(8)

Berger is here talking about the experience of riding a motorcycle, however the meaning is the same for Camille's experience in G.'s car. Her husband, a successful business man, is a 'man of the world'; the man she finds herself alone with now is in the real sense 'other worldly' and there is now no limitation, no constraint, on what might happen between them. G.'s ability make his liaisons 'remarkable' is the key to his success as a Don Juan.

Lines 195-213:

Again the primacy of the visual, through the 'look' and the expression of the eyes, is affirmed here. In this case the look is 'expressionless' in that it does not convey meaning readily, it does not encourage interpretation. Like Beatrice's look earlier in the novel, this look, which is common to both men and women, represents a moment of complete self-knowledge and self-announcement. Although the narrator clearly believes that such a moment exists for both sexes, it is, he implies, far more rarely seen in men. This suggests that for all the difficulties encountered by women, as described, for example, in Berger's Ways of Seeing and in the passage 'A Situation of Women' in G. itself, that women still have a more ready access to such moments of self-knowledge, that is, are able to 'open up' to experience so fully that the outward skin of a socially constructed self is completely destroyed. This is reaffirmed by the reference to 'romantic poets', who through this very look felt they had discovered 'a path straight to a woman's soul' (lines 205-206). However the narrator emphasises that this look in fact leads the observer nowhere, it prevents penetration, disclosure, rather than permits it, because it represents a totality, the totality of 'I', 'like a heliotrope declaring itself blue' (line 211). This is part of Berger's phenomenology of the senses, all we have is what we see. Camille's look curtails further examination or analysis, it closes the door on the standard avenues of cultural exchange. Such looks, 'encourage neither discourse

nor exchange' (line 212). It is a non-literary look, its medium is not words. Here it suggests a moment between Camille and G. which forms a kind of contract, an agreement to move beyond 'meaning' into feeling, moving beyond a barren romanticism to the ambiguity, but potentially limitless freedom, of Mallarmé's verse.

214-225:

G., by negotiating his way into a 'private' meeting with Camille has already achieved his initial goal, to be 'alone with a woman' (line 214). His machinations and Juan-like manouevering is not aimed, at least initially, at sexual encounter. Rather that is the outcome of this being alone, the natural result of the isolation from all cultural and social repression. It is 'social absence' which G. desires, for only then does a woman come truly into 'focus', that is presents her real self. It is difficult, again, not to be reminded of Women in Love and the kind of love Birkin searches for from Ursula, a love which craves the 'golden light' beyond female ego, an ego which is merely the reflection of societies expectations and demands. As with G., Birkin feels that any true relationship, any real meeting of a man and a woman, must occur 'beyond the sound of words' (9). In that silent place, in utter isolation, the lovers can meet truly naked and exposed, yet at the same time equally empowered. The symbolic importance of 'looking' is highlighted throughout the passage:

...her vision of his appearance altered. (line 76)  
The gaze of his eyes were insistent. (lines 88-89)  
She remembered a painting she once saw..(line 120)  
There is a look... (line 195)  
..he felt she was envisaged... (lines 233-234)  
She could see his powerful head... (line 328)  
..Camille has chosen a setting which reminds her  
of some Renaissance painting.. (lines 447-448)  
..the mirrors which are falsely impartial...  
(lines 471-472)

Finally it is significant that the scene includes at the very end a passive observer in the shape of a peasant who himself unobserved, spies the two lovers. This creates a sense of perspective, bringing the reader him or herself into the role of observer. For there is a distinction in the passage between real seeing and 'false' seeing. Camille is clearly still 'picturing herself' right up to the point of the sexual encounter, envisaging herself in the specific context of a 'Renaissance painting'. However the real 'crime' of 'false' looking, of looking in 'bad faith', is thrown at the reader. Of Camille the narrator states:

we are liable to picture her as having the body  
of a goddess, as painted by Titian.  
(lines 448-450)

It is we, as readers, who are likely to misconceive the

image of Camille, imaginatively producing a 'Titian-like' form to complete the scene. The narrator is keen therefore, at this point, to underline that Camille is in fact the opposite of this kind of vision. Like the peasant who watches the encounter from the safety of the trees, the reader only has a partial view of the encounter, we are essentially voyeurs. What is only partially glimpsed we complete with our own imaginations. The peasant's 'vision' combines the two 'ways of seeing', the idealistic and the realistic. The statue's idealised aesthetic beauty is put in sharp antithesis to the physical realism of the leg in its stocking. Similarly, the reader has two viewpoints of the encounter, the romantic image of the passionate lovers and the sensual, 'down to earth' nature of the actual sexual meeting. Both are in a sense constructs, they take place less in the passage itself than in the mind of the reader. It is this discrepancy between the events on the page and the construction of them in the reader's own imagination which Berger here emphasises.

Lines 226-244:

Being alone here not only means 'without other company' but being in a position where the 'other' can be recognised in all their singularity. G. at last feels that he perceives Camille's true nature. She is 'revealed' in both time and place.

Lines 246-269:

Here G. describes Camille's voice as being like a 'Cicada', who in legend 'are the souls of poets' (line 248). This links us with the narrator's reference to 'Romantic poets' earlier in the scene and introduces another central theme of the passage as a whole - that is, language. The narrator has already suggested that both 'sight' and 'vision' are partial, relative and obscure, open to mystification and misrepresentation. Now language itself is seen to be even less reliable, less trustworthy in conveying reality (this was discussed in detail in the 'Beatrice' commentary). Words will always betray the meaning and the significance of the sexual act. For example, Camille's response to G. is to remind him of the 'foolish note' (line 255) he wrote to her and which her husband discovered. G.'s feelings, when committed to language, become problematical and dangerous. For Camille, G.'s written expression of love suggests not the reality of the moment the couple find themselves in, not the moment towards which G. is leading them, but rather towards further literature, towards Mallarmé:

...vous mentez, Ô fleur nue  
De mes lèvres" (lines 265-266)

The flower, which has been used by the narrator throughout the novel to signify sexuality, in its directness and freshness, is here beautifully subverted in Mallarmé's verse - the flower becomes the lie, the lie which is

language itself. The world of language is primarily a fictional one, words signify other words, whereas to 'look' , and to an even greater extent to 'touch' leads directly back to the experiential source.

Lines 270-292:

In this beautifully ambiguous passage, the narrator describes the gravestones in the churchyard where G. and Camille walk, and notes the way in which some letters and words are more quickly worn by the elements than others. Writing is thus further seen as a victim of time. Language is not the timeless and universal system it is thought to be, it constantly changes, appearances become defaced, parts disappear, altering the original meaning for ever. All writing is a kind of inscription and its meaning will fade. Here the curved lines maintain whilst the straight lines fade. G. and Camille, ('G' and 'C'), will outlast Monsieur Hennequin ('H'). In this sense the gravestones represent a symbol of hope for the lovers, that their love is not one of surface appearances only, but is cut deeper into the fabric of history. It is prophetic in a formal sense also, connecting to a moment near the end of the novel where G. first meets Nusa in 'Hölderlin's garden' (p.246), which actually belongs to the "Museo Lapidario" (p.246). Here again the couple find themselves surrounded by tombs and gravestones. G.'s future is written here he will die by the end of the novel, however he comes to the garden in defiance of that fate, not in slavery to it. What



is said of him, written about him, told of him is of no consequence, all that matters is how he feels. Through the image of the fading gravestone inscriptions, Berger accosts language, accuses it openly of mystification and deceit. As we shall see at the end of the novel, the author is finally forced into one form of expression only, the one form which will not lie, will not force an impossible resolution on the narrative, and that is silence.

Lines 287-288:

Camille refers here to a comment made by G. at the dinner party given by her husband earlier in the novel, when G. describes the 'petites chaises' of the fairground, which was used as a sexual metaphor to describe a moment of physical freedom resulting from the abandonment of social constraints (p.185) and also picks up the image Camille recalls to herself in this scene, of a girl on a swing in a garden (line 121). In the first scene Camille did not believe that life was like the swing G. described and yet now the swing has become a kind of symbol of the freedom and innocence which this extraordinary encounter has created. This is a sign of G.'s growing influence, he is influencing not only her behaviour but her very imagination, perhaps the key metamorphosis which G. is the 'trigger' for. The image of the swing also forms a link to an episode far earlier in the novel, to the 'Beatrice' scene, where there is a further connection with the image of 'swinging', as the couple join hands and 'swing' towards

the bed (p.119). The image of the 'swing' is a repeated metaphor for sexual attraction and initiation. Again a link is made with Chavez, and with the experience of flight. G. puts himself between the object of his desire and gravity, he makes the encounter 'extraterrestrial'. As we have seen, in the 'Leonie' section a similar experience is described, where G. places his hand 'between her and gravity' (p.150). Here the same sensation of the 'swing' is described, the gaining of lightness, of freedom from the ground. As in Kundera's novel, The Unbearable Lightness of Being this 'lightness' is the 'gift' of an unfettered sexuality. To be weightless is to find oneself in a higher sphere of experience.

Line 347:

Camille is under no illusion that G. represents something entirely new and even dangerous. What he offers is beyond all the expectations and beliefs which have decided the course of her life so far. Because G. represents something so utterly new he himself is beyond conventional moral judgement. He cannot be explained within, or encompassed by, the 'structure of feeling' in which Camille is bound. Like Mallarmé, it is G.'s position in time, his unique position within history, which makes him significant and important, not any personal characteristics he may possess:

If we could all live a thousand years, says G.,

we would each, at least once during that period, be considered as a genius. Not because of our great age, but because one of our gifts or aptitudes, however slight in itself, would coincide with what people at that particular moment took to be the mark of genius. (p.177)

Just as Chavez is made 'immortal' by his crossing of the Alps (he will 'go down' in history), so too is Mallarmé 'immortal', one of the 'gods' of the pantheon. However this pantheon is one which has its sole context 'within' history, all the achievements are there courtesy of their place in time. G. too owes his special place to his marking of history, he represents something which can be taken for the 'new'. G. does not believe in the 'future' because in a sense he is the future (p.265). However Mallarmé is significant for another reason, and that is clearly his role as a poet. Here he represents the ambiguity of language itself and the falsity of personal identity:

A woman dancer...is not a woman who dances...  
(p.176)

This idea is echoed by the narrator's own poem on page 188. We create what we see. If we deny the hegemony of our imagination we allow the visible its true place. What makes a thing unique is not what it possesses in isolation but what it represents in relation to everything else. As with

the 'genius' or the 'hero' where immortality is the result of a special place in history, so the world of perception only bears the exceptional as part of the overall 'picture'. Nothing can be unique in isolation. Like Magritte's "mystère" which reminds us of the alienation beneath the surface image, Berger constantly reminds us that what we are reading is a construct, a representation. Words confuse and mystify, we cannot trust our imaginations.

Lines 354-374:

Here 'indifference', generally held to be a negative term or description, becomes a positive element in G.'s character. It is this very indifference which serves to expose the doubts and contradictions integral to Camille's own self-image. The 'indifference' which G. displays (an indifference to her social self in comparison to his sharp interest in her individual self) is contrasted to the 'love' which Camille feels for her husband and family - a love which defines her notion of self. She 'enacts' a person called 'Camille'. As an individual she has literally been 'called into being'. In a patriarchal society the husband is the nomenclator, and the name he bestows decides the woman's function, delimits her role. For G., names are an integral part of cultural repression (note his own anonymity). During his first sexual encounter G. contemplates how intimacy, intimacy of an illicit and subversive nature, draws attention to this very component

of repressive society; he discovers that to 'unlearn' someone's name is to unmask them. When he meets Camille later to the novel he decides that he shall call her 'Camomille' (p.178), and imaginatively she undergoes a metamorphosis from a representative woman (as wife and mother) into a plant, just as he removes her from the closed and inhibiting rooms of her husbands apartment to the woods where their encounter will take place. Both women, Beatrice and Camille, had become a form of myth in their 'old' life, and G. intervenes by offering a moment of historical reality -this moment, here and now. This change of name may only be 'the difference of a syllable' (p.223) but it is a difference which the narrator proposes defines true knowledge of self from an erroneous perception of self.

Lines 395-407:

Here the narrator again makes a direct intrusion into the narrative, this time entering the dialogue itself - fracturing the scene and emphasising the difficulty of knowing who is addressing the reader. For example who is speaking these lines? Is it the fictional narrator, Berger, the reader, Camille herself perhaps? Relationships, all relationships, are creative ventures, constructed from the images of those we encounter, however this does not mean that we therefore 'know' them fully - we can never possess them in that way. The words do not say 'I know all about you for I created you'. Even the author's knowledge is

partial. It is that which is absent which is significant, what we do not know, or do not understand which generates true signification. *Mystère*.

Lines 420-438:

The infinite nature of each individual is explored in Camille's internal dialogue. She is not, she tells herself, giving to G. the 'self' which belongs to her - 'Not the self of mine' (line 420). This does not mean that she is withholding a part of herself, a part which she believes is the 'real' part, but rather that she has many parts, many images and 'realities'. Nor would the 'real' Camille be found by adding all the various parts together. We see others 'whole' in the same way that we see ourselves as something unified and complete, that is through a kind of Lacanian misprision - we mistake the parts for the whole, the body in bits and pieces is continually reassembled in a mistaken attempt to create a unitary picture. All such pictures are temporary however. What a relationship defines is not personal identity but a particular moment. Sex, like all physical and sensual experience is a historical event and not purely an individual one.

Lines 454-463:

This mixture of expectation and surprise is common to all sexual moments and it is this internal opposition which sets such moments apart, outside time. The moment is comparable to a birth - the surprise at life co-existing

with an acceptance of its inevitability. Later in the novel the emphasis will shift to images of death (the death which has haunted the novel since the 'Roman Girl' episode) but the same antithesis between expectation and surprise remains in place (see page 348). G. certainly 'knows' of his death, understands its inevitability and has no fear of it, yet he is still surprised when it finally comes to him.

Lines 463-466:

Here Camille's clothes represent the rejected influence of her husband and of her position as both wife and mother. They also represent the men who are the targets of G.'s disgust. The clothes are not as culturally loaded for Camille herself. To Camille they represent another possible self. She does not discard them all, she chooses what to lose and what to keep, what to conceal and what to present. To G. clothes are part of a woman's vanity - they are part of the woman's image of herself. The woman inside such clothes is inert, bloodless, like the glove the woman in the shop blows into earlier in the novel (p.191).

Lines 475-540:

At the beginning of the final encounter Camille imagines herself in a Renaissance setting (line 448), she 'pictures herself' in an imaginary scene borrowed from paintings she has seen. Now she, 'sees herself as a dryad' (line 476) and imagines G. as a 'goat' (line 481). These however are the last moments of such 'picturing' and the imagination is

soon taken over by the intensity of the physical experience itself. The experiential again supersedes the imaginative, Camille cannot 'imagine anything from a distance' (line 486). 'Distance' is meant here in terms of both perception and imagination; the sexual moment banishes the distraction of the imagination which no longer has any rule, and at the same time focuses the senses on the intimate, to the extent that the individual 'becomes' what they sense. As in the 'Beatrice' scene, where Beatrice became simply 'cunt' (p.122) so Camille becomes a 'penis'. This is underlined by a line drawing of a penis, this time with a crude rendering of lips and an eye; this is Camille 'made flesh in another' (lines 515-516). Instead of the constantly shifting representations of personality which are created in the imagination between language and the act of looking, the sexual moment 'embodies' the other, takes it into itself and thereby guarantees a temporary unity.

At line 519 we return to the 'safety' of the sexual verb "fuck", 'safe' because only through 'swearing' can the immediacy of the sexual moment be in any real way conveyed (see 'Encounter: Fuck' earlier). The sexual encounter, as the above verb proclaims, cannot be described in ordinary, literary, language. The only option available to the author is to emphasise the temporary unity of the moment and the narrator does this in two ways - by attempting to describe this moment in detail, relying on a modernist fracturing of the narrative to imply the bringing together of the disparate perceptions which make up any



image and secondly, by formally bringing together different moments in the novel itself. This he does through repetition. Lines 531 to 535 are an exact repetition of the words which appear towards the end of the 'Beatrice' scene (p.128). This repetition links the two events in narrative time, bringing Beatrice and Camille together in the 'history' of the novel. That quality of 'firstness' which the narrator explores in the 'Beatrice' scene is found to be repeatable through sexual experience. The same kind of 'drawing together' will occur at the end of the novel when G. begins to discover that his memories are all becoming inseparable. The "Roman girl" becomes identical with Nusa as G.'s mind becomes a kind of 'hall of mirrors' (p.332). By bringing together identical passages of writing at various moments in the book the author builds up a similar narrative 'hall of mirrors', until at the end of the story we begin to see fractured images of the novel as a whole, reflecting crazily like the surface of the sea into which G. will eventually disappear.

Lines 541-553:

The scene ends with what is in effect a short poem, even if this time it is not announced as such. This poem is a response to the final challenge of finding a true representation of sensual experience, finding a medium through which to depict the 'truth' of a moment in time. The pictured image which the narrative creates must be dissolved, or at least challenged by a narrative

language which will, by its very nature, confuse and render opaque. It is too obvious, and reductive, to simply call the style 'cubist', however this does convey the effect of the poem, the multiple images and perspectives which the author creates. It ends again with a thematic repetition, evoking flower imagery for the body sexual:

The blood-vessel was lifted up in the lock of  
your flowers. (line 553)

Both male and female sexual organs are again compared to flowers. As we have seen, this is a recurrent theme not only in this novel but in Berger's work generally. In Art and Revolution Berger describes Neizvestny's sculpture 'Adam' thus:

He is like a magnolia tree in bud: his crossed  
arms like a flower opening. And yet at the same  
time he has more of the fragility of a flower.  
(10)

Here Berger's final sexual 'poem' portrays a similar balance between the solid physicality of the sexual encounter, and its inevitable evanescence.

## Reading

I think we can take Foucault's point here that there is a history of sexuality and that sexuality is as open to change and development as any other culturally generated activity. Anyway, one could argue that sex is not 'mysterious' or 'spiritual' at all, but rather represents the moment when we drop out of human history and into biological materialism. However, Camille's comment about not being 'the sum of her parts' seems to me a kind of Barthesian reading of sexuality. Just as there are no texts, only relationships between texts, so there are no individual 'selves', only relationships between possible selves. Each encounter with an 'other' defines yet another possible self. This is why G. increasingly begins to question his own sense of self towards the end of the novel and he does this by reflecting on his previous encounters. For it is only by juxtaposing his past selves with his knowledge of himself now, his memories with his current experience, that he can gain any real sense of who he is not (not who he is - for that would be to fall into the trap of the idealised image of the unified self). I think I am actually trying to say something about myself - that there are no readings, only relationships between readings (actual and possible). How I respond to the text at this particular moment, only has meaning in terms of all my earlier responses. In other words, I am attempting to deny the idealised image of the unified critical 'self'.

Lines 1-3:

'It was a morning of early summer...'

This final scene of the novel begins with the image of the gradual coalescence of the sky and the sea one morning in early summer. It signifies the revoking of antagonistic and antithetical positions, a temporary equilibrium which will be echoed and balanced by the ultimate fusion of fire and water in the final lines. The merging of sea and sky forms a uniform backdrop for the day's coming events, which will eventually close with the horizon as final curtain.

As if to confirm the theatrical (and therefore artificial) nature of this closing scene, the opening two lines place the action securely at the beginning of the day, setting a well defined time order - a summer morning, while the scene ends at sunset. Thus the episode operates within an externally fixed time-scale, with a chronological unity which the formal devices of the narrative itself will seek to undermine, through the invoking and questioning of the concepts of history and memory. Again we are brought face to face with a central thematic antithesis - historical time and time as experienced by the individual consciousness. Here there are no easy periods of homeostasis, no natural resolving of polar opposites.

Thus we start with the antithesis of morning and evening, light and dark, beginning and ending, life and

death. Lines 2-3 provide the vital thematic link:

The evening seems a lifetime away.

This operates as a kind of 'amorce' (see 'Genette' Encounter) and anticipates the 'tragic' conclusion. More than this, the term 'lifetime' implies not only the passing and ending of an individual life but also the reliving of a past life. In the final scenes G. will relive moments from his life, through memory and dream, as Don Juan also witnessed his past self and past loves before being carried off to hell. At the same time the narrative will formally return, through the repetition of themes, symbols and specific phrases, to earlier moments in the novel. The narrator forces us to reread our own reading, asking us to reconsider, at this final moment, when our attention is drawn towards closure, the very nature of the novel and its meanings.

Generally, the first two paragraphs are 'dialectical' and stand in dramatic contrast to each other. The first is 'lyrical' in tone whilst the second denies the lyrical, refuses that novelistic excess which attempts to universalise experience. This is achieved by the change of tone and subject, as the two paragraphs link two of the alternative narratives present in the novel - the personal narrative of G. and the history of the First World War. The inappropriateness of the lyrical narrative, which seeks to ignore the social and historical conditions within which the

personal and individual 'drama' is played out, is underlined by the language used in the second paragraph which concludes, 'Its a fucking fine day to croak.' (13-14). This line does several things; it links up with the use of 'fuck' as a radical term - implying a break with novelistic decorum or moral propriety, a form of narrative 'shock' -and with the theme of sex as representing the celebration and ultimate fulfilment. However it also works to deny the lyric at this specific point through its use of the vernacular 'to croak' - that is, to die. This line is ironic and seeks to encounter the notion of 'heroic death' thereby anticipating the end of the novel itself. We think of Brecht in his exile years continually countering the lyric with the political and the historical, countering specifically the false language of poetry.

COLOUR	Myth/Symbol	IMAGE (line)
Blue	Jupiter augury/ fate/ eternity	sea (3), sky (3,7,367)
Red	Mars war/ martyrdom	cherries (69), raw steak (128,133), blood (129, 131,270,272,275,279), fire (431,432,493,494, 499,500,501,502,504,512, 523)
White	Diana - the moon,fertility, purity, hope, women,hunting	scalp (127,164), shoulders (140), milk (357,358,359, 360,361,367,582), berries (361), shirt (531), light (587)
Pink	denoting health	cheeks (130), ear (356)
Black	Saturn time,harvest	flag (153), bell (292) dark/lead sea (597)

devouring  
evil,error  
death,grief

Silver            linked with            mirror/sea (593,596)  
the moon or  
Diana

We can now go through the most significant of these colours in more detail. We shall take blue first. As we have seen, blue is the linking colour between the two simultaneous events in the final scene - the events in Trieste and on the battlefields of France. Blue is also connected to the sea at the end of the novel, mixed now however with black to reflect its part in the 'hero's' death. Blue has a thematic link stretching further back into the novel. The blue sky for example, refers to scenes which include two of G.'s early lovers - Beatrice and Leonie. Beatrice's experiences in Africa with her husband are described under the continued presence of a harsh blue sky:

The frayed ostrich feathers above her,  
shaking as the Zulu between the shafts ran,  
appeared to brush the blue sky as though it  
were a tangible, painted surface. (p.108)

They passed a company of marching British



soldiers. Under the blue sky, in front of the low, shack-like hastily constructed buildings, along the unmysterious absolutely straight streets, each platoon looked like a box in which twenty or thirty men were helplessly vibrating. (p.108)

Beatrice's disorientation, her presentiment that something is wrong, without knowing precisely what, is linked to that blue sky and the blazing hot sun. It is the sky's strangeness which makes it a focus for presentiments of a void lying beyond the world of her senses. For Leonie on the other hand, the blue sky represents the familiar, against which the unfamiliar and unexpected can take place:

Out of the window she could see the sky above the mountains, September blue, familiar as the colour of a plate. (p.148)

The sky here represents the familiar world within which her encounter with the unfamiliar, with G., takes place. In both scenes however the sky represents a hopeful stage in the novel, a stage in which there is still 'time', in which unlooked for events can still take place. In the 'Leonie' scene, Chavez is still in flight, literally part of that blue sky, a symbolic figure, a mythological augur of providence and good faith. Both women are thus connected with the final scenes, re-invoked through the repeated use

of the colour blue, whilst G. is bombarded with memories and images from his past life. In his apartment in Trieste he sees from his window a woman with a blue towel (p.276) and such moments subliminally recall the earlier women from the novel. Interestingly Camille is not connected in this way. However her 'affair' with G. takes place deep in a wood on an autumn's day, so the image of the blue sky would be inappropriate. Yet this moment also marks a turning point in G.'s affairs, and in our opinion of him as readers. In this scene we see G. for the first time acting callously, and playing the part of the Don Juan 'for real'. We begin to realise that there is limited time for this character, his 'change' in behaviour, like some tragic flaw, heralding his downfall. We are also literally aware of the pressing of time as at this point we are almost two thirds of the way through the book. However a far more significant and important thematic link is found at page sixty one, the moment when G. as a young boy is knocked from his horse and is badly injured:

When he hit the ground, curtains of whole  
fields were drawn back to reveal the blue  
sky without any land but him beneath it.

The boy comes 'face to face' with the sky and in a sense with his own mortality. At the same time he comprehends some kind of eternity in the infinite mass of the sky above him. It is this blue which echoes most loudly in the final

scene - the blue sky which looks down on the injured and dying on the battlefields and on G. as he moves towards his own death. Finally we are met with the blue/black of the sea which swallows him up, the sea which stretches infinitely to the horizon.

The second colour of great significance throughout the novel is red, which, as we have noted, signifies war and martyrdom, and is represented by the god Mars. The most significant reference to the colour red is during the 'Two Men' scene (pp.55-59). This also involves a dramatic inversion of the image of the sky. For here the setting for the killing of the horse is a forest beneath a 'red sky' (p.55). This is clearly most portentous as it immediately conveys the idea of destruction, of violence and of innocent blood. The killing of the horse, which is an evil and mysteriously symbolic event, has a lasting effect on the young boy, and is also recalled in the final scene by the linking of the smell of paraffin (p.58 and p.346). The blood on the hand of one of the men (p.58) will be echoed by the lengthy references to blood, pouring down a symbolic bayoneted body (p.340). Mars signifies thieves and robbers, people of the night and darkness, the same shadowy figures who kill the horse in front of the boy. Mars also represents war and conflict, and this is the theme which runs concurrently with G.'s narrative throughout the novel. G. is inextricably caught up in the struggle between the individual and the social, the personal and the political, and by stepping over the threshold from one to the other in

this final scene, he finally meets, and accepts, his own death.

White is also used throughout the novel as a thematic linking device. In the final scene we see it used to represent the alternative to war and destruction, signified as we have seen by the colour red (the wine staining G.'s conspicuously white shirt (line 531) neatly brings the two together in a dramatic and highly visual juxtaposition - G. is literally 'marked', set aside, by the sign of conflict and this indicates that there can be no avoidance of the violence to come). White can be taken to signify Diana, the moon goddess, and is generally associated with women - often suggesting purity and/or hope. In the 'Nusa' scene it is indeed linked with the female body - Nusa's white scalp (lines 127 and 164) and her shoulders (line 140). Here again the 'sign' of violence is juxtaposed - with two 'raised weals' (140) starkly standing out against the white of her flesh. It also represents sexual experience through the dream/memory sequence on page 342. Here the whiteness of the milk becomes a kind of screen upon which other visions or signs appear, finally replacing the red of blood in a symbolic transference, flowing down to be caught in pubic hair (compare lines 276 and 361).

However there is another line of white imagery 'competing' (and sometimes complementing) the sexual or physical one. This is the use of white to suggest the idea of oblivion, of absence. White is taken here to represent the 'void' - the space where all emotion and feeling is

abandoned, where all other colours have been drained away. This sense of the void is not a negative one, it is linked with the sense of hope in that it represents the dissolving of all need to act, for all demands for participation and activity. It resembles a kind of absolution, it pardons. In the dream sequence which occurs shortly after the 'Beatrice' scene, the narrator recalls a journey, a journey which ends, like G.'s, with a plunge into the sea. However, this journey, which should or could have been terrifying, is described instead as a descent into 'beauty' (p.137). The climax of the sequence, again like the closing moments of the novel, is 'neither tragic nor pathetic' (p.137). The oblivion, the final light towards which the journey takes us, is a neutral space, it holds no terror and no joy. The symbol of this is the vision of the 'white bird' (p.136), which is pictured within a 'small circle of light' (p.137), and is a potent image of hope, a denial of despair. The image is one which Berger will pick up in a later essay entitled 'The White Bird' (1) which is a meditation upon aesthetics, focusing on the small wooden birds carved by the peasants in the Haute Savoie. The bird is the symbol of a theological aesthetic - art's other 'transcendental face' (p.9). Art's first role is to help men and women claim their social rights, its second role is to help them claim their 'ontological rights'(2). Art can help us confront the void, through the aesthetic representation of the infinity of nature. In the final scene of the novel, the white of the body, the primal source of all sensual and aesthetic

experience is contrasted to the white of oblivion - the 'cloud of unknowing' (p.348) (3).

This same image is used in the earlier 'Leonie' episode, when the young pilot Chavez is attempting to fly across the Alps and is brought face to face with the impassive white of the snow covered mountains, 'Not a stain would remain on that white'(p.154). The white of the mountain snows would absorb all, leaving no trace of the of the life it consumed. Nature, despite the attempts to sentimentalise it, is essentially antagonistic to man:

Nature is energy and struggle. It is what exists without any promise. If it can be thought of by man as an arena, a setting, it has to be thought of as one which lends itself as much to evil as to good. Its energy is fearsomely indifferent. (4)

Men embrace that struggle in full recognition of the void. Art mirrors, in an ontological sense, that void. Language struggles to wrestle some meaning from the knowledge of the void. Leonie experiences something similar while she is lying in bed with G., when the words in her head represent a form of prayer, a prayer to the unknown and unexpected. The dream sequence at the close of the novel, drawing together the images of nature, sex and death, are also a form of prayer, an imprecation, a final plea for a materialist trinity before the dissipation and destruction, the

oblivion, of the final moments.

Black also features strongly in the novel - the final colour is the 'dark leaden' sea (p.349). In the last scene black is used as a portent of doom, the black and yellow flag waved by the gathering crowd (p.336) for example, and the tolling of the blackened ship's bell (p.340). These are clear presentiments of tragedy, they remind the reader of what they are already aware, that the hero will soon be facing death. The bell rings like an alarm, repeating what G. has said earlier 'We have no time,' (p.337). In mythological terms, black is associated with Saturn - identified with the Greek Kronos, or 'Time'. Saturn devoured all his children, all except Jupiter, Neptune and Pluto. These represent the air, water and the grave respectively. Only these three can resist the destruction of time. Saturn reigns over the final episode with its themes of destruction and violence - yet it cannot consume those other central thematic images we have just discussed, the blue sky, the sea and death itself, which is oblivion. G.'s death defeats time, it returns him to nature, to the infinite sea, and this confers a kind of immortality. The final scene is a kind of saturnalia, a time of misrule within which the normal rules and constraints are relinquished. A similar moment is referred to at the very beginning of the novel, when the narrator describes the arrival in Naples of Garibaldi, which turns into a 'saturnalia which lasted for three days' (p.30). This is a time of debauchery, of licence, of moral freedom. It is the moment of the Don

Juan. It is also the potential moment of revolution, of political praxis. In the important Milan episode, when the young G. first encounters revolutionary action and witnesses, first hand, human death, the sky itself turns 'leaden' (p.72) and thunder rolls across the sky. It is a Viconian historical moment, a turning point in history (both personal and political in this case). The use of black in this way is a kind of narrative chiaroscuro, the darker episodes of the novel suggesting a world turned upside down, defining moments of dramatic change and transformation. They prepare us for the final transformation from light to dark, from the perfect blue sky to the leaden sea, from life to death in the final lines. There is a moment in the 'Milan' scene which attempts to bring all the colours together in one poetic image:

Butterflies the colour of grey sandstone,  
others the colour of honeysuckle. Grass  
and wild flowers as high as the knee.  
Petals faded by the sun so that they are  
almost white, but not clay white like the  
miniature snails to be found in places on  
the dusty earth. Delicate wild gladioli  
the colour of amethysts, transparent and  
smaller than a finger joint. The red of  
poppies - the colour in which a child  
pictures fire. Fading poppies, damp, their  
fallen heads the colour of wine stains.



Shallow outcrops of flat rock smooth and  
grey like the sides of dolphins. The whole  
field surrounded by ilex trees. To die in  
that field, blood flowing into the dry earth.  
To be shot, to fall across the tram lines,  
blood making the cobbles slippery. I picture  
the first death to make a wreath for the  
second. (p.82)

The passage is quoted in full as it combines so many themes from across the novel, linking, through the use of colour, images of death with images of nature, mortality with immortality. Note in particular the poppies the colour of 'wine stains', suggesting the spilt wine in the final scene and the battlefields of the First World War. In fact this passage in a way denies colour, emphasising instead tones and shades. Petals and poppies are faded, gladioli 'transparent', there are 'almost' whites and 'clay' whites and the ambiguous grey of dolphins. These carefully selected and 'worked' shades deny the visual closure that the direct use of colour would convey. Although the scene evokes violent death, it avoids any suggestion of the tragic or romantic. The imagined field is surrounded by ilex trees, a species of holly, preparing us for the 'wreath' image in the final sentence. It also, of course, suggests the scenes in Hades in Virgil's Aenid (Book VI) which also emphasises the ilex. Holly is also a symbol of the Roman saturnalia - we have returned to the revolutionary moment, the time of death

and transformation. However this time it takes the form of an Ovidian metamorphosis. The fallen man, like G. at the end of the novel, becomes 'one' with nature, becomes one with the elements.

Lines 15-16:

The first two 'lexias' compared the morning in Trieste with the same morning in Flanders. Both events - the continuing trench warfare in France and G.'s final acts in Italy are happening simultaneously - they share the same historical moment (rather as G.'s seduction of Leonie took place at the same time as Chavez's heroic flight over the Alps). This synchronicity is underlined by the repeated image of the dead or dying soldiers who 'lay on their backs' (lines 5-6) being placed in juxtaposition with the descriptions of G., whom we find here lying on his back on his bed. The repetition serves to pull the events together - we are forced to remember that G.'s narrative is a part of a much larger narrative, the narrative of history itself. In the same way that the novel formally disrupts the chronology of the traditional narrative structure, replacing it with repetition and a history of the 'personal', history itself is seen as not simply a series of events, but a story of men and women's real lives. Berger draws upon the humanist marxist ideas of the 1950's and early 60's, exemplified in the New Reasoner, and asks us to reread history in the same way that we are invited to reconsider our expectations of the novel.

Lines 16-25:

The acanthus leaves recall an episode earlier in the novel, where G. is again lying on his bed in his apartment considering his planned seduction of Von Hartmann's wife Marika. This scene (pp.276-277) is of interest as it gives clues to what will happen in the final 'act'. The canal by which G. will be led by his killers is clearly visible from his apartment window for example. Also there is the allusion to 'Verdi' - an acronym for 'Vittorio Emmanuele Re d'Italia' in the Irredentist code (p.277). This will be picked up in the final scene when the crowd attacks the statue of Verdi - symbol of Italian pride and independence. However it is the mention of 'acanthus' which is particularly interesting.

Acanthus leaves are a form of decoration surrounding a corinthian column. A 'corinthian' is a term in both Greek and Roman history for a licentious libertine. G., looking through his acanthus leaves at the women on the street below, is seeing himself as a Juan, as the libertine. It is the acanthus leaves themselves which remind G. in the final scene of his planned seduction. They are the unwelcome trigger for further memories, further tracks into his own past which is continually, and literally 'catching up with him'.

Lines 24-25:

We now expect that the remainder of the scene will reflect the growing 'burden' of memories, will reveal increasing emphasis on the repetition of images and symbols from

previous episodes of the novel. It may be useful to have a quick survey of the main ones encountered - however these will have to be differentiated by the kind of repetition they represent, i.e a re-encounter in terms of narrative (that is, the reader's experience - discovering repetition of words, phrases or images); or in terms of G. himself (the character's experience of reliving moments from his past life); or in terms of narrative voice (the author/narrator exploring the operation of memory). These will be designated by 'N', 'G' or 'A' respectively or a combination of one or more (for simplicity, line numbers will be given for specific occurrences or to mark where a longer passage begins). Thus we have;

1. endless summers (N/G)	line	1	page	331
2. Flanders (N)	"	5	"	331
3. Tolstoy (N)	"	7	"	332
4. acanthus (G)	"	16	"	332
5. Roman girl (N/G)	"	28	"	332
6. Beatrice (N/G)	"	34	"	332
7. Jim (A)	"	47	"	333
8. Livorno (G)	"	55	"	333
9. cherry (N)	"	81	"	334
10. Milan (N/G)	"	116	"	335
11. loose hair (N/G)	"	101	"	334
12. 'hup hup' (N/G)	"	149	"	336
13. fuck (N)	"	197	"	337
14. legend (N)	"	203	"	338

15.London	(G)	"	260	"	339
16.Milan	(N/G)	"	331	"	341
17.sex	(N/G)	"	347	"	342
18.VERDI	(N/G)	"	371	"	342
19.Giovanni	(N/G?)	"	369	"	342
20.houses	(N)	"	408	"	343
21.Red Cross ball	(N)	"	459	"	345
22.paraffin	(N/G)	"	482	"	345
23.cherry/woman	(N/G)	"	544	"	347
24.milk	(N/G?)	"	578	"	348

We can immediately see to what a remarkable extent the final episode is constructed from a series of re-encounters, memories, echoes and retrospective readings. These draw together, in a startling way, the experience of the narrator, the reader and the central character himself. As G. struggles with the sheer force of memories and associations in the final moments, the narrator 'revisits' scenes and events from earlier in the novel. This forces the reader to forego closure, to resist reading 'towards the end' and to reconsider the novel, literally, as a 'whole' and not a straight chronology. The central character is the focaliser for this enforced 'looking back' (there is one example of prolepsis in this scene, at lines 227-241, telling what happened to Nusa's brother Bojan. This is primarily of interest because of the way G.'s name is appropriated by Bojan, and through him could be said to have

a kind of link with the future, especially in the absence, as far as we made aware, of any children. However, very little is made of this. Bojan is in many ways the opposite of G., and the passport is the symbol of this. Bojan states that with an Italian passport 'I can go further' (p.253) whereas G. decides that by giving up his passport 'he would go further' (p.333)). The narrator describes G. as having the feeling of,

...walking back, regardless of the direction  
he chose, towards the past, towards the life  
he had lived before... (p.337)

This is the feeling conveyed by the final scene itself, as we read we move further back into the book, we move forward only through a series of backward steps. The 'final curtain' (p.349) is arbitrary in this sense, it is not in any way a climax to the novel. The reader has already been forced to meditate upon the events and scenes which have led up to this point, the narrative decisions which have been made (with and without our collusion). We are directly reminded that this has been work, that the novel is a process and not a product, and that we the reader play an active part in the generation of the novel and in the 'playing out' of its meanings. It proves that linear time, be it in terms of narrative, history, personal experience or even reading, is a construct, an artificial equation which can be questioned and subverted. In the final scene of the novel all the

events become simultaneous and all our knowledge of the novel comes together in one retrospective instant, and this distances the novel, creates a space in which to judge it anew (for example see lines 28-33, p.332). The events in the book are similarly 'concatenated', their symbolic repetition in the final scene 'pushes' the novel away. The emphatic reading, the reading which drives towards the conclusion, is hereby denied. The narrative 'hall of mirrors' distorts any attempt at a prescriptive reading. We have to confront our own 'memory' of reading, return again and again to each impression and reflection if we are to avoid the errors of misprision and false closure. This idea of a multi-surfaced mirror is developed in the final lines, this time using the sea as a metaphor. The water's surface throws back a myriad of reflections, it does not falsify through the representation of a unified and complete whole. It is the opposite of the Lacanian mirror-image discussed previously, the one which presents us with an artificial self-knowledge. It is the opposite of the mirror which is 'falsely impartial' (G., p.226), the mirror which conceals more than it reveals. In G. Berger creates a fiction which presents itself as just that, and by doing so expresses more about the real world, about the way in which it is constructed and manipulated, than any falsely impartial 'realist' fiction can ever pretend to do.

Lines 38-51:

This is the first 'intrusion' of the personal pronoun in

this scene. As has been the case earlier in the novel, this occurs at a moment when the narrator is dealing with the problem of language, where he is struggling with the problem of 'ways of telling'. Here, like the Brechtian actor, we see the narrator attempting to find the right 'gesture', the most appropriate way of expressing the moment. This has been a concern of the narrator's throughout the novel, beginning with the first sexual encounter between Beatrice and G., and it is not a problem which is 'resolved', for, as the narrator suggests on more than one occasion, there is no resolution. In the end this will mean relying on 'silence', literally the narrator silencing himself in order to tell the truth more fully. Before this however, the narrative itself will break into ever more distinct sections, where the process of 'disintegration' becomes, paradoxically, an act of unification. The 'I' of the narrator will become ever more pronounced, as the authorial voice becomes increasingly heard, increasingly involved in the dialogue with the reader about the end of the book. Let us note the frequency with which this form of 'intrusion' takes place;

LINE NUMBERS

NUMBER OF INTRUSIONS

38-51	14
202-207	6
408-426	19
553-560	8
572-570	5



This constitutes one twelfth of the line length of the final scene. This is a significant proportion of the text to be given over to a form of writing which is not directly involved in moving the story towards its conclusion.

Lines 58-63:

G.'s choices of action no longer exist in time and space, neither supply the means by which to escape the memories which oppress him, the previous loves which possess him. He see no point in leaving Italy although it is clearly dangerous for him to remain, indeed he gives up his passport, his guarantee of safety, for a man he does not even know. He recognizes that time itself has 'run out' - note his repeated exclamations that 'we have no time' (for example at p.337). By taking part in the uprising he ensures that he 'steps into' history, into chronological time, something he has steadfastly avoided throughout his life. By therefore relinquishing his freedom within space and time in these ways he ironically achieves a kind of freedom, even although this freedom is finally linked to his own death. It is finally an existential freedom he chooses, locating himself in the antithesis between being and non-being, encountering, and defeating his earlier philosophy - 'What matters is not being dead' (p.90).

Lines 64-68:

This passage follows G. as he pursues experience further, attempting to locate the essence of experience through the senses. The cherries themselves symbolically act as a kind of narrative amorce, foretelling the hero's death, representing disintegration and decay, and signifying the brevity of all life. This is also a kind of literary signifier, the cherry has been used by many writers to represent this same sense of loss (see Gower's observation 'Alle is but a cherye-fayre' for example). Cherries contain within them the suggestion of their own demise and as such reflect G.'s own position, like a 'character in a legend becoming conscious' (p.338) he senses his own mortality in the very midst of sensual awareness. The cherry is in fact also closely linked to the theme of sexuality. The narrator makes this connection explicit at line 90, comparing the surface of the cherry to that of a lip. Throughout the novel there has been a close association between the various sensual experiences but particularly between the sense of taste and that of sexual experience. Again this link is made explicit by the narrator when he 'borrows' from Lèvi-Strauss (see Berger's 'Acknowledgements' for page 52 at the end of the book), where he observes,

the search for honey represents a sort of  
return to Nature, in the guise of erotic  
attraction transposed from the sexual  
register to that of the sense of taste,

which undermines the very foundations of culture if it is indulged in for too long.

G.'s later history is a history of just such an indulgence, and it begins with his very first sexual encounter with Beatrice. When G. takes Beatrice's nipple into his mouth it is as though it were a kind of fruit - 'as though it were on a stalk' (p.120), and its most significant impact is on his sense of taste, a taste which reminds him of grass - i.e. which signifies a 'return to nature' and the beginning of a 'search' which will last his whole lifetime. The story of G. is of the pursuit of taste and sensation, the attempt to recover the 'sweetness in the throat' like 'sweet grape' (p.119). The constant evocation of fruit links us to the narrator's discussion of 'firstness' during the 'Beatrice' scene, where the experience of sexual arousal is compared to the sensation of the first taste of seasonal fruit each year. The same encounter with the new through repetition is involved. G. buying and eating cherries in the final scene is an attempt by him to recreate this sense of 'firstness', of possibility, of acquiring sensation 'on his own initiative'.

Food has a strong symbolic presence in the final episode as a whole. This is perhaps surprising in a narrative that deals with insurrection, violence and the hero's own death. Yet we have in this one relatively small passage references to cherries/ steak/ wine/ cheese/ sausages/ milk/ berries/ vegetables and bread. It is

possible to suggest that these operate at two levels, symbolically represent two central themes of the novel - sex and 'economics'. The cherries already discussed link up with 'berries' (rather beautifully) at line 361, when G. recalls a sexual encounter from some earlier period in his life. The milk is also connected at this point, which itself is gathering like berries in pubic hair - like 'winter trees' (line 358) (also providing a further echo of Virgil). This image also suggests mistletoe which has a double-edged significance, both positive and negative. In a negative sense it suggests balefulness, a parasite, something poisonous. In a positive sense it suggests festival, health, love (or at least lust). Like Lèvi-Strauss's honey, which 'may be either healthy or toxic' (p.52) the white berries in the dream sequence, and by extension the type of sexual encounter they represent, may be positive or harmful. It is not finally clear if this sequence is indeed a positive one, however it does make very clear links with those themes raised earlier in the novel and with the sex/death relationship so firmly established in previous sexual encounters.

Within what we may term the 'economic' sphere, we see G., through the various images of food, coming to some kind of recognition of the political reality of the lives which surround him. When he suggests that Nusa put raw steak on her wounds she quickly makes him aware that such decadent use, or abuse, of food has no place in her world. Moments earlier the woman who owned the house in which Nusa lives

'hustles' her children away from G. when he offers them some of his cherries (p.334). He has already witnessed women queuing for bread and for vegetables - both basics in short supply, yet he has bought a luxury - cherries. His behaviour on both occasions reveals his utter blindness to the political reality of the situation around him. Later, as the crowd moves through the now deserted streets of Trieste, moves towards the richest part of town, they begin to look poorer and poorer, until it eventually has the appearance of 'an army of beggars' (p.341). It is at this point that they begin to loot a grocer's shop, passing out cheese, sausages and wine. G. accepts some of the wine, spilling it down his shirt. We could say that he is stained with the colour of the crowd's need. He has finally become part of what he had up to this point always found a way to ignore, the historical moment. As he meditated on the aesthetic and sensual nature of the cherry, he calmly observed the poor women queuing for food, or the men standing on the street corners discussing war. It is not that he comes to feel for these people, he does not empathise with them any more at the end of the novel than he did in the 'Milan' episode near the beginning. However at this point, the personal crosses over into the political, their paths converge.

Lines 71-84:

This description of the cherry, or rather more precisely the eating of a cherry, works as a metaphor for the reading (consuming) of the novel itself. Here in one concise image is represented the distinction, the Barthian distinction, between forms of text - the lisible and the scriptable (it also connects with the recurrent food/eating symbolism in the novel as a whole). Fruit, and its consumption, has already been used in the novel to describe sensuality and sexual attraction, the 'firstness' of desire (see pages 124-125). Now we have the Barthian link between reading and sensuality. To complete the fruit metaphor we can distinguish between the lisible and the scriptable thus:

lisible	grape	'gob' (complete, easily swallowed)
scriptable	cherry	'stoned' (fruit must be recovered)

The lisible novel, the one we read passively, is like the grape -unitary, easily digested, consumed in one bite. It holds no surprises, contains its own meaning, fulfils only its own expectations. The scriptable novel however is the

more problematic, the more sensual, the most implicative. It represents the dialectics of appearances, seeming one thing (the gob) and being another (the stone). Although the stone belongs to the cherry it feels as though it is somehow the result, the very product of eating itself. Transposed to the act of reading, the scriptable text carries the kernel of a reading, but through its arbitrariness, its phenomenology of false appearances, its deceits and its contradictions, the final reading, the final expectation of meaning is the result of that reading itself. The eater creates the fruit - part imagination, part mastication. To eat a cherry is to confront the 'work' of eating, to approach the scriptable novel, to read G. is to face the 'work' of reading itself. The experience of the reading is the stone within the flesh, it is born in the mouth. We read on, we fructify. We seed. The sexual nature of this experience is no coincidence:

Before you bite the cherry in your mouth, its  
softness and resilience are identical with the  
softness and resilience of a lip. (lines 89-90)

The anticipation of eating a cherry is essentially an erotic one. Like the blackberry Berger discusses earlier in the novel in his notion of 'firstness', the cherry represents both anticipation and retrospection, the instance of

sensual experience and the delight of encountering again the sexual moment, a 'bringing together which represents the knowledge of temporality, of beginnings and ends. The modernist text, and Berger is consciously creating a highly formalised and self-conscious text, is an erotic experience in the Barthian sense, holding within itself the kernel of new experience. Berger attempts explicitly to tie in the theories of sexuality, temporality and the notion of reading itself. The cherry is the metaphor for that nexus of concepts. When the novel is finished, the 'meaning' of the novel is 'like a precipitate' of one's own imagination. Berger, in so doing, allows the idea of 'mystery' to enter the relationship between consumption and production. The act of reading, like the act of writing (as Berger illustrates) is a form of work, yet there is, even as we see the 'tin moon' come swaying down, a certain 'magic' being created. This is Berger's debt to the poetic. Interestingly, Brecht too makes this connection. Consider his poem, written during the 'Svendborg' period, The Cherry Thief:

Early one morning, long before cockcrow  
I was wakened by whistling and went to the window.  
In my cherry tree - grey dawn filled the garden -  
Sat a young man, with patched up trousers  
Cheerfully picking my cherries. Seeing me  
He nodded, and with both hands



Pulled the cherries from the branches into his  
pockets.

For quite a while as I lay once more in bed  
I heard him whistling his gay little song. (5)

There are two inversions at work here, a poetic and a sexual one. Sexually we expect this poem to involve a man and a woman, that the cherries will be some kind of fairly explicit metaphor for sexual experience itself, that the 'cherry thief' will be some kind of 'Juan' figure, the fruit 'standing' for female sexuality itself. Yet here the poet is male - the thief's 'nod' makes this clear and the relationship is concerned with a different kind of 'property'. That is, the sexual inversion leads us into the poetic reversal heralded by the change in rhyme scheme from lines one to two to the rest of the poem. The verse begins with a simple rhyme -- 'cockcrow' and 'window', only to be confounded in the following two end of lines - 'garden' and 'trousers'. Not only do we have a dramatic fall from the expected rhymes scheme but from the poetic as such to the prosaic. In other words the 'young man' could stand for an image of the poet himself, the cherries are the sensuality, the desire he has lost and at the same time the innocence of poetry. The lyric, represented by the cherry, now belongs to a different time, in fact is locked into that shadowy time

before the cock crows, the time when spirits walk that cannot rest. The undead lyric impulse belongs to this now twilight world. The poem as a whole is a premonition of Brecht's more explicit verse on the same subject - 'Bad Time for Poetry', where he says,

In my poetry a rhyme

Would seem to me almost insolent. (6)

The 'cheek' of the thief is also the resilience of the poetic, refusing ultimately to be banished from the garden. In one concentrated image Berger has brought together many of the central themes which have 'troubled' the text so far and will, as we shall see, push onwards towards the conclusion of the novel itself.

## Reading

Where have I found myself? I have nearly finished the novel, well the commentary has nearly finished its work on the novel, in terms of a straight read I finished the novel years ago. I certainly do not recall 'fructifying' at the time. Or have I missed the point. This is the fruit of that reading I guess. It is truly impossible for me to remember my first impressions of the book. Back then I was not concerned with my 'situation as a reader', I was more concerned, I think, with the 'privacy' of my reading, that intimacy which the first reading confers. The search for a Brechtian mode of reading was an attempt to gain some kind of secure 'high ground', some kind of certainty of my responsibilities as a reader. However, the more I read Brecht (and do remember that this reading is done 'in translation, so the comments on the 'rhyme scheme' of that poem may not apply in German) the less likely such certainty became. My next problem therefore became to encounter Brecht again, in all his ambiguity and contradictions, so I guess a kind of 'seeding' had gone on.

Encounter: 'Brecht (2)'

Brecht is sitting at the window in his little wooden house in Marlebäck in Karsala - the house generously loaned to him by his good friend Helen Woolijoki. It is early morning on the twenty fourth of August 1940, and Brecht is following the events of the war on his faithful radio. The 'Battle of Britain' rages over the hitherto quiet southern English countryside. As the nation turns its eyes to the blue skies above, the Home Guard - a petty bourgeoisie temporarily raised to the petty heroic - tramp the green lanes armed only with farm shotguns and 'molotov cocktails'.

Brecht casts his eyes around his shelves for some suitable reading, something to turn his mind from the world and its troubles. The radio stains the morning for him, colours his work from first light and yet he cannot bring himself to silence it, as if even the quietest moments, in fact particularly the quietest moments, must be marked with some kind of historical significance, that the view from his window, onto the truly lovely Finnish countryside, should also be a view onto the world and its war. Yet he turns to a volume of Wordsworth's poetry (Arden edition) and his attention is drawn to the verse of 1804 - "She was a Phantom of Delight'. For some weeks Brecht had been feeling strangely at odds with himself. Perhaps it was the severe difficulty of his position, a German intellectual on the run

Encounter: 'Brecht (2)'

from the Nazis, staying one jump ahead of certain arrest and death, whilst waiting for the all important visa which would ensure his, and his family's, escape to America - where he has been invited to teach. As a persecuted individual, Brecht has come to feel that this visa has become a symbol of his whole existence - of the very possibility of existence, and this is reflected in the dialogues he was writing at the time. See, for example, his 'Refugee Conversations' where we meet the character Kalle, who states, 'The passport is the noblest part of a man' (1). Brecht's uneasiness, his sense that there must be something beyond the artificiality of his political existence, leads him to suspect that somehow his feelings are linked to the beautiful Finnish landscape itself, and most of all to the silence which that landscape represents - an aural void which, for once, does not simply provide an echo of his own thoughts, but rather makes mysterious suggestions of its own. He says,

...the unnatural day is not beginning with a discord but with no sound at all. (2)

Bertolt has nearly completed the play he has been working on for many months, the one that has given him so much trouble. Not least it had brought back Ruth Berlau, who, refused entry into the house, had set up a tent in the garden.

Bertolt worked with her out there, and we imagine that tent as a kind of echo chamber, amplifying the sounds of the natural world outside, whilst isolating, and concentrating, the words being spun inside. The Good Woman of Setzuan was almost finished then, and Brecht was involved in re-writing a play originally written by his friend and host Helen. The play was intended for a local Folk Festival, and Bertolt felt strangely drawn to the twilight world of the folk tale, the episodic form, the pranks and adventures, the strong and clear stories which were moral but not 'political' in any narrow sense. Most important of all perhaps, was the realisation that narration could be realistic, could tell of people's real experience but not be confined by any historical 'moment'. This was to have important ramifications for his later work, and fitted into some of his theoretical work done previously.

Here however it was to lead him to speculate on a art form which presented a vision of life, a representation of life rather than a photograph, magic not science. Thus when Bert reads the lines in Wordsworth's poem,

A lovely Apparition, sent  
To be a moment's ornament

he cannot bring himself to damn it outright, to condemn it out of hand as merely a 'petty bourgeois idyll' (3). Instead

he suggests that Wordsworth,

...helps to conjure up other situations less  
unworthy of the human race. (4)

The poet as sorcerer! Here is a challenge to the role Bert had cast himself in for so long. To the Home Guard marching under a dark sky streaked with the infernal red of the Messerschmit's machine gun fire, the offer of an idealised vision of beauty and value might just offer a means of release and escape. In the quiet peace of that Northern land, Bert's idealism could grow and ripen as luxuriously as the wild strawberries which grew beneath the tall fragrant pines.

Reading.

I appreciate the effort to broaden the scope of the 'Encounter', emphasising the informal nature of that term, however I do not think I like the tone of this dicussion at all. What's all this stuff about Messerschmitts (there are two 't''s in Messerschmitt by the way, named after the German aircraft designer Willy Messerschmitt (1898-1978) - if one attempts to fill out commentary with historical 'colour' one must at least get one's facts right) or Brecht smelling Alpine strawberries? How the bloody hell can we know what Brecht was doing outside his window in Karsala? And that stuff about Brecht and Ruth Berlau in a tent bordered, quite frankly, on the ridiculous (if not offensive and salacious). The most irritating thing however is the increasing informality of address, starting with 'Brecht', moving on to the slightly irritating 'Bertolt' and ending, incredibly, with 'Bert'! This last term in particular implies an intimacy with the man and his work which, judging by some of the comments on his writing at that time, simply does not exist. All I know about Brecht is what I have read about him, what other people have written for me to read. By now it should be absolutely clear just how unreliable that can be. This second-hand tittle-tattle concerning the author, can only lead to spurious conclusions regarding the work.

However, I do think the point about Brecht reading Wordsworth is an interesting one, an important one even, and may just provide some clues to solving the riddle of



locating that 'Brechtian' way of reading I said I was searching for, by looking at Brecht himself reading. We all know that he loved detective stories, Jacobean drama, Chinese poetry - but Brecht reading Wordsworth! I would like to see this developed, without the purple prose, criticism not clairvoyancey!

Encounter: 'Brecht (3)'

Even though Brecht is only 'skimming' (1) Wordsworth - an interesting point in itself, Brecht keeping close to the surface of Wordsworth, reading superficially - he cannot bring himself to damn Wordsworth completely, to lay down the poetic law. His first instinct, to label Wordsworth's verse as a 'petty bourgeois idyll' (2) is restrained as Brecht considers moments in History (such as the one he is himself experiencing) when poets can or should write in such a way as to present humanity with an idealised vision of how things could or should be. Brecht comes to the conclusion that poetry may increase the reader's 'capacity for experience' (3), accelerate their ability to communicate and, as a form of labour, an active participating function, perform the action of 'holding up a mirror' to nature (note, not 'mirroring' as in Aristotle).

Now these thoughts do not in any way necessarily contradict Brecht's previous theories on the role and function of art, yet they fill out that theoretical 'map' in some surprising ways. For example, it suggests that the enriching of the capacity for experience and communication of that experience may be a satisfactory end in itself, that 'feeling' may have a central place in any aesthetic. Now, as we have pointed out, this is not something entirely new in Brecht, rather the re-admission of a thought inhibited and repressed. It is a feeling generated by two things: by the re-encounter with 'beauty' (the Finnish landscape which

inspired emotions in Brecht which he had not allowed himself to feel since he left Bavaria) and secondly the experience of a particular moment in history, when all that is beautiful, or innocent, seems either damaged beyond repair or about to be destroyed forever (the Nazis' successes across Europe were at their peak). It is the beautiful and the sublime coming together in one fearful moment, love and death encountered at once. It is a moment when the inspiration of beauty brings back hopeful memories long forgotten, and the terrible distortion of the present brings premonitions of a dark and terrible future.

This is the same kind of moment, as I see it, as created by Berger in the final scenes of G. where he re-encounters the ideas of beauty and of love through the visions of 'Beatrice' (a Dantean moment), whilst the turmoil and bloodshed of the uprising takes him towards dissolution and decay. Beatrice is surely Wordsworth's 'Phantom of delight', a vision which haunts, startles and waylays the hero. We remember that G.'s father Umberto had just this 'double' view of women, part earthly, part spiritual,

It seemed to Umberto that he had married a ghost.

(All ghosts for him were connected with women and their supernatural tendencies.) (p.9)

For G. too, women become increasingly 'supernatural', belonging to his past, a past which has no part to play in the confrontation with the physical and political

world which marks his final hours.

With Berger, as with both Brecht and Wordsworth, there is a sense of escape, an escape into the 'garden' or the natural world, where the elements reflect the world experience but ultimately lead beyond the experiential to the purely metaphysical. Throughout G. there are references to gardens and woods, and it is no coincidence that G. escapes from London and its mood of war and apocalypse only to find himself sitting in the 'Museo Lapidario' (p.246). This sets up an antithesis between Hölderlin's madness, the madness of love, contrasted with the madness of war and destruction which lies outside the walled garden. Brecht too encountered this antithesis, which at heart, is a temporal dialectic. Brecht faced the evidence of cyclical time in nature, with its advances and retreats, and the seemingly unstoppable and irreversible onslaught of history. Not a Hegelian advance towards reason but a descent into terror and blackness. Consider one of Brecht's more moving poems of this period, A Bad Time for Poetry, where even a rhyme is deemed to be inappropriate for the times. As Benjamin stated, how can we write lyric poetry today? For Brecht, poetry grows from this very question. He states that only the 'housepainter' (Hitler) drives him to his desk to write, but the poem which results is of course about nature as well, about good and evil, beauty and terror (one cannot do without the other or it ceases to exist). A new poetic form is born from the confusion of its age. Again it is this kind of dialectic which fires Berger's novel. What kind of

place does the novel have in the post-war world, what justification for narratives of individual lives in an age of mass destruction? For the artist, like Berger, the question is: how can one relate the concept of beauty with the knowledge of manifest cruelty and injustice? The novel itself deals with this dialectically, it encompasses the contradictions and in so doing produces something new, an alternative form. Berger's novel in part represents deliberate formal experiment, borrowing from other texts, other artists, and drawing on a range of formalist devices, yet at the same time it also is the result, and represents in its very structure, the contradictions of its time. A historical novel about a Don Juan figure, written in the late 1960's and early 1970's, which is dedicated to 'Women's Liberation' is ample proof of this. A novel set in the context of the First World War, written during the Vietnam offensive, a 'socialist' and 'committed' author writing in a modernist and highly stylised manner? It is only through confronting these contradictions that Berger was able to find the right style and theme for his work. It is only by analysing these contradictions that the reader can fully understand the generating heart of the novel itself.

Reading.

What happened to Wordsworth? Left out in the country somewhere perhaps? Okay, it was finally not possible to make the connection between Brecht and Wordsworth, but that's alright (I would rather it was admitted). It was good to move onto Berger (every little helps) however I think the problem is that one wants, or needs, to find a solution to everything. If one is not available, you create one 'to fit'. I think that this often leads criticism down the 'garden path'. I do not pretend to understand all of Berger's novel, nor am I sure that I want to. If Berger explained to me what the killing of the two horses early in the novel 'meant', as he tells himself on page 301, then the story would be finished, closed, completed. Without his explanation the narrative remains active, I can still 'feel' the story. It is that business about a 'process' rather than a 'product' Raymond William's described. We must not expect a gobbet, but must always remember the stone ( Berger and cherries remember). Reading, like eating, is a process, a form of work. We cannot expect to understand all the stages and procedures of that 'work'. As Kascher the fishmonger, in Brecht's short story 'Java Meier', concisely puts it,

People who understand everything get no stories.

I think Brecht dramatises this perfectly in The Good Woman of Setzuan, where Wang, during an interlude, falls asleep over a large book:

With his left hand he thumbs through an imaginary book laid over the book in his lap, and lifts the imaginary book up to read from it, leaving the real one lying where it was.

This is a beautiful image, and for me represents the practise of criticism itself. It is only ever an imaginary book which we lift up to read from, the real one staying in our laps. This image strikes a resonant chord with Barthes description in part 11 of Criticism and Truth:

The critic separates meanings, he causes a second language - that is to say, a coherence of signs - to float above the first language of the work. (p.80)

Solutions and answers can only perhaps be found in terms of one's own language, in one's own 'book'. We are getting closer to that notion of reading, to use Barthes's delicious phrase, 'a la Brecht'.

### Commentary.

Lines 92-93:

This passage identifies the kind of house Nusa lives in. It is in sharp contrast to the kinds of houses identified (and attacked - both by the crowd and by the narrator) later in the scene. Nusa's home leads straight onto the street - it has no bourgeois 'defence' against the public, no barricades of iron or grass. The events of the street (Brecht's 'theatre' (7) come right up to the front door. The inhabitants are not spectators but players. Later in the scene the crowd will vent its anger against the rich and their houses located in the pretty Italian squares, with their protective shutters, their balcony vantage points. In the knowledge of their own poverty, through the awareness that it is their labour which has built these houses, the crowd attack the manifestation of their oppression.

Lines 100-101:

This involves a repeated hair motif - see earlier commentary on 'Beatrice'. However on this occasion there is a significant reversal. There is no seduction and Nusa quickly ties her hair up in a scarf (see line 127). This signifies an important transformation for G. - from this point onwards all possible doors back into his past, or forward to a possible future, will be closed to him.



Lines 109-118:

The image of Nusa leaning against G. for support, although equally willing to support him, recalls the 'Roman girl' episode, where again two 'strangers' have been thrown together, linked by the same unexpected events and who find comfort and support in each other, however temporarily.

Here we have the opposite image as that created after each sexual encounter, where invariably G. and his lover lie separately, isolated. Here, as a result of a political encounter, the couple are joined, bonded, equal.

both of them together, and are now exhausted,  
limp with exhaustion, but safe.

It is a form of union that G. has searched for throughout his career as a Don Juan without ever realising it.

Lines 120-124:

Again Nusa's hair points towards the essential difference between this final scene and the seduction scenes we have encountered previously. As we have noted, Nusa quickly ties her hair up after lifting it to show G. her wounds. Hair has been closely connected to sexuality throughout the novel and this symbolic act clearly announces the end of G.'s sexual pilgrimage. In the 'Roman girl' scene the girl in question is allowed no reference to her hair apart from her facial hair, 'a growth of black hair above her lip' (p.79), in other words in a negative context conventionally. As these

two moments are also the most significant political moments in the novel, it is possible to suggest that the narrator conceives of some kind of antithesis between female sexuality and political experience. In order for the woman to be pictured within some kind of political framework it is necessary for her to lose her sexual or sensual side. The two kinds of 'embrace' commented on above would seem to reinforce this reading - the political one which is mutually supportive and asexual, and the sexual one which is highly gendered and ultimately isolated. It is not a problem which is resolved in the course of the novel.

Lines 140-143:

It should be recalled that Nusa's wounds have been inflicted by another woman. It was Marika and her whip which caused the weals on Nusa's back. They are a kind of 'witness' to G.'s final acts as the Don Juan he has become. One woman bears the scars of G.'s betrayal of another. The scars are a physical link between the women in G.'s life, just as the memories and dreams in the final scene are a psychological one. They are also a reminder that violence can outlast tenderness. As a character in a Brecht story observes,

What's left of kisses? Wounds however  
leave scars. (8)

It is a sad testament to G.'s career.

Lines 145-147:

The presence of the outside world, detected through an open window, more often than not from a bedroom, is a recurring incident in the novel. Thus we had the 'notary' arriving watched by Beatrice and G. from her bedroom window; the sight of Chavez flying over the mountains as G. and Leonie meet in the hotel bedroom; here we have the sound of the approaching crowd heard from Nusa's window, a sound which will precipitate their final parting. It is as though the events of the outside world are constantly threatening to break into the 'private' world of individual experience. It is precisely what will happen when the crowd begin to smash the unshuttered windows of the Piazza San Giovanni -breaking down the fragile barrier between exterior and interior. In many ways it is a pictorial device, a view revealed beyond the central figures on a canvas, and as such it neatly brings together the central themes of the personal and the political, the social and the historical in one dramatic moment.

Lines 148-154:

The 'Hup! Hup! Hup!' sound, coming from that open window, is a kind of 'call to arms' - it beckons G. to go and join with the men and women on the street. It reminds G. of his childhood, when the cry was used in hunting by his Uncle Jocelyn (pp.96-97). This is a heavily symbolic moment, the moment when G. is invited into the 'company of men'. It is a conspiratorial cry and one which G. ultimately resists. It

is a cry that attempts to enforce an 'aesthetic order upon nature' (p.97), the same kind of order in fact which men like Von Hartmann impose upon their wives. Both forms of order are despised by G., both disrupted and transgressed by his behaviour. Although the young G. joins in the hunt with his Uncle he remains on the 'outside' of that experience, he resists conspiring. Thus also in the final scene - although he does go out and join the crowd, and takes part in their activities, G. remains distanced from the 'conspiracy' which binds the crowd together. By linking the two events, the narrator ensures that we understand the nature of G.'s involvement in the uprising, that is he acts without conspiring in the events which unfold.

Line 157:

This line would seem to suggest that women's bodies are more eloquent than their faces, that they express more through their unconscious body language than through any direct linguistic communication. This indeed has been suggested throughout the novel, where the 'liberated' female body reveals truths beyond the falsity and repression of enforced social and linguistic codes. We need only think of the poem which introduces the 'Beatrice' scene:

The sounds I make are made elsewhere  
I am enveloped in the astonishing silence  
of my breasts  
I plait my hair into sentences

Never let loose

I walk where I wish

My cuffs admit my wrists alone

Break

Break the astonishing silence of my breasts.

(p.114)

For Beatrice, the body is a kind of language, a language which has been silenced. The sexual encounter between G. and Beatrice will be a form of linguistic liberation, however it is a liberation which is physical and not intellectual, focused on the body and not the mind.

Lines 162-171:

Here the sheer physicality of G.'s need is made clear. It is Nusa's 'physical being' (line 163) which G. wishes to confront, feels he must join with. This joining he presents as a form of 'gift', a gift to Nusa herself - yet the gift will be 'carried on his own body' (line 170), and thus will complete him at the same time. This idea of the body as gift takes us back in the novel to G.'s first experience of 'love' - when he was just five years old and contemplates his governess Helen:

Being in love is an elaborate state of anticipation for the continual exchanging of certain kinds of gifts. The gifts can range from a glance to the offering of the

entire self. But the gifts must be gifts:  
they cannot be claimed. (p.45)

These gifts represent a unilateral declaration, based upon an anticipation of the future. There is no surety that this 'future' is any more than a dream born of desire:

What is impossible, or at least very improbable, is that his beloved will ever recognize either his offer or his anticipation for what they are. (p.45)

In the final scene, G. offers this gift from a similarly unrequited position as the five year old boy. Nusa does not recognize what G. is offering, she only sees the passport, she only hears the crowd out on the street. G., recognizing this failure to connect, speaks her name with 'despair' (line 172). From this moment it is clear that 'time', in the form of the lover, has finally run out.

Lines 176-183:

This passage outlines G.'s movement away from the strictly temporal - his sense of 'time running out' discussed above - has no real relation to the particular events in which he finds himself caught up - the arrangement with Nusa, the uprising, his problem of finding a way to escape from Italy. It is that second sense of 'time' which is activated here - the internal marking of the passage of time dictated by

memory and desire. G. finds himself the victim of that internal time order, an order of which he once was proud to be master.

Lines 184-196:

This 'lexia' details G.'s growing awareness of the illusory nature of the 'freedom' he has enjoyed, a freedom at the heart of his life as a Don Juan. He now recognizes that his future lies only in the past, the past not yet encountered. His position reminds us of the railwayman in the 'Roman girl' episode, who when shot believes that the bullet belongs, '...to the past, preceding his own childhood.' For G., every event now appears as if from part of a pre-ordained sequence, a sequence he must blindly follow. When he joins the crowds in the streets of Trieste he allows the man whom Nusa directs to follow him to make 'all the decisions' (lines 303-304). The lexia also serves another purpose, and that is to draw attention, at this ultimate and most dramatic moment of the novel, to the fictional nature of the narrative. We have already noted the intrusion of the narrator's own 'voice' at line 38 - 'I am not conveying the truth accurately enough', the narrator questioning his own mode of 'telling'. We also note what we take to be the author's own 'voice', recalling an event from his own life (lines 46-51) - the suicide of a close friend. This death is not conceived of as tragic, however its meaning or significance cannot be interpreted through language. To simply write the friend's name in no way reassembles that

person. In the same way the end of the novel is not conceived in tragic terms, its meaning cannot be conveyed in traditional narrative terms, relying on a strict chronology of events leading to a final closure. G. begins to think of his own existence in fictional terms, what has not yet happened is simply a part of a story not yet told. There is no 'mystery', no ambiguity about how the story will end - it has been written. The characters cannot change that story any more than we as readers can. We can interpret that story as we choose, but we can not alter it in any way. The consequences of each event 'have already taken place' (lines 193-194) within the narrative (in the same way that all novels become 'historical novels' with the passing of time). What G. confronts, as the earlier passage demonstrated, is not 'real time' (events in the story) but 'pseudo-time' (to use Genette's phrase). We as readers also face this 'pseudo-time', the time generated by the act of reading the novel itself. What the narrator tells us is not that the individual in history has no choices, no freedom of action and therefore no hope of transformation, but that the fictional character, and through association and the process of reading the reader, is trapped within the existential restrictions of art itself. This is developed in the lexia at lines 202-207 where the narrator suggests the analogy of a character within a legend becoming conscious of his position (9). The character will be trapped, smothered by the absence of 'real time', by the denial of choice. The narrative constantly reminds us of its own fictionality in



order to stress our ability to act, our capacity to choose and transform, within 'real'time' - to change the real world, to create our own legends. This is an exercise in Brecht's 'complex seeing', and the mythological symbolism of the final scene is a part of this process. As Raymond Williams observed:

It is important that Brecht, who was so deeply concerned with a contemporary political world, turned so often to fable and to history, to achieve complex seeing ...The use of fable and of history is connected with this, as well as being a device of distancing, of making strange, comparable to the more evident distancing of convention and technique. (10)

The narrative in G. achieves a double distancing, the story itself is 'historical' and the central character is drawn into a legendary or mythological context. This is a way of forcing the reader ever further from the events of the story, from the desire to see how the story 'ends', towards a view of the narrative which focuses on the intricate interweaving of themes and devices, to see the novel as a piece of 'work'. This cannot be done from a position which locks the reader 'inside' the story (11).

Lines 197-201:

This passage directly recalls earlier episodes from the novel, bringing together the themes of sex, passion and the erotic as being the only way of abolishing 'time' - see earlier commentary.

Line 220:

The image of Nusa running holding up her skirt with one hand directly recalls the 'Roman girl' scene, where the girl is seen with 'her free hand' holding 'up her skirts' (p.81). It also recalls an earlier moment in this scene where Nusa is at the dressmakers and holds up her gown to be fitted. This is another example of a repeated 'gesture', or class gestus, that Brechtian use of a single action to connect themes and issues across the novel (another example might be the grocer who still hands out wine and supplies to the looters attacking his shop). In the earlier scene the girl runs to take the young G. to safety. In the final scene Nusa is pictured in the act of running away from G., leaving him to his fate. The linking gesture makes the transformation of G.'s position clear, the earlier scene acting as a kind of commentary for the later one. In this way the novel is constantly analysing and interpreting itself.

Lines 227-241:

This passage has already been discussed briefly, in terms of it representing one of the very rare examples of an external homodiegetic prolepsis in the novel as a whole. Here we discover what happens to Bojan once he has escaped from

Italy - an escape made possible only through G.'s sacrifice. The style is formal and brief - almost a form of reportage. Ironically, as we have observed, G. 'lives on', at least in name ( the immortality through fatherhood which G.'s father Umberto dreamt of), in the form of a political agitator and Slav nationalist, whose creed decrees an absolute abstinence from all sexual activity. In other words Bojan is G.'s complete opposite, a reversed mirror image.

The relinquishing of the passport could be interpreted in some respects as an 'Oedipal' act, G. 'kills' his father by giving away his name. He denies succession by denying his name, the name which Umberto traces back through a long paternal line. By this act G. subverts the patriarchal line, kills the plant by lopping of its buds. After 'murdering' the father in this way, G. enacts a 'return to the mother' - the dream sequence at lines 347-368 centres around the image of milk and the female body. It creates a sense of intense intimacy, like that felt by G.'s mother Laura as she fed him as a baby (see G., page 31). G. completes this Oedipean journey back to the mother in the final scenes of the book (and note also the use of 'mother' as a code name for the Irridentists), returning to the 'silver mirror' (line 593) which is the sea.

Lines 242-253:

The central image in this passage is of waves. The sea is used as a metaphor for describing the movement of the crowd in the streets. As in the final passage, where the sea is

described as a being made up of a myriad of reflecting surfaces, catching and distorting light in an infinite number of ways, here the crowd is not represented as an amorphous, homogeneous mass. The description attempts to deny the kind of assumptions that Raffael, the Italian agent, demonstrates by his epithet 'the scourge of the docks' (line 438). The crowd is in fact made up of people from all different backgrounds and cultures unified only by their shared poverty and their temporarily agreed common purpose. They illustrate that there is in fact no such thing as a 'crowd', but there is oppression, they deny the observable by exemplifying the abstract. They move in the mode of a wave, and G.'s absorption into the crowd foretells his later swallowing by the sea. The repetition of images is yet another strand in the high degree of formal unity imposed upon a narrative which looks at first glance as a disparate collection of theme and narratives.

Lines 262-285:

We now have an example of an analepsis - G. recalls the day that war was declared in London, and the very different kind of crowd which assembled. The crowd in London is described as being 'static' (line 262) compared to the wave-like motion of the crowd in Trieste. The crowd in London 'did not know where to go' (lines 262-263) whereas that in Trieste is unified by a common sense of 'destination' (line 255). The crowd in London is expectant and demanding, but does not know what it is it waits for or what it wants. The crowd in

Trieste is not waiting but is actively making something happen, and understands what it is it desires - revenge.

Lines 286-289:

The description of the crowd and its behaviour is generally a fairly negative one. In these lines it is compared to a 'drunk'; later they will appear like an 'army of beggars' (line 311). Although they are united by their common experience of poverty and suffering, and in their opposition to their Italian oppressors, they do not possess any clear understanding of their political position. They are encouraged in their rioting by the Austrians, who are also their oppressors. The crowd in Milan in the earlier episode is described in dignified if not devout terms. Their dignity arises from their clear political purpose, their specific social demands. The crowd in Trieste has no such clarity. Their uprising signifies a period of misrule, not a revolutionary event (see lines 330-334). Their unrest has no focus because they cannot give a voice to their sufferings. It is for this reason that G. can become involved. He does not believe in 'the great causes' (p.266) but he does believe in anarchy, in subversion for its own sake. Because he does not understand the crowd, and the reasons for its suffering, the uprising resembles a form of madness, a disruption in tune with the conflict within his own mind. To G.'s father, Umberto, the crowd signified madness, lawlessness, the loss of reason. This is because, like G., he is not of the crowd:

In face of such a crowd there are only two ways in which a man, who is not already of it, can react. Either he sees in it the promise of mankind or else he fears it absolutely. The promise of mankind is not easy to see there. You are not one of them. Only if you have previously prepared yourself, will you see the promise. (p.16)

G. is not of the crowd, yet neither does he fear it. Rather he recognizes in it the unfocused need, the desires which cannot ever be filled, which trouble his own soul.

Lines 290-295:

Again the crowd is diminished by the tone of the narrative - here by the repeated use of the conjunction 'but':

but he wore no uniform (line 291)

but nothing was sustained for very long (295)

The bell which is rung is black and rusty, fished up from the mud in the harbour. The crowd has an air of desperation, of failure. Its actions are gestural, theatrical, as if the men and women were acting out some prepared part. It is significant that when G. does finally join the events of the moment, that they are so 'unreal', almost a form of pageant or history play.

Lines 305-311:

In this passage we realise that the crowd itself does not change, it is the context in which it finds itself which changes how the crowd appears. Thus it is not that people are either 'beggars' or 'unemployed workers' but that surroundings define them as such. Material circumstances dictate our moral judgements. In Brecht's 'Hollywood Elegies' there is a wonderful meditation on the nature of heaven and hell:

The village of Hollywood was planned according  
to the notion  
People in these parts have of heaven. In these  
parts  
They have come to the conclusion that God  
Requiring a heaven and a hell, didn't need to  
Plan two establishments but  
Just the one: heaven. It  
Serves the unprosperous, unsuccessful  
As hell. (12)

The crowd in Trieste is caught in the middle of this paradox - between heaven and hell. By tearing down the shops and houses in the wealthy Italian squares the people in the crowd to some extent renegotiate their place in this divine comedy.

Lines 324-327:

Some of the exclamations from the crowd can sound rather false or forced. However they can be better understood in terms of Brechtian stage directions -the banners and posters which were used as a kind of counterpoint to the action on the main stage. These forms of alienation were certainly in vogue with the alternative theatre companies at the time Berger was writing G.. Lines such as 'The Thieving Rich!' should be read from this perspective.

Lines 335-339:

G. spills wine from the offered flask - a further example of his distance from the experience of the people around him (his inability to drink from the flask identifies his class). The spilt wine, as we have already noted, marks him as an outsider, is a sign of his 'otherness'. The spilt wine also has a sacrificial symbolic weight, representing spilt blood, idea of martyrdom. The sacrificial or sacramental theme is carried forward through the image G. has of himself being carried along by the crowd 'ceremonially, almost like a body in a coffin'.

Lines 339-347:

G. looks up at the buildings as he is 'carried along' by the crowd and notes the houses with their rows of caryatids. these are highly significant in a symbolic sense, in that they represent graphically two of the central themes of the novel - the violent death of men and the enslavement of



women, both of which are the direct result of capitalist society. The 'acanthus leaves' in the third paragraph of the final scene (line 16) suggested the corinthian column, and by association the idea of the licentious libertine. Now that column has been replaced by the caryatid - a female figure representing enslavement. The male inhabitants of Caryae were put to the sword by the Greeks for siding with the Persians at the battle of Thermopylae, the women were made slaves. To immortalise this punishment figures of these women were used instead of traditional columns. In G. two of the main themes are war and sex. The battlefields of France show us the brutality of war, and the wholesale slaughter of men. The sisters, fiances, daughters, wives whom G. encounters are 'enslaved' within a patriarchal hegemonic system. They are slaves sexually, allowed no freedom to explore their own sexuality (hence the 'need' for a figure such as G.) yet they are also central to the class system they inhabit. These women 'support' in the fullest sense of the word, the systems which enslave them. Thus we have Beatrice supporting her brother and the farm, Leonie fulfilling the roles imposed on her by her family and husband to be, Camille playing the part of the society wife and mother, Marika the wife and lover, and Nusa lives for her brother and his vision of the 'revolution'. Like the caryatids on the decadent streets of Trieste, women are seen to 'bear the weight' of the very culture which oppresses them.

Lines 347-368:

From the stone women supporting the houses outside we move to the 'dream women' supporting the internal narrative. Here it is unclear who is remembering the sexual experience described. 'Louise' is not a name which fits easily with the other women G. encounters in the novel. Is this then the narrator's own memory (like the poem/dream sequence on pages 129-130)? The sequence is structured around a series of natural images and around different colours (see commentary above). The recurring image of the dog takes us back to the 'Beatrice' scene, where the narrator describes Beatrice's foot as resembling a 'dog's head' (p.117). There is also the connection with Beatrice's dead husband, who, according to her brother Jocelyn, 'fawned at her feet like a dog' (p.100). This is not the only thematic repetition in the passage, many themes and symbols from further back in the novel are echoed, in the same way that events and images from past moments in our lives are relived in dreams. For example we have at line 351 'A grain of sand'. This returns us to a description of G.'s mother, Laura:

When her head was thrown back and she  
smiled, baring her teeth, her upper and  
lower teeth did not quite touch - between  
them the space for perhaps a grain of sand  
to pass. (p.15)

We have already noted how the final scene could be read as

to some extent a 'return to the mother', the image of milk linking us to the mother and infant scene at the start of the novel. The 'grain of sand image' reinforces this connection, suggesting that the visions of women experienced by G. in the final scene do not lead us back to Beatrice, but towards Laura, although this is by no means established and can only represent a possible reading.

We have also noted how important the colour white is in this scene and the novel generally. The white is here picked up by the image of milk - linking with the mother and with sensual experience, but also with fear (see p.56 where fear is likened to a liquid in a jug which must not be spilt). Milk is also associated with the 'world' of women in general, through G.'s memory of the milking shed on his Aunt and Uncles farm:

The shed smell means milk, cloth,  
figures of women squatting hunched  
up and small against the cow flank (p.43)

This is the opposite of the smell of 'horse and harness' - the world of 'men', the world of unspoken codes and rules, the world in fact which G. rejects, preferring instead the 'absolute absence of secrecy' (p.43) represented by the cowshed. Finally the dream is shattered by the ringing of the ship's bell (portentous indeed) and G. moves on with the crowd aware only of the blue sky above him.

Lines 369-376:

The 'Piazza' shares the same name as the one G.'s father wanted for his son, the name G. has 'given away' in an act of patriarchal terrorism. The crowd attack the figure of a 'gigantic man' (line 570) - the statue of Verdi -and by so doing enact the violence against the father figure which G.'s linguistic assassination has already played out. The 'gigantic man' is a Titan, a patriarchal, and despotic, figure. For the crowd he is a symbol of their oppression but also a symbol of their ability to overthrow and destroy that oppression. For G. however he represents another 'sign' of his own mortality. The statue recalls the 'Stone Guest' passage which prefaces the final scene and which raises the idea of a 'contract' for the life of the hero. Like the 'stone guest' who comes to dine with Don Juan, bringing with him the promise of death, the statue is a reminder that G. too will soon 'pay the price' for the contracts he has made throughout his life.

Line 380:

The use of the phrase 'i teppisti' is a repetition from the moment early in the novel when Umberto recalls the uprising he witnessed as a boy in 1848, which we have already looked at (G. p.16). It links the two events even more closely together.

Lines 412-430:

These lines are a close reworking of the passage on pages

197-198. The repetition only 'loses' one or two sentences from the original entry, which occurs during G.'s walk with Monsieur Hennequin and his friends in the woods near Lake Maggiore. They underline the hypocrisy and deceit which Hennequinn and his like represent, the bourgeois facade of respectability which masks the oppression and greed which lie beneath. The houses are a fitting target for the crowd's anger in Trieste - they represent all that they do not have, all that they will never have. The passage itself is rather awkward, the sudden juxtaposition of images, houses and nudity, at first seems rather clumsy and to have little relation to the themes and images previously encountered. The passages have a 'filmic' rather than a narrative quality - perhaps reminding us again of experimental film techniques like those of early Godard. What they do accomplish is to tie in bourgeois sexuality with capitalism, they are both products of, and servant to the same system. As such they are both the object of G.'s hatred.

Lines 432-436:

Here G. actively participates in the uprising, going with the other men to the newspaper offices (see 'Roman girl' commentary). As in Brecht's Drums in the Night we are invited to imagine a dramatic climax, a climax which of course will in fact be later denied. This is the first time that we have seen G. participate directly in any kind of political action, without any kind of ulterior motive or purpose. It heralds G.'s absorption into the crowd, and as

we have noted, into the historically specific. Like Brecht's Kragler, he disappears into the crowd only to reappear again in the form of a denial, a denial of the reader's expectations. We are forced to ask ourselves the question - to what extent have we 'wished' G.'s participation in the uprising? To what extent are we tempted to force the end of the novel into a shape which would suit the conventions of traditional narrative? G.'s isolation from the crowd, his distance from their experience and their motives, maintains that distance from a false 'empathy' with the 'hero' - we are denied the tragic ending we are conditioned to expect (and desire). Brecht's comments on his own approach are useful here:

I hope in Baal and Jungle I've avoided one common artistic bloomer, that of trying to carry people away. Instinctively, I've kept my distance and ensured that the realization of my (poetical and philosophical) effects remains within bounds. The spectator's 'splendid isolation' is left intact; it is not sua res quae agitur; he is not fobbed off with an invitation to feel sympathetically, to fuse with the hero and seem significant and indestructible as he watches himself in two different versions. A higher type of interest can be got from making comparisons from whatever is different, amazing, impossible

to overlook. (13)

What is amazing, finally, about the final scene, is the absolute ordinariness of G.'s death (reminding us again of Kafka's conclusion to The Trial). By denying the tragic, by resisting the temptation to try and engage the reader's sympathy, Berger in fact forces the reader, in their 'splendid isolation' to question their assumptions about narrative and about the individual's role in history.

Lines 437-446:

Raffaele, the Italian agent, speaks in a kind of 'journalese' - note his 'coining' of the phrase 'scourge of the docks' (line 442). He works language like some kind of base metal, his currency is the labels with which he selects and identifies people. His 'misprision' of both the crowd and G.'s actions, are a metaphor for the reader's desire to 'close' the narrative, to demand that characters act in certain ways, to react empathetically rather than keeping our 'distance' from the narrative. Raffaele's misinterpretation of G.'s involvement with the crowd leads directly to G.'s death, just as our tendency to misinterpret the narrative leads to the 'death' of the novel, its premature closure, forcing it to fit set tragic patterns.

Lines 464-466:

It is precisely this sense of 'satisfaction' which the

narrator in G. wishes to deny the reader. All the techniques of the final scene, the repetitions, the anachronisms, the narrative intrusions, are there to unsettle the reader, to prevent narrative 'decisions' being made without the consideration of all possibilities, of all conflicts and contradictions.

Line 478:

Repetition of 'i teppisti' from page 343 (line 380) and page 16 (see earlier commentary entry).

Lines 482-507:

The crowd attack the print shop and attempt to burn it to the ground. By doing so they are attempting to destroy the language and vocabulary of oppression, the 'journalese' of Raffaele for example which defines them as a 'scourge' (line 442). To begin with they douse the broken furniture and dirty rags with paraffin, the smell of which almost chokes G., taking us directly back to the 'Two Men' episode, where the two mysterious and 'evil' men kill the horse in front of the young boy (p.55). Here the smell of paraffin 'will force him to vomit' (p.58). At this moment however, revulsion overcomes fear - the boy's hatred of the men takes over from his horror of the act and any fear for his own safety. In this final scene G. also relinquishes any thought for his own safety, he is committed to action. A similar moment occurs after G. has met Von Hartmann and his wife



Marika at their house. His revulsion at the couple's hypocrisy sets him on a course which will ultimately lead to his death, for it is at this moment that he decides to deceive Marika and make a fool of her at the Red Cross Ball. This chain of reaction is set in motion by the nausea which G. feels after his meeting with Marika and her husband, and it is significant that as he descends the staircase after this meeting G. has 'the impression that permeating the stone-cold darkness was the smell of paraffin.' (p.302).

The image of the fire in the workshop also brings in the Don Juan narrative which is always in the background. Don Juan is, of course, carried off into the flames of Hell, however here the story is subverted, G. will be 'swallowed' by water, not fire. The novel never allows us to take a one-dimensional view of character, G. is both fire and water, we could borrow Neher's description of Brecht as 'Hydratopyranthropos', a man of fire and water, of inner contradictions and conflicts (14).

Lines 493-507:

Fire itself is seen as a 'contradictory' element - both destructive and protective. The flames of the fire in the printshop are at first small - they remind the crowd of the fires of their homes and villages. It is a comforting form of fire, it represents security. Ironically, when later the fire grows bigger, and its destructive force becomes more evident, the crowd then begin to 'think of themselves as its

master' (lines 505-506). Everything in this final episode is subjected to this kind of scrutiny. Everything is revealed to have more than one side. As readers, we are invited to view the narrative in the same inquisitive way, never relying on surface appearances for our judgements.

Lines 522-525:

G. here begins to take an active part in the activities in the crowd, suggesting to some of the men a way of ensuring the successful burning of the newspaper offices. In this he reveals his strategic mind, used only to plan seductions up until this point. In another time, another place, we are offered the vision of G. as an activist, a revolutionary. His subversiveness as a Don Juan could be transformed into a political radicalism. Sex and revolution are again linked in the most intimate of ways.

## Reading

I was on the point of making some final remarks, a kind of 'summing up' (old habits die hard!), however I realised just how inappropriate that would be. To 'sum up', after all, means to pin down, to nail, to fix. It is to assume that the text in front of you is some kind of unified whole, that it can be classified and judged. Isn't that precisely what I have been trying to avoid all this time? Perhaps I should go back to that image from Brecht's Good Woman of Setzuan, the imaginary book we lift from our laps. Shouldn't I be attempting to present 'the text we write in our head' to quote Barthes? The problem is that I am still concerned that I need something more concrete, more...Brechtian! As Barthes again points out:

The rules taught by Brecht aim at  
reestablishing the truth of a text:  
not its metaphysical (or philological)  
truth, but its historical truth.

Is this reading 'a la Brecht'? Have I done it?

My favourite description of 'critical' writing is in Barthes's 'Brecht and Discourse':

Brecht's work seeks to elaborate a shock  
practice (not a subversion); his critical  
art is one which opens a crisis: which

lacerates, which crackles the smooth surface, which fissures the crust of languages, loosens and dissolves the stickiness of the logosphere; it is an epic art: one which discontinues the textures of words, distances representation without annulling it.

And what is this distancing, this discontinuity which provokes the Brechtian shock? It is merely a reading which detaches the sign from its effect.

There you have it. The Brechtian way of reading is one which 'shocks' the text, splinters the logosphere, tears the constraints of language asunder. The Brechtian reader is involved in both creation and destruction, joining and severing, a truly dialectical state of affairs!

Lines 526-531:

Again the white shirt helps to isolate and identify G., this time to his assassins. They are gathered at a significant point, at the mouth of a tunnel which runs under the hill upon which all the symbolic constructs of society are arranged - the museum, the castle and the cathedral. All are symbols of oppression, of culture and history, of power and violence, and of the spirit. These are the real centres of power, linked by various diverse tunnels and passages, united by one desire, to deny the crowd which assembles within their shadow their true and proper rights. G. finally falls victim to the very powers he has spent his lifetime attempting to deny.

Lines 539-542:

G. walks back towards the Piazza San Giovanni, symbolically back towards his father. He then sees a woman ahead of him who is familiar in some way (yet again forming a parallel with Kafka's Trial). This familiarity extends his journey back into his past, he must walk further back into his earliest memories in order to keep moving at all.

Lines 543-547:

In this passage there is a narrative switch, a change of focus, from G.'s viewpoint to the perspective of his pursuers, his killers. We are beginning to move away from the central character, 'further still' from empathy. To the assassins he has the appearance of a traitor, of someone

perhaps not quite sane. In the previous lexia G. was described as 'strolling' (line 539) whereas now the focus is on his 'lunging gait' (line 545). It is a question of interpretation, we are invited to look at G. from different angles, to take in all sides of him. His comparison at line 545 to a bull has many implications and connotations. Within the text itself, for example, we have these specific narrative associations:

Umberto as 'La Bestia'	(p.9)
Beatrice and cattle	(p.37)
Cows/cowshed	(p.43)
Amoxosa Delusion	(p.111)
Beatrice drawing	(p.120)
Dream cows/bison	(p.130)

The effect generally is to suggest someone possessing a kind of natural vitality and sexual energy. To G.'s pursuers it simply suggests his treachery. G.'s lunging gait has always 'picked him out' from the crowd, provided something of his attraction to women.

Lines 548-556:

The woman G. notices seems familiar, and this familiarity increases his interest in her, for as we have noted, she represents another stage in his journey back towards his own past. As a Don Juan, his quest was always to seek out the 'new' woman, the next conquest. Now the vision of this woman

takes him back along the sequence of his seductions, back towards an awareness of himself in the 'here and now'. It is his past self who would have physically caught up with the woman, who would have engaged her in conversation, who would have aroused her interest in him. His present self sees this only as a potential act, the difference between action and inaction being almost transparent (see lines 553-555). There is no longer any desire in G. to relive his past, to rediscover the 'firstness' of experience. The heat he feels on his body is the warmth of the past. G.'s 'life' as a character fades simultaneously with the drawing to a close of the narrative itself.

Lines 557-564:

The narrator attempts to find a way of describing G.'s death through antithesis. G. 'did not struggle' (lines 558-559) and yet he did not 'submit without any resistance' (lines 560-561). The truth of the event lies somewhere between these positions - the emphasis is upon the reader to decide how the 'moment' should be pictured. What happens is never fully described - instead we are offered a narrative absence, an aporia, as the truest 'way of telling'. We are given a vision of other possible narrative 'tracks', either of which would take 'several pages to describe' (line 558). In the same way that G. watches his past self catching up with the woman ahead, so here the reader can imagine a reading which follows one of these alternative 'tracks'. What separates one reading from another is also 'very slight,

amounting to no more than a whim' (lines 554-555). At this climactic moment the narrator again reminds us of the possibilities which any text represents, the different narratives that might be created. He reminds us that reading is an active 'event', a constant process of interpretation and connotation. To read, as to write, is to choose. By doing so we deny ourselves the ease of being passengers, the satisfaction of seeing a world created for us, a world in which we do not have to decide or judge. What the narrator does not say is as important as what he or she does, 'the rest can be conveyed at last by my silence.' (lines 563-564).

Lines 565-575:

The woman G. had noticed in front of him turns out to be the peasant woman from whom he had bought cherries that morning. The day has come full circle, it has its own repetitions and returns. The cherries had symbolised, at one level, the 'firstness' of experience', the continual discovery of the new through repetition. However the woman herself represents a descent into the bathetic. This is no vision of Beatrice, no eternal mother figure, simply an ordinary woman. Again we are denied the tragic or dramatic, no redemptive image with which to console ourselves. The men hold G. in such a way that he resembles a 'foetus' (line 570) - he is being reborn into death. This picks up the imagery from the 'London' passage earlier in the scene -where the men going off to war are pictured as being 'aborted' (line 279) onto the street



as 'men-embryos' (line 280). However G.'s death is different. Like the railwayman in the 'Roman girl' scene, the violence which he endures 'gives birth to his death' (p.86). It is a process of completion and not negation.

Lines 576-580:

Death as surprise. G. does not 'foresee the exact circumstances of his own death'. The 'surprise' at death, and the loss of all 'self-distinction' that arises from it, creates a comparison with the sexual moment. The sexual experience is one which, through its quality of 'firstness', always presents itself as the unexpected. It startles. Sex also abolishes the obsession with the self. It liberates.

Lines 581-584:

We have already discussed the significance of the milk imagery - drawing together the themes of maternal love, sex and 'the void'. The 'cloud of unknowing' is this void, the final oblivion which the sexual encounters were a kind of preparation for. G. is dropped 'feet first into the salt water', the same salt water which forms 'phosphorescent drops' in the buckets of the poor women who illicitly collect it to cook their pasta (p.77). Life and death are continually seen to be no more than a hair's breadth apart. G. had visions of his death in childhood, when he was struck from his pony's back by a low branch:

He was conscious, but suddenly his own body, its sensations and acquired memories became a vast estate in which he could wander without concern about his means of locomotion. Far away from where he was in his estate he saw a dark mass, composed of stone surfaces and water. He was approaching it fast. He entered it as his back struck the pony's haunches. He lay vertical in a fissure of a cloud-like substance as his feet shot up into the air above the pony's withers. (p.61)

The 'cloud of unknowing' in the final moments fulfills the prophecy of his childhood. The cycle is completed and G. will disappear from the narrative forever.

Lines 585-601:

The narrative concludes with a description of the sea, a description which again attempts to deny, or at least refine, our preconceptions. The sea is not a smooth and even mass, its surface is a complex interfacing of constant movement. Like history, or like personal experience, its movements are not always predictable, follow no fixed or pre-ordained pattern. It is a shattered mirror only, it provides an infinite number of reflections at once. We have been asked to consider the nature of mirrors throughout the

novel, and there are many specific references to mirrors appearing in most of the central scenes. For example:

Laura's milk as 'quicksilver' - the bond between the baby and its mother is described as a kind of mirror, wherein the baby becomes 'part' of the mother's body. (p.31)

In 'Roman girl' G. 'sees' in her expression the mirrored image of his own feelings. (p.87)

The sexual 'bond' between Beatrice and the young G. is presented as a kind of mirror wherein everything he perceives in her 'increases his consciousness of himself' (p.120).

In the 'Leonie' scene G. looks at Leonie in a way that recognizes her as she 'really is' and not as the person society expects her to be. This look is contrasted to the reflection provided by a mirror - 'The mirror reflects: he recognizes' (p.151).

In the 'Camille' scene, Camille uses the mirror (which is shaped like the sun) to consider herself through G.'s eyes. In this she is enacting Berger's thesis which claims that women are the surveyors of themselves surveyed (see Encounter- Ways of Seeing). Camille colludes in the continuation of her own false image, the image which G. will try and break through to find the 'real' Camille. Later in

the scene he will have 'led her from...the mirrors which are falsely impartial to husband and wife' (pp.225-226).

At the end we return to the sea as mirror, a mirror whose surface is in 'continual agitation' (line 594). The novel itself is a series of reflections, of representations. Art, the novel says, is not a mirror but an irregular reflection (15). The final passage is built around the central antithesis of fire and water, the sun and the sea, light and dark. The sea rises towards the sky, the sun fires the sea. Light reflects brightly from the 'variegated' surfaces of each wave before returning to the dark of the sea's mass. 'White' and 'blackish blue' emanate from the same source, creating gradations of colour within the silver surface. The sea recedes infinitely towards the sun until the arbitrary 'final curtain' of the horizon returns us to the dark. We have been reading a novel which is like this sea, it has no surface, it is not a mirror of experience, it 'neither requires nor recognizes any limit'. The end, when it is reached, can only be an arbitrary break. The analysis of such an oceanic text, with its infinite number of readings, must equally arbitrarily, and perhaps as equally suddenly, cease.

#### LAST WORDS.

The final lines of G. are not in fact part of the main

narrative, but are there to provide information, in terms of time and space, about the making of that narrative. 'Geneva . Paris . Bonnieux...1965-1971' (lines 602-603) immediately recalls James Joyce's 'signature' to Ulysses - 'Trieste-Zurich-Paris...1914--1921' . G. ends where Ulysses was begun, its 'action' concludes in the same year that Joyce began writing. As interesting as these correspondences are however, the real significance of lines 602-603 is of a Brechtian nature. These lines tell us where the novel was written, when it was written, and how long it took to write. Their appearance at the end of the narrative, and not as part of 'biographical information' or as footnotes, diverts our attention as readers away from the story of G. and towards the making of G.. It reminds us that what we have read has its own history. The novel is not an aesthetic artefact claiming some universal (and therefore timeless) status. It is 'a process rather than a product' (16). There is a history of its making just as there is a history of its reading. G. remains Brechtian, literally, to the very 'end'.

## Notes

### Introduction.

1. Bertolt Brecht, Poems on the Theatre (London, Scorpion Press, 1961), translated by Anna Bostock and John Berger.
2. John Berger, Art and Revolution (London, Writers and Readers, 1980), p.95 (Berger is describing his approach to the artist Neizvestny).
3. Bernard Sharratt, Reading Relations (Brighton, Harvester Press, 1982), p.138.
4. Walter Benjamin, Understanding Brecht (London, Verso 1992), p.43/44
5. Roland Barthes, S/Z (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1974), p.4.
6. *ibid.*, p.10..
7. Harold Bloom, A Map of Misreading (New York, Oxford University Press, 1975), p.3.
8. Roland Barthes, S/Z, p.5.
9. *ibid.*, p.10.
10. *ibid.*, p.10.
11. *ibid.*, p.16.
12. Hugh Kenner, A Readers Guide to Samuel Beckett (London, Thames and Hudson, 1973), p.76.

'Roman girl'

1. John Berger and Nella Bielski, Goya's Last Portrait: The Painter Played Today (London, Faber and Faber, 1987), p.52.
2. See Martin Clark, Modern Italy: 1871-1982 (London, Longman, 1990).
3. Edward Dowden (ed.), The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley (London, Macmillan, 1904), p.349.
4. *ibid.*, p.349.
5. Laurence Sterne, The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy Gentleman (New York, Fawcett Publications, 1962), p.493.

Encounter: 'The 1960's'.

1. See David Caute, '68: The Year of the Barricades (London, Paladin, 1988). This book provides much of the background for this discussion.
2. See John Osborne, Almost a Gentleman: an Autobiography (Volume 2) (London, Faber and Faber, 1992).
3. Caute, p.58.
4. Nigel Fountain, Underground: The London Alternative Press, 1966-74 (London, Routledge, 1988).
5. Quoted in Fountain, Underground, p.78.
6. *ibid.*, p.49.
7. *ibid.*, p.147.
8. *ibid.*, p.106.
9. Caute, '68, p.25.
10. *ibid.*, p.198.
11. *ibid.*, p.46.
12. *ibid.*, pp. 238-239.
13. See Geoff Dyer, Ways of Telling: The Work of John Berger (London, Pluto Press, 1986) p.89.
14. Caute, '68, pp.228-229.
15. *ibid.*, p.198.

### 'Beatrice'

1. Thomas Hardy, Tess of the d'Urbervilles (London, Macmillan, 1985), p.134.
2. John Berger, And Our Faces, My Heart, Brief As Photos (London, Granta, 1992), pp.53-54.
3. See Charles Singleton's commentary on Dante's Divine Comedy.
4. Berger, And Our Faces, pp.83-84.
5. See Fiona McCarthy's review of the Eric Gill Barbican Exhibition 1992, in the Times Literary Supplement, 25.12.92, p.14.
6. John Berger, The White Bird (London, Hogarth Press, 1988), p.256.
7. *ibid.*, p.256.
8. John Berger, Ways of Seeing (London, BBC/Pelican, 1980), p.56.
9. *ibid.*, p.57.
10. *ibid.*, p.57
11. John Berger, The Success and Failure of Picasso (London, Granta, 1992), p.158.
12. John Berger, Art and Revolution (London, Writers and Readers, 1980), p.146.
13. Berger, The White Bird, p.44.
14. See Raymond Williams, The Long Revolution (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1965).
15. Berger, Success and Failure of Picasso, p.100.
16. John Berger in Christopher Rawlence (ed.), About Time (London, Cape/ Channel 4, 1984), introductory essay.
17. *ibid.*, introductory essay.

### Encounter: 'Brecht'

1. John Willet, Brecht on Theatre (London, Methuen, 1986), p.92.
2. *ibid.*, p.91.
3. *ibid.*, p.195.



4. Berger in Rawlence (ed.), About Time, introductory essay.
5. Willet, Brecht on Theatre, p.195.
6. *ibid.*, p.144.
7. Walter Benjamin, Understanding Brecht, p.28.

Encounter: 'Ways of Seeing'

1. John Berger, Ways of Seeing (hereafter all references to or from this work will be signified by the abbreviation 'W.S', followed by a page reference where applicable.
2. Peter Fuller, Seeing through Berger (London, Claridge Press, 1988), p.7.
3. Mike Dibb, 'Letter to Fuller', printed in New Society, 22.4.88, p.13.
4. Marcia Pointin, Naked Authority: The Body in Western Painting 1830-1908, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990), p.3.
5. *ibid.*, p.4.
6. *ibid.*, p.29.
7. Jane Gallop, Reading Lacan (USA, Cornell University Press, 1985), p.79.
8. *ibid.*, p.85.
9. For example see Geoff Dyer, Ways of Telling, p.84.
10. John Berger, Success and Failure of Picasso, p.157.
11. Jane Gallop, Reading Lacan, p.81.
12. *ibid.*, p.81.
13. This phrase is used by Berger in Ways of Seeing, p.59, and also in Success and Failure of Picasso, p.158, with reference to the paintings made of Thérèse Walter. It is one of several links between G. and these two other works.
14. John Berger, The White Bird, p.115.
15. *ibid.*, p.134.

Encounter: 'Fuck'

1. John Berger, Art and Revolution, p.19.
2. *ibid.*, p.153.
3. Quoted by Walter Benjamin in Understanding Brecht, p. 121.
4. See Richard Ellmann, Ulysses on the Liffey (London, Faber and Faber, 1974), p.106.
5. James Joyce, Ulysses (London, Penguin, 1987), p.224.
6. These terms come from John Berger, Art and Revolution, p.140.
7. John Berger, Success and Failure of Picasso, p.22.
8. *ibid.*, p.171.
9. *ibid.*, p.169.
10. John Berger, The White Bird, p.134.
11. John Berger, Art and Revolution, pp. 111-112.
12. John Berger, Success and failure of Picasso, p.169.
13. *ibid.*, p.169.
14. John Berger, Art and Revolution, p.141.
15. John Berger, Success and Failure of Picasso, p.157.
16. See Jonathan Culler, Roland Barthes (London, Fontana, 1983).
17. Quoted in Time Out, 30 May - 5 June, 1975, source - Geoff Dyer, Ways of Telling, p.91.
18. John Berger, Success and Failure of Picasso, p.215.

Encounter: 'Kierkegaard'

1. This discussion stems from a reading of Soren Kierkegaard, Either/Or, Volume 1 (New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1971).
2. Leo Weinstein, The Metamorphosis of Don Juan (Stanford University Press, 1959), p.53.
3. John Berger, Another Way of Telling (London, Writers and Readers, 1982).

Encounter: 'Don Juan'

1. J Weinstein, The Metamorphoses of Don Juan (USA, Stanford University Press, 1959), p.16. This book provides much of the source information for the discussion of the history of the Don Juan legend.
2. John Berger, The White Bird, pp.53-54:  
'The scent of lilac, you once said, is not so far from the smell of cows in the stable. Both are smells of peace and procrastination.'
3. John Berger, Time Out, 30 May - 5 June.
4. Ralph Manheim (ed.), Brecht: Collected Plays (Volume 9) (New York, Vintage, 1973).
5. See Harold Bloom, Anxiety of Influence (New York, Oxford University Press, 1973). We can see G.'s 'compulsive neurosis' (Bloom, p.66) as a mirror image of Berger's 'swerving' (Bloom, p.44) from his own literary 'fathers' - Brecht, Benjamin, Joyce and Lawrence for example.
6. Bertolt Brecht, Don Juan (Manheim ed.), Act One, Scene One, p.192.
7. Weinstein, The Metamorphoses of Don Juan, p.40.
8. *ibid.*, p.37.
9. Geoff Dyer, Ways of Telling, p.92.
10. Weinstein, The Metamorphoses of Don Juan, p.53.
11. *ibid.*, p.54.
12. Soren Kierkegaard, Either/Or (New Jersey, Princeton University press, 1971), p.66.
13. Edmond Rostand, Cyrano de Bergerac (USA, Dramatic Publishing Company, no date, performance script), p.83.
14. Weinstein, The Metamorphoses of Don Juan, p.68.
15. *ibid.*, p.81.
16. *ibid.*, p.94.
17. See Oscar Mandel, The Theatre of Don Juan (Lincoln, University of Nebraska press, 1963), pp. 328-330.
18. Weinstein, The Metamorphoses of Don Juan, p.120.
19. John Berger, A Fortunate Man (London, Penguin, 1967), p.111.

20. *ibid.*, p.144.
21. *ibid.*, p.111.
22. Weinstein, The Metamorphoses of Don Juan, p.156.
23. *ibid.*, p.160.
24. Albert Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1955), p.75.
25. Weinstein, The Metamorphoses of Don Juan, p.159.
26. Otto Rank, The Don Juan Legend (USA, Princeton University Press, 1975), p.51.
27. *ibid.*, p.50.
28. *ibid.*, p.51.
29. *ibid.*, p.62.
30. As quoted in Oscar Mandel, The Theatre of Don Juan, Part One, p.576.
31. *ibid.*, p.574.
32. *ibid.*, pp.590 - 591.

Encounter: 'Gawain and the Green Knight'

1. WRJ Barron (ed.), Sir Gawain and the Green Knight (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1984).  
The discussion follows this text and any reference to or from this edition will be signified hereafter by 'G.K' followed by a line reference where appropriate.
2. J A Burrow, A Reading of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight ( London, Routledge, 1977), p.71.
3. See Robert Levine, 'Aspects of Grotesque Realism in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight' in Chaucer Review, Volume 17, 1982.
4. *ibid.*, p.67.
5. See Barron (ed.), Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, p.173.
6. *ibid.*, p.173.
7. *ibid.*, p.10.

'Leonie'

1. John Berger, Ways of Seeing, p.61.
2. *ibid.*, p.61.
3. Thomas Hardy, Far from the Madding Crowd (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1993).
4. D H Lawrence, Women in Love, (London, Penguin, 1986), p.396.
5. John Berger, Art and Revolution, p.114 and p.131.
6. *ibid.*, p.127.

'Camille'

1. John Berger, The Foot of Clive, (London, Writers and Readers, 1979), p.12.
2. John Berger, A Painter of our Time, (London, Writers and Readers, 1976), pp. 155-156.
3. *ibid.*, p.60.
4. *ibid.*, p.23.
5. *ibid.*, p.25.
6. *ibid.*, p.25.
7. Bertolt Brecht, 'A Bad Time for Poetry' in John Willet and Ralph Manheim (ed.), Bertolt Brecht: Poems 1913-1956 (London, Eyre Methuen, 1979), p.331.
8. John Berger, Keeping a Rendezvous (London, Granta, 1993), p.197.
9. D H Lawrence, Women in Love, pp. 326-327.
10. John Berger, Art and Revolution, p.144.

Encounter: 'Genette'

1. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, Narrative Fiction: Contemporar Poetics (London, Routledge, 1991), p.4.
2. Gérard Genette, Narrative Discourse (New York, Cornell University Press, 1980), p.23.
3. *ibid.*, p.34.

4. *ibid.*, p.34.
5. Rimmon-Kenan, Narrative Fiction, p.45.
6. *ibid.*, p.48.
7. See Genette, Narrative Discourse, chapter One, 'Order'.
8. Rimmon-Kenan, Narrative Fiction, p.44.
9. John Berger, The White Bird, p.150.
10. Rimmon-Kenan, Narrative Fiction, p.44.
11. *ibid.*, p.44.
12. *ibid.*, p.53.
13. John Berger, The White Bird, p.150.
14. *ibid.*, p.149.
15. John Berger, in Christopher Rawlence (ed.), About Time, introductory essay.
16. Jonathan Culler's introduction to Genette, Narrative Fiction (p.10).
17. Jane Gallop, Reading Lacan (New York, Cornell UNiversity Press, 1985), p.81.

'Nusa'

1. John Berger, The White Bird, pages 5 to 9.
2. *ibid.*, p.9.
3. There is, of course, a further medieval echo here, Berger's phrase corresponding to a famous (and anonymous) medieval treatise entitled The Cloud of Unknowing.
4. John Berger, The White Bird, p.7.
5. Bertolt Brecht, 'The Cherry Thief', in Willett and Manheim, Bertolt Brecht: Poems 1913 to 1956, p.304.
6. Bertolt Brecht, 'A Bad Time for Poetry', in John Willett and Ralph Manheim (ed.), Bertolt Brecht: Poems 1913-1956, p.331.
7. Bertolt Brecht, 'On Everyday Theatre', in Willett and Manheim (ed.) Bertolt Brecht: Poems, p.177.
8. From Lucullus's Trophies, in John Willett and Ralph Manheim (ed.), Bertolt Brecht: Collected Short Stories (London, Minerva, 1992), p.175.
9. This idea of course has been explored by other writers,

for example Synge and Yeats.

10. Raymond Williams, Drama from Ibsen to Brecht (London Penguin, 1976), p.324.
11. *ibid.*, p.320.
12. Willett and Manheim, Bertolt Brecht: Poems 1913-1956, p.380.
13. Bertolt Brecht, preface to Drums in the Night (London, Methuen, 1970), p.xiii.
14. Martin Esslin, Brecht: A Choice of Evils (London, Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1959), p.18.
15. We perhaps think here of the opening of Joyce's Ulysses, and Buck Mulligan flashing his messages onto the 'radiant' sea.
16. Raymond Williams, Drama from Ibsen to Brecht, p.330.

#### Encounter: 'Brecht (2)'

1. Qouted in Ronald Hayman, Brecht: A Biography (London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983), p.234.
2. *ibid.*, p.240.
3. Brecht, 'Poetry and Context', quoted in Willett and Manheim (ed.) Bertolt Brecht: Poems 1913 to 1956, p.482.
4. *ibid.*, p.483.

#### Encounter: 'Brecht (3)'

1. Willett and Manheim (ed.), Bertolt Brecht: Poems 1913 to 1956, p.282.
2. *ibid.*, p.482.
3. *ibid.*, p.483.

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