

**TRADITIONAL ALLEGORY  
AND ITS POSTMODERNIST USE IN THE NOVELS OF  
J.M. COETZEE**

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## INDEX

	PAGE
1 INTRODUCTION .....	1
2 ALLEGORY: A BRIEF CONSIDERATION OF ITS DEVELOPMENT UP TO THE NINETEENTH CENTURY .....	7
2.1 INTRODUCTION .....	7
2.2 THE ORIGINS OF ALLEGORY .....	9
2.3 MEDIEVAL ALLEGORY .....	15
2.3.1 THE NATURE OF MEDIEVAL ALLEGORY .....	15
2.3.2 BIBLICAL ALLEGORY .....	19
2.3.3 THE MORALITY PLAY .....	24
2.3.4 MEDIEVAL LOVE POETRY .....	25
2.4 RENAISSANCE ALLEGORY .....	27
2.5 EIGHTEENTH AND NINETEENTH-CENTURY ALLEGORY ....	33
2.6 SOME CONTENTIONS SURROUNDING ALLEGORY .....	41
2.6.1 ALLEGORY AS GENRE .....	41
2.6.2 METAPHOR OR METONYMY? .....	46
2.6.3 SYMBOLS AND SYMBOLISM IN ALLEGORY ....	48
2.6.4 ALLEGORY AND MYTH .....	50
2.6.5 PERSONIFICATION AND AGENTS IN ALLEGORY	51
3 MODERN ALLEGORY .....	55
3.1 INTRODUCTION .....	55
3.2 THE NATURE OF MODERN ALLEGORY .....	58
3.3 COMPARING EARLIER AND MODERN ALLEGORY .....	68
3.4 SYMBOLS AND MODERN ALLEGORY .....	74
3.5 MYTH AND MODERN ALLEGORY .....	76
3.6 FABULATION .....	77
3.7 THE IMPORTANCE OF THE READER .....	79
3.8 LITTÉRATURE ENGAGÉE .....	81
3.9 A WORKING DEFINITION OF MODERN ALLEGORY .....	83
4 SOME MODERN ALLEGORISTS .....	89
4.1 WILLIAM B. YEATS (1865-1939) .....	89
4.2 JOSEPH CONRAD (1857-1924) .....	91

4.3	FRANZ KAFKA (1883-1924)	92
4.4	HERMANN HESSE (1877-1962)	102
4.5	DINO BUZZATI (1906-1972)	104
4.6	GEORGE ORWELL (1903-1950)	108
4.7	WILLIAM GOLDING (1911- )	109
4.8	LAWRENCE DURRELL (1912- )	115
4.9	IRIS MURDOCH (1916- )	118
4.10	JORGE LUIS BORGES (1899-1986)	124
4.11	GABRIEL OKARA (1921- )	128
4.12	JOAO UBALDO RIBEIRO (1941- )	133
4.13	JOSÉ DONOSO (1924- )	135
4.14	CONCLUSION	147
5	ALLEGORICAL TENDENCIES IN SOUTH AFRICAN LITERATURE	149
5.1	INTRODUCTION	149
5.2	JAN LION-CACHET (1838-1912)	152
5.3	N.P. VAN WYK LOUW (1906-1970)	153
5.4	ETIENNE LEROUX (1922- )	155
5.5	BARTHO SMIT (1924-1986)	168
5.6	ANDRÉ P. BRINK (1935- )	169
5.7	BERTA SMIT (1926- )	171
5.8	ELSA JOUBERT (1922- )	172
5.9	ANNA M. LOUW (1913- )	173
5.10	SHEILA FUGARD (? )	176
5.11	KAREL SCHOEMAN (1939- )	177
5.12	NADINE GORDIMER (1923- )	178
5.13	WILMA STOCKENSTRÖM (1933- )	179
5.14	CONCLUSION	180
6	ALLEGORY AS AN ASPECT OF THE NOVELS OF J.M. COETZEE	181
6.1	INTRODUCTION	181
6.2	DUSKLANDS	184
6.3	IN THE HEART OF THE COUNTRY	209
6.4	WAITING FOR THE BARBARIANS	224
6.5	LIFE AND TIMES OF MICHAEL K	245
6.6	FOE	259

7	CONCLUSION .....	275
8	BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	299
ADDENDUM I:	ABSTRACT .....	i
ADDENDUM II:	UITTREKSEL .....	xi

within this allegorical framework that Coetzee's novels should be read, and within which they attain their most complex meaning. Although many reviewers take cognizance of this fact, no extensive study of this particular aspect has to date been published.

Coetzee's novels qualify as allegories because of the multi-level nature of the narratives. As Beryl Roberts says, "Endowed with a gift for sparse, spare story-telling, in which there is not a wasted word or image, he yet manages to tell a story of allegorical significance, which haunts the mind and touches raw nerves" (1983).

Tony Morphet points out that in Coetzee's very first novel, **Dusk-lands**, "realism as the faithful history of the interpenetration of man and situation seen from within and without, and judged from a single central point of view" is abandoned (58), and Coetzee strikes out on a course as yet uncommon in South African literature, but along a trail blazed by writers such as Barth, Pynchon and Borges. In **Waiting for the Barbarians** Michael Lee identifies a movement in South African fiction "away from direct and realistic representation of a deadlocked South African reality ... through imaginative projection into the realm of allegory, myth and symbol" (1981:88).

Williams refers to the allegorical level of **In the heart of the country**, in which Magda frees herself from her past, represented by her father, and then tries to relate to the black labourers. "The allegory would suggest that it is too late for peaceful negotiations between black and white and the confrontation between them will be violent" (1985:53).

Zamora calls **Waiting for the Barbarians** Coetzee's most allegorical work, presenting "a portrait of the relations between the possessor of power and the possessed which is both a subtle and a pointed indictment of those relations" (5).

**Life and times of Michael K** is identified as an allegory by Allan Huw Smith, who calls Michael K "a bent-wire coat hanger of a character on which to hang this allegory" (1983:28), although Zamora feels that this novel is less an allegorical fable of power than Coetzee's other novels. She does, however, connect this novel to the tradition of allegorical dissent which she has traced in much modern literature (11).

Nadine Gordimer (1984:3) is of the opinion that Coetzee chose allegory as his mode, because it was the only way he could handle the horror he had to convey, and she identifies various allegorical symbols in **Michael K**. Helene Müller confirms that in **Michael K** "Coetzee has written an allegory which may be interpreted on two distinct levels: the universal and the more specifically South African" (1985:41). D.J. Enright appears able to justify **Life and times of Michael K** only on the grounds of its being an allegory, albeit a thin one (1983:1037), while Patricia Blake reads it as an allegory of terminal civil war, and the end of the world (1984:56).

Coetzee's most recent novel, **Foe**, also falls into this category of allegory. Douglas Reid Skinner remarks that "... more allegorically than explicitly, it revealingly examines the complex and highly politicised empirical and textual domains of South Africa, achieving by such inspired distancing an emphatic clarity of vision" (1986b:83). Alexander refers to the fact that the novel is about "the vagaries of communication and above all about the writer's craft" (1987:38), while on the surface confronting the reader with the rudiments of the racist, colonialist situation out of which many of the problems of our present world have grown, thus unmistakably an allegory.

In order to test my hypothesis that the allegorical aspect of Coetzee's novels is of crucial importance to the interpretation of his work, it will be necessary first to trace the development of allegory into modern times. This summary lays no claim to being fully comprehensive, but will hopefully be of sufficient scope to



arrive by this method at a working definition of allegory, within the framework of which it will be possible to evaluate Coetzee's novels as allegories.

## 2 ALLEGORY: A BRIEF CONSIDERATION OF ITS DEVELOPMENT UP TO THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

Despite the developments and adaptations that allegory has undergone through the ages to allow for changing demands and purposes and shifting emphases, it has remained sufficiently recognisable so that even very early definitions are still at least partially valid. Allegory can still be identified as "speaking in other terms" (Gillie,1972:382), while Whitman (1987:1) points out that from the beginning allegory has been known as an oblique way of writing. A very early theorist, Quintilian, says that allegory presents one thing in words and another in meaning (Levine,1981: 23). These early definitions imply a critical awareness of allegory ever since the earliest literary and artistic employment of the form (Bloom,1951:163).

A more modern theorist, Northrop Frye, defines allegory as follows: "We have allegory when the events of a narrative obviously and continuously refer to another simultaneous structure of events or ideas, or natural phenomena" (Preminger,1965:12). Angus Fletcher writes that allegory says one thing and means another (1964: 2) while Nuttall defines allegory as "a described set of things in narrative sequence standing for a different set of things in temporal or para-temporal sequences; in short, a complex narrative metaphor" (1967:48).

These definitions of the simplest form of allegory are useful as starting points, but various authors voice warnings against reading adequacy or conclusiveness into them. Levine points out that Quintilian, Fletcher, Frye, Hönl and Quilligan have all gone on "from the description of allegory's bipartite design to discussion of its larger significance - raising questions of typology, classical backgrounds, Biblical exegesis, 'levels' of interpretation, iconography, and so on" (1981:23-24). Nevertheless, as Bloom

points out, there has never been any divergence of opinion about the "foliate nature" of allegory (1951:173).

Allegory is then a term denoting a technique of literature, which in turn gives rise to a method of criticism. It is a technique of fiction-writing, for allegory must have some kind of narrative basis (Preminger:12).

Allegory appears to have come into being as a form of interpretation of the earliest classical myths. It came to include compositional allegory, adjusted itself to accommodate Christianity and continued through the Middle Ages, becoming particularly popular in secular literature as an allegory of courtly love. In more modern times allegory has proved itself to be a flexible literary form, capable of adapting to modern ways (Sattin,1978:4), coming to include satire and irony, and becoming popular as a disguised political and social commentary. Buning points out that in the course of its long history allegory has proved to be an appropriate literary mode for dramatizing man's psychological experience and search for identity (15). Most recently allegory has served to illustrate man's futile search for meaning in a world that has become a wasteland of frustration and a minefield of racial prejudice and political dissent.

Angus Fletcher and others have shown how features of allegory appear in a variety of kinds of works, from its early beginnings, through the parables of Hawthorne, to such modern poets as Yeats and Eliot (Fowler,1982:193).

Allegory has remained an important mode employed successfully by various modern authors. Indeed, after a long period of decline, allegory has almost become what it once was: the vogue (Whitman, 1981:64), and its value is proved by the fact that it has survived centuries of use, abuse and criticism. It is indeed 'living allegory'.

## 2.2 THE ORIGINS OF ALLEGORY

Whitman has made a study of the meaning of the Greek components of the word 'allegory', and come to the conclusion that the composite connotes both that which is said in secret, and that which is unworthy of the crowd: guarded language and elite language. These two connotations have become explicit parts of allegorical theory and practice. The secretive language has special importance for political allegory, and elite or superior language has particular point in religious and philosophic contexts (1987:263). "Insofar as the emphasis is placed on **saying** other than what is meant, allegorical theory and practice is largely a grammatical or rhetorical matter, concentrating on the **compositional** technique of creating an allegorical text ... Insofar as the emphasis is placed on meaning other than what is said, allegorical theory and practice is largely a philosophic or exegetical matter, stressing the interpretive technique of extracting meaning from a text already written" (Whitman,1987:264).

Auerbach, Lewis and MacQueen are in agreement that allegory originated with the ancient Greeks, in a form which we would now call allegoresis (Lewis,1938:48). Northrop Frye explains that allegoresis, a system of interpreting the gods as personification either of moral principles or of physical or natural forces, grew up in order to account for the foolish behaviour of the gods. Judaism had similar difficulties and there were Jewish efforts to demonstrate that philosophical and moral truths are concealed in the Old Testament stories (Preminger:13). Bloomfield agrees that historically, the allegorical method was developed in Alexandria to interpret 'properly' Homer, and somewhat later there and in Palestine to interpret 'properly' the Old Testament, so that it could be seen as the prediction of Christ or the future kingdom of God (1971:301). Quilligan supports this argument, agreeing that it was allegoresis that began with the Greeks, and that many works were felt to be allegorical because they had been made to read so (1979:19). Theagines of Rhegium (c.525 BC) is generally credited

with having been the first to resort to an allegorical interpretation in explaining such offensive passages in Homer as the battles of the gods. Theagines interpreted below the literal battles of the gods, the description of conflicting elements, or of moral conflicts (Scholes & Kellogg, 1966:117).

Buning confirms that the earliest examples of allegory would therefore be the controversy in early Greek philosophy over the interpretation of the stories about the gods in Homer and Hesiod, which led to the various rationalizations and moralizations of classical myth (35). This means that allegory did not develop merely as a device or a fashion, but "was originally forced into existence by a profound and moral revolution occurring in the later days of paganism" (Lewis:113). In his fine work on allegory, MacQueen confirms that allegory did not originate in the first place as a literary device, and points out that its origins were philosophical and theological (1970:1). Scholes confirms this view, arguing that allegory depends on types, but the types of allegory are referable to a philosophy and theology concerned with ideals and essences (101).

Lewis, however, also agrees with Dante that the history of allegory begins with the personifications in classical Latin poetry (48). This view is supported by Quilligan who says that "as a narrative in its own right, allegory had to await a Christian Latin poet"<sup>1</sup> (1979:19). The type of narrative allegory referred to here, has been termed "compositional allegory" by Whitman (1987: 264). Whitman says that the interaction between compositional and interpretive strains of allegory reaches a critical stage in the twelfth century, the decisive turning point being the *Cosmographia* of Bernard Silvestris. He says that "in this text, the coordinating tendencies of earlier movements in antiquity and the Middle Ages begin to coalesce in a comprehensive, far-reaching design"

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1. Quilligan identifies this poet as the fourth-century Prudentius (1979:19).

(9-10). Bernard interprets the story of creation by creating allegorical agents to act out the story, thus integrating the act of interpretation with the act of personification. By consolidating the internal dynamics of allegorical writing, he stimulates the sophisticated allegorical movement of the late Middle Ages (Whitman, 1987:10).

Edwin Hönic is of the opinion that the origins of allegory are to be located "in the indistinct border between primitive mythological figurations and the more sophisticated structures of philosophical thought" (Buning:35). This idea is particularly interesting when seen in the context of modern African literature. Hugh Webb contends that this becomes clear when one examines some characteristic features of the African oral tradition, "that vast cultural inheritance responsible for shaping the final form of much of the modern literary achievement [in Africa]" (1978:67). The moralising tales or parables are certainly allegorical in form, "a short narrative presented so as to emphasise the implicit analogy between the component story-parts and the organising moral or lesson" (67).

In agreement with Hönic's view, Bloomfield traces the origins of personification allegory into the distant past, pointing out that "it has been argued that the origin of literary personification is to be found in ritual drama, for Canaanite and Egyptian rituals used abstract qualities as divine and semidivine names" (1963:163). He also concedes that in the earliest Western writings, in the Bible and Homer, personifications are used, and they are found throughout all Greek and Roman literature (163). In fact, Bloomfield declares that if we view the whole range of Western literature, from Homer to the present time, personification allegory will be found to be one of the most popular of all literary modes (1963:161). He defines personification allegory as the process of animating inanimate objects or abstract ideas (163) and calls it a method of "presenting generalized and idealized notions in literature by literary means" (170).

To Lewis allegory is inventing *visibilia* to express an immaterial fact, such as the passions which one experiences (45), for he believes that allegory developed as the only way in which to convey that which is subjective in literature, "to paint the inner world" (113). Indeed, he calls it "the subjectivism of an objective age" (30). Allegory makes it possible to convey complexities of meaning not otherwise accessible. It causes reverberations in the readers' own experience, so that even the simplest allegory may have almost endless application (Lewis, 1938:289).

Levine agrees: "By definition personification is a metaphoric, hence mixed mode - something non-human is endowed with human characteristics. This 'endowment' results from the transfer of semantic features from a predicate normally associated with humans to a noun (typically functioning as subject) that designates something non-human" (1981:24). He explains that when we say that allegory says one thing and means another, it is the predicate that "says" the one and the personified nouns that "mean" the other (25). Bloomfield acknowledges that the relevant theories of Lewis are perhaps the best-known (1963:168) and he is also in general agreement, stating that personification allegory combines the non-metaphoric subject with metaphoric predicate and "yokes together the concrete and the metaphoric in the presentation of generality" (169). He is of the opinion, however, that what Lewis speaks of as "immateriality" is better thought of as "generality" (1963:170).

At the root of the allegorical concept is the traditional notion that it is "an essentially didactic device whose responsibility it is to delight while it teaches" (Bloom:164). From the beginning allegory has been associated with narrative, "a narrative, that is to say, or series of narratives, which serves to explain those universal facts that most intimately affect the believer, facts such as times, crops, tribes, cities, nations, birth, marriage, death, moral laws, the sense of inadequacy and failure and the sense of potential, both of which characterize the greater part of mankind" (MacQueen:1).

MacQueen identifies Plato as the effective founder of many aspects of the allegorical tradition. The tradition of Homeric allegoresis was well-established at the time of his birth, and constituted an important element in Greek philosophy by the time he wrote **The Republic** (Scholes & Kellogg:118). In his attempt to give comprehensible shape to truths that were difficult for the human mind to grasp, he employed myths, allegorical narratives and developed metaphors (MacQueen:7). MacQueen illustrates the depth of meaning made possible by the use of allegory: "Dis or Pluto, the god of the underworld who rapes Proserpine, is the earth in which the seed is buried and germinates. At a different level, however, Dis is death, and Proserpine is the human soul, subject to death, but redeemed by the toils of the mother goddess, Ceres" (2). He suggests that the Greek philosopher, Sallustius, would have called the one level "material" and the other "psychic". Ceres and Proserpine began as an allegorical process of sowing and harvesting corn, which is the material level, but by an almost inevitable extension became an allegory of rebirth after death, which represents the psychic level (1).

A second myth which MacQueen discusses is that of the search of the musician, Orpheus, for his dead wife, Eurydice. This allegory he labels psychic: "Orpheus and his music represent the higher intellectual and redemptive powers of the human soul, Eurydice the lower, more appetitive powers which are particularly subject to evil and death. The sufferings of Orpheus in the upper and underworlds represent the sacrifices necessary if the soul is to redeem the lower self which it loves, and without which it cannot find salvation" (4). MacQueen points out that under Orphic influence, the allegorical journey through the underworld became an important part of classical epic poetry, notably in Virgil's **Aeneid** (5). "The descent of Aeneas [into Hades] is an allegory of the dark night of the soul as it is tempered to become the instrument of divine purpose" (MacQueen:5). Wimsatt and Brooks identify the **Aeneid** as an allegory of the course of human life: "the wanderings of the first three books are the tales that amuse childhood;



the love affair of the fourth and the athletic exercises of the fifth typify phases of youth; the descent into Hades of the sixth is a profound study of the whole nature of things; the rest is the contest of active life" (1970:148). Wimsatt calls this a typical moralisation of a classical myth. "One should notice, however, that the two levels of action do not merge when abstract names are assigned. There still exist independently a literal action and an abstract action which the literal action points to. On the literal level, despite the generalizing names, a specific man still plays a specific lyre in the woods" (1970:25).

Fletcher points out that allegories tend to resolve themselves into either of two basic forms, which may be labelled "battle" and "progress". He says that "battle" perhaps begins in Western literature with Hesiod's account of the *gigantomachia*, the battle between titanic creatures for control of the world, but is more prominent when psychologised with the *Psychomachia* (the fight for mansoul) of the early Christian poet, Prudentius. Progress begins with the allegorical interpretation of the *Odyssey*, the *Argonautica*, and the *Aeneid* (151).

In some allegories, particularly in some of the earliest attempts at allegorical narrative, like Prudentius' *Psychomachia*, the aesthetic and mimetic elements seem to be sacrificed to plainness of meaning. In *Psychomachia* the characters are female soldiers, bearing the names of virtues and vices, involved in unrealistic and aesthetically unsatisfying cavalry charges and single combats, in which the virtues ultimately triumph (Scholes & Kellogg:110). Nevertheless, one of the earliest recorded objections against allegory is that of Socrates, who complains of the obscurity which shrouds the underlying intention of moralistic poetry (Bloom:173-174).

## 2.3 MEDIEVAL ALLEGORY

### 2.3.1 THE NATURE OF MEDIEVAL ALLEGORY

According to Gay Clifford, the wide range of material included in medieval allegory originated from the encyclopaedic humanism of the twelfth century. She says that the omnipresence of this kind of encyclopaedism that dominated the Middle Ages is suggested by the recurrent figure of the world as Mirror or Book (1974:64). Leyburn points out that what a mirror reveals is just a reflection of reality, but it is only by means of the reflection that reality can be perceived (1956:9). It was a development which had an important influence on the intellectual history of the next three centuries, and it affected allegories as much as it did ecclesiastical art and theology. The more comprehensive a work was, the more effective it was thought to be (Clifford:63). She says that "amplification" and "embellishment" were the terms used for excursions into subject matter now regarded as separate from literature (65). Coetser (1985:18) regards this as a weakness, stating that by building three or four levels of meaning into his work, the medieval allegorist made his allegory obscure.

Lewis emphasises that there was nothing mystical or mysterious about medieval allegory. It was a mode of expression used deliberately (1938:48). He points out that we cannot speak, can in fact hardly think of an "inner conflict" without a metaphor, which is a limited allegory (60). He traces the development of allegory and finds that the habit of applying allegorical interpretations to ancient texts encouraged fresh allegorical constructions (61). Later medieval allegory is a new creation. "It owes to antiquity and to the Dark Ages not so much its procedure as the preservation of that atmosphere in which allegory was a natural method" (84).

Whitman identifies three different but related versions of the philosophic tradition which distinguish, respectively, three seminal allegories in the Middle Ages. He emphasises that none of the

traditions defines the "philosophy" of a particular allegory or any medieval period, but "each approach, brought into the foreground by broad changes in medieval intellectual life, illuminates a different allegorical work" (1981:65-66). He calls the first approach the absolute or metaphysical correlation of opposites which divides the very universe into opposites, arguing that one side implies the other. In the *Cosmographia* Bernard Silvestris seeks to resolve this division. The effort to define the oppositions of the natural world might be called the relative, or generative, correlation of opposites, and this preoccupies Alain de Lille's more troubled vision in the *De planctu naturae*. The relation between nature and the human mind in what might be called the perpetual, or epistemological, correlation of opposites is dramatised a century after the *De planctu* in Jean de Meun's *Roman de la Rose*. Two generations later, Dante consolidates and transforms these three approaches in the *Divine Comedy* (1981:66).

Bloom says that for the spiritually and morally searching temper of the Middle Ages, allegory was ideally suited to the expression of both temporal and everlasting truths, because it offered an apparently satisfactory key to many of the mysteries of the moral universe. "Medieval thinkers ... made it impossible for themselves to evaluate every event in nature or in scripture as the repository of four different yet related kinds of truth, one literal and three symbolic" (165). The three symbolic kinds of truth he identifies as allegorical, tropological and anagogical (165). He believes that this rule has survived as the philosophical essence of allegorical writing (166).

Wimsatt finds that modern critics have identified at least three varieties of allegory in medieval literature: topical allegory in which fictional characters and a fictional story represent the real actions of historical people; scriptural allegory written in imitation of the allegory found by medieval exegetes throughout the Bible, and personification allegory in which the actions of persons representing abstract concepts portray events of general

human significance (23). Topical allegory seems to have more historical than literary value. The fable of the mice in *Piers Plowman*, for example, is generally accepted as a representation of political events in Richard II's time (Wimsatt:23). His king is both the King of England and all kings, his field full of folk both England and the whole human community. The failure of various orders of Englishmen to fulfil the most basic obligations of social and political justice is given grave and apocalyptic significance (Scholes & Kellogg:144).

McClellan agrees that allegory in its narrower sense is usually moral allegory (1976:39). Zamora is of the opinion that medieval poets were concerned to preserve the values of a world they felt to be slipping away "under the changing social and intellectual pressures of their times" (1). Allegory personifies abstractions such as love, faith or courage. It may also be historical, presenting a historical event or series of events half-concealed by altered names and surroundings. Historical allegory seldom refers to the distant past, and generally has to do with contemporary events. In the Scriptures it often refers to events in the future (McClellan:37).

Zamora (1) gives her description of medieval allegory: "It rests on the understanding of a universe in which all things are fundamentally signs, an understanding inherent in the ubiquitous trope of the world as God's book. The framework for all medieval signs was believed to be fixed and guaranteed, and diverse spheres believed to be ultimately congruent: the allegorical literature of the medieval period was a means of making this congruence visible".

Allegory may be simple or complex. Simple allegory is often considered to be naïve because it subordinates the fiction to the abstract "moral". An example is the fable. Simple historical allegories occur in some of the later prophecies of the Bible, such as the allegory of the four kingdoms in Daniel. More complex historical allegories tend to develop a strongly ironical tone, so that

there is a close connection between historical or political allegory and satire (Preminger:12).

Piehler observes that many early medieval allegories are concerned with the logical argumentation between rationality and pre-rational thoughts and beliefs (1971:7-8). Allegory blurs those distinctions that would be distracting. The discursively complex is represented symbolically with a directness and unity of expression that suggests an underlying unity, even in the "reality" of the invisible world (Piehler:45). Piehler confirms Lewis's finding that with the turning inward of the mind, to internal debate, comes a tendency towards allegory (34). He suggests that in allegory there is a deliberate attempt, supported by both the intuitive and rational operations of the mind, to recover the internal dimension that was inherent in primitive myth (10).

Piehler explores a particular type of allegory, a manifestation of a particular kind of experience, visionary allegory. His approach is twofold: a literary historical approach in which he explains medieval allegory in terms of the ancient myths out of which its central imagery developed, and the classical dialogue which formed the basis of its intellectual structure; he also interprets visionary allegory as "a profound and far-reaching exploration of the human psyche, sustained and developed for over a thousand years" (5).

Dreams are an important medieval allegorical device, *Piers Plowman* containing no less than eight dreams, and two dreams within dreams. Sattin, in fact, contends that allegory did not originate as a literary form at all, but as interpretation of dreams, events or utterances (5). The dreamer is faced by an alarming problem that causes considerable emotional tension. The initial answer to the problem is provided by an enigmatic vision of a psychic authority, and the dreamer has to obtain further guidance from an interpreter. It is this type of allegory that Piehler terms "visionary allegory". The pattern that is usually followed is the preliminary anguish,

the subsequent prayers and invocations by which the hero obtains access to the visionary world, the landscapes of this world, the characters of the persons he meets there, and the dialogue that ensues between them (Sattin:7). Both *Piers Plowman* and *The Pilgrim's Progress* answer to this description.

In medieval visionary allegory the emotional tone of the situation is frequently conveyed by images of landscape and setting (Piehler:41). Coetser points out that the allegorical landscape in medieval visions was drawn from a range of specific literary sources. The primary source was the Biblical Garden of Eden, and garden imagery of the *Song of songs* (78).

Piehler has come to the further conclusion, that from the thirteenth century onwards allegorists increasingly based their allegories on the encounter of the narrator with a single specific individual, rather than with a personified abstraction. He suggests that Dante's figure of Beatrice was the great step towards modern conceptions, in which concrete personalities became frequent (142).

### 2.3.2 BIBLICAL ALLEGORY

The allegorical method of interpretation of the Bible had its origins with Greek and Roman thinkers, who treated classical myths as allegorical interpretations of abstract cosmological, philosophical or moral truths (Abrams,1981:88). Piehler agrees that Biblical and Christian allegory developed naturally out of medieval pagan allegory, the already familiar "psychic" level being readily transferred to Christian Biblical exegetical practice, and to religious allegory (80). On the other hand, Scholes and Kellogg warn against this assumption. Although rationalist attacks on the truth and morality of Biblical texts were similar enough to those levelled against Homer, Scholes and Kellogg believe that they cannot be assumed to be a continuing of pre-Socratic Homeric allegoresis. They motivate their objection by pointing out a basic dif-

ference between the two. Plato and his predecessors understood the Homeric texts to have been divinely inspired, but the truth was hidden below the literal surface. The literal surface itself was a (beautiful) lie. Hebrew exegesis also regards the Bible as being divinely inspired, but the difference from Greek allegoresis lies in its acceptance of the scriptural writings as literally and historically true (Scholes & Kellogg:122). St Augustine, for example, believed that the Bible was literally true. God, being the author, is the allegorist and He frequently hides his meaning in the historical events recorded by the Old and New Testaments (122).

Bloomfield points out that Prudentius' *Psychomachia* gave personification allegory a great boost, representing a break-through in which Judeo-Christian notions were given an epic quality built around personifications (1963:163). He says that when Prudentius "presents artistically" the moral struggle by means of personified abstractions, he is "creating a work which makes clear the norm and the ideal without losing the vividness of the concrete" (169).

Christian visionary allegory contains examples of the two types of allegorical *loci* most prevalent in later medieval allegory: the landscape as setting, and the contrast of landscapes to express contrasted psychological and spiritual states (Piehler:81). Piehler names an example: "The vision of the ninth similitude of the **Pastor of Hermas** (second century) includes a detailed description and interpretation of the contrasted topography of twelve mountains representing twelve contrasted human states" (80).

Corinthians X:1-11 is an example of allegory. "In this passage Paul sees the exodus of the Children of Israel from Egypt as combining historical fact with a latent meaning which refers to the Christian Church. Egypt is the old world of sin; the Promised Land is the Kingdom of God; the wilderness is the struggle for salvation during this life. The miraculous crossing of the Red Sea together with the subsequent guidance by the pillar of cloud

corresponds to Christian baptism; manna corresponds to the bread of the Eucharist; the water which sprang from the Rock corresponds to the wine of the Eucharist; Moses and the Rock correspond to Christ, and there may also be a reference to Peter, the Rock on which Christ built His Church ..." (MacQueen:19-20).

Paul saw the old Israel as a type of the New Kingdom. That Paul was right is suggested by the prophetic nature of the later books of the Old Testament (MacQueen:27).

More examples are mentioned by MacQueen, namely the Song of Solomon, which may be allegorized in terms of the love between Christ and the Church, and Jonah in the whale's body as the descent into Hell and the resurrection of Christ, the three days spent in the whale's belly being allegorized as the period between Good Friday and Easter Day (20-21).

MacQueen identifies both narrative and figural allegory in the Bible, Corinthians XIII being a figural allegory, and the parable of the Prodigal Son a narrative allegory (18). The Old Testament events, on the other hand, are "types", figures of events in the New Testament (18).

The examples mentioned above (the Song of Solomon and Jonah in the whale's body) depend less on a narrative than on a situation (mutual love; Jonah's plight). "The full meaning becomes apparent in terms only of the future. A figure may be involved, but to bring out the allegorical meaning it stands, not in isolation, but in meaningful context. The prophetic situation rather than the figure forms the allegory. Narrative is not involved, or if it is, it is at a fairly rudimentary level" (MacQueen:23).

In typological theory, events narrated in the Old Testament are viewed as figures which are historically real themselves, but also prefigure persons, actions and events in the New Testament (Abrams: 87). "Typological interpretation is sometimes said to be horizontal, in that it relates items in two texts separated in time; al-



legorical interpretation is said to be vertical, in that it uncovers multiple meanings expressed by a single textual item" (Abrams:88). Abrams explains that the distinction is between the historical truth that is expressly signified, and the allegoric meaning that is signified by analogy (88).

Boucher says that typology is the perception of God's acts in history as consistent and steadfast, therefore as interrelated and mutually illuminating. "Typology is continuous not simply because of the continuity of cause and effect in history, but because purpose is lent by history's author, God. According to this view God makes each event a partial revelation of His whole purpose and a term relative to the absolute fulfillment" (1981:133).

MacQueen believes that typology dominated Christian thought and Christian art until the Reformation (18) and he comes to the conclusion that typological allegory forms an important subdivision of the more general prophetic and situational forms of allegory, which are characteristic of both the Old and the New Testament (23).

The difference between narrative and typological allegory is described by MacQueen. Typological allegory has no narrative complication such as the role of the Priest and the Levite in the parable of the Good Samaritan, or the behaviour of the elder brother in that of the Prodigal Son, these last two being narrative allegories. He believes that the majority of the New Testament parables are prophetic and situational allegory, not involving typology (23). Bede makes an important distinction between verbal and factual allegory which MacQueen explains: "Verbal allegory is a trope: it is a use of figurative language to convey prophetic information. Factual allegory is a New Testament typology" (52).

Clifford contends that all New Testament allegory, particularly situational allegory, originated from a feeling that author and audience were participating in a new and exceptional situation.

She hastens to qualify, however, that this feeling was not confined to the New Testament (26). The situational allegory of the Bible is, on the whole, more direct and immediate than the classical allegory which, while dealing with the day-to-day and year-to-year routine of life, places this routine at a distance and so makes it more "comprehensible and controllable" (MacQueen:26). MacQueen names Mark IV:26-29 (the parable of the man who casts seed into the ground but doesn't know how it grows) as situational allegory, a straight-forward variation on the Seeds and the Ground. The reaping of the harvest, however, now represents the advent of the Kingdom of God (25). Ezekiel XXVII-XXXII is also an example of situational allegory, in which Tyre is presented as a magnificent merchant ship, wrecked at sea (MacQueen:28).

The book of Revelations makes use of situational allegory, being the record of a series of visions, but structurally can be classified as alphabetic allegory: "The entire book Revelations revolves on the phrase which in the first and last chapters John placed in the mouth of Christ: 'I am alpha and omega, the first and the last' [letters of the alphabet]" (MacQueen:33). Alphabetical allegory merges easily into the numerical, and the numbers referred to in this book, two, seven, twelve, etc., have a powerful meaning in relation to time and history (MacQueen:33). This tradition was continued into later periods and MacQueen refers to a hymn composed by St Colomba of Iona, *Altus Prosator*, for which he used a similar content, an account of the beginning and end of the world, in numerical allegorical form (44).

Scholes and Kellogg are of the opinion that the "plot" of the Bible may be seen not merely as a horizontal line stretching from the beginning to the end of historical time, but also as a second line, just above the former, gradually rising and leading in time from man's expulsion from paradise to his reunion with God in Heaven (124).

### 2.3.3 THE MORALITY PLAY

The oldest kind of compositional allegory is the moral or homiletic allegory. In the Middle Ages the moralities were the most important form of allegorical drama. Riggio suggests that Medieval Christian writers favoured allegory "because of its tendency to give universal sanction to a particular set of moral patterns and to transfer meaning consistently from one level of meaning to another, features which accorded well with medieval theological ideals" (1981:188).

Mackenzie states that the Moralities are not a series of plays which have adopted allegory as a method of presentation; but a series of allegories presented in dramatic form (1914:vii) in which the emphasis is placed "on those allegorical figments that expressed the fate of man on earth" (Preminger:531). It is didactic and employs three kinds of allegorical agents: the individual, the type, and the allegorical hero (Coetser:27). It has two poles, its bipolarity (birth, death, etc.) emphasising facets of life, which become allegorical leit-motifs (Coetser:25). Coetser quotes Mackenzie as saying that the main object of a morality play is the teaching of some moral lesson, in which the principal characters are personified abstractions of universal types (25). The motif is the pilgrimage of the life of man, an enterprise ending in death or a battle between the forces of evil. The crisis in the full-scope moralities is the unexpected arrival of Death (Preminger:531). Abrams calls them dramatised allegories of the life of man, his temptation and sinning, his quest for salvation, and his confrontation by death. The hero represents Everyman, and among the other characters are personifications of virtues, vices and Death, as well as angels and demons who contest the possession of the soul of man (108).

Broussard is of the opinion that the theme of a journey which originated two civilizations before in the *Odyssey*, became the medieval morality play epitomized in *Everyman* (1962:6).

Riggio recognises change or development in English morality plays, pointing out that those of the fifteenth century characteristically dramatise the process of Christian redemption as an allegory of temptation, repentance, and divine mercy, while sixteenth-century moralities often serve more obviously political purposes (187). Riggio says that Bevington identifies **Wisdom who is Christ** (c. 1460-1480) as the first English morality play to contain an extended political commentary, but finds evidence to suggest that as early as the beginning of the fifteenth century, in the oldest extant English morality play, **The Castle of Perseverance** (c. 1400-1425), there is a consistent political sub-structure associating economic and social abuse with feudal patronage (188). **The Castle of Perseverance** dramatises four theological allegories: the pilgrimage of human life, the battle between the vices and the remedial virtues, the defence of a figurative castle, and the debate of the four daughters of God in the parliament of Heaven (Riggio: 188). She emphasises, however, that the play goes beyond traditional theology in its use of allegory, and becomes a reflection on the social order (189).

#### 2.3.4 MEDIEVAL LOVE POETRY

Medieval love poetry is apt to repel the modern reader, both by its form and its matter. Lewis is of the opinion, however, that we should understand our present, and perhaps even our future better if we could succeed in reconstructing the long-lost state of mind for which the allegorical love poem was a natural mode of expression (1), because humanity moves through stages of development yet never leaves anything behind.

The allegorical method in general was familiar to thirteenth-century readers (Lewis:116). In support of his view of the importance of allegory, Lewis says that "the inner life, and specially the life of love, religion and spiritual adventure, has ... always been the field of true allegory; for there are intangibles which

only allegory can fix and reticences which only allegory can overcome"(166).

According to Bloomfield, as far as the West is concerned, "the great efflorescence of personification began in the late twelfth century with the extensive use of animated concepts and notions, many of them psychological, in romance, lyric, and debate" (1963: 163).

The first part of **Le Roman de la Rose** by Guillaume de Lorris is perhaps the finest example of allegory in medieval love poetry. Lewis describes its second part by Jean de Meun as a failure, but a great failure, designating the **Romance** as the typical poem of the Middle Ages (155). The poems that derive from it constitute the most important literary phenomenon of the later Middle Ages (156).

In the fourteenth century the sentiment of courtly love, expressed in the form of an allegory, made its effective appearance in England (Lewis:158). Chaucer's love poems are all recognisable descendants of **The Romance of the Rose**, but none of them is a poem of the same type (166). Lewis believes, however, that while the Guillaume **Le Roman de la Rose** is a true allegory of love, only a trace-work of allegory survives in the work of Chaucer. We have dreams, allegorical persons, and in the **Book of the Duchesse** we have the allegorical frame of a dream and courtly love, but Lewis contends that allegory has disappeared (167). Love allegory, however, forms the framework of Gower's **Confessio** (Lewis:213).

Lewis finds allegory to be the dominant form in the years between Chaucer's death and the emergence of the poetry of Wyatt, emphasising that dominance is not necessarily good for a form (232). Bloomfield contends that the period from 1200 to 1700 was the great era of personification allegory in European literature (1963: 163). It is the labouring of this form that has given allegory its bad name (Lewis:233). It deteriorates steadily as the Middle

Ages progress. With Deguileville medieval allegory descends to such depths that Lewis almost finds it possible to excuse the last century of criticism "for rejecting allegory root and branch as a mere disease of literature", but even in Deguileville's work there are passages that restore one's faith (Lewis:269). Through Lydgate and Hawes there is improvement but a new perfection is only reached in Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (Lewis:279). It was his method to have an allegorical core in each book, although not everything in the poem was allegorical (Lewis:334).

#### 2.4 RENAISSANCE ALLEGORY

"With the ascendancy of the Renaissance the practical concept of allegory became comparatively simplified, although in its general outlines the mode supported the same tropological and anagogical overtones as in medieval usage" (Bloom:166). Bloom points out that the Renaissance practitioners and critics retained the concept of the literal-figurative level, but synthesized the three symbolic levels into one (166). Allegory remained a valuable didactic tool (167).

McClennan expresses some generalizations concerning the function of allegory during the Renaissance: that it was useful as a rhetorical device, and that it was useful to half conceal contemporary references (37). Zamora sees similarities in medieval and Renaissance allegories in that they both present an admirable surface of action and description which corresponds to a moral and ethical system - unstated perhaps, but palpably present (1).

McClennan has made a study of the definitions of the term 'allegory' as it was used between 1550 and 1650, and has found it used loosely enough to include fable, prophecy, irony, hyperbole, and similar devices. "It is synonymous with the vague, the strange, even the technical" (37). Puttenham's definition is more limited, finding allegory to be "continued metaphor" (McClennan:37). Put-

tenham and some critics, in fact, decry allegory because of its "duplicity" (Bloom:168), while other critics like Harington and practitioners like Spenser acknowledge allegory not as a deception for the sake of concealment, but as a "transparently adorned statement of both tropological and anagogical truth" (Bloom:168). This latter view is predominant during the Renaissance period.

In his letter to Cangrande, Dante expounds the four possible senses which he identifies in polysemous allegory: the literal, the allegorical, the moral and the anagogical. He uses the Biblical account of the departure of the Israelites out of Egypt to illustrate his theory. "Here the literal sense ... is the actual, historical journey out of Egypt; the moral sense is the conversion of the soul from the misery of sin to a state of grace; the anagogical sense is the passage of the soul from terrestrial corruption to heavenly glory" (Nuttall:23). Nuttall remarks that Dante allies his *Comedy* with scriptural allegory (23).

Leyburn focuses attention on the fact that Renaissance writers were still convinced that allegory is "a decoration of unpalatable truth, the sugar coating of the pill" (3). Although Scholes and Kellogg find it difficult to imagine that the representational or aesthetic qualities of allegory could ever have been received in this way (110), this conviction probably stemmed from the use made of allegory by the medieval church. In the interpretation of scripture Leyburn recognises that the presence of allegory is indicated in three of the four senses, literal, allegoric, tropologic and anagogic (3).

Up to the Renaissance, visionary allegory is defined by its use of the images of the external world, and the structural principles of the classical dialogue, to fashion a visionary world "in which spiritual powers can be encountered and portrayed directly" (Piehler:10). Spenser's allegory, however, finds its most characteristic images not in the world of experience, but in the Faeryland of myth and romance (Scholes & Kellogg:145). The introductions to

each of *Piers Plowman*, *Faerie Queene* and *Pilgrim's Progress*, confront the reader with a strange world, each distinctive, though at the same time a combination of elusiveness and familiarity. They are neutral and indefinite, and yet immediately suggest that they mean something important (Clifford:2). Rosamund Tuve distinguishes between "moral" allegory, which by universalizing human behaviour teaches us how to act, and "allegory proper" which is concerned with man as a soul to be saved. Both kinds of allegory are present in Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (Tuve, 1966:25). Spenser's doctrine is based on a broadly humanistic Christian ethic and theology, but his heroes, which being illustrative of specific virtues, are also types of men, not purely intellectual symbols.

Lewis calls Spenser the great mediator between the Middle Ages and the modern poets: "What the romantics learned from him was something different from allegory; but perhaps he could not have taught it unless he had been an allegorist. In the history of sentiment he is the greatest of the founders of that romantic conception of marriage which is the basis of all our love literature from Shakespeare to Meredith" (360).

Scholes and Kellogg identify Spenser and Dante as being among the few narrative poets really to master allegorical composition. It is possible to gain from their work an idea of the essence of allegory, and what qualities are indispensable to allegorists: "They have in common extraordinary literary learning and linguistic ability; ease and control in writing vernacular verse, based on enormous natural gifts and an arduous apprenticeship in versification; a deep commitment to ideas, balanced by an esthetic commitment to the art of narrative" (108).

During the Renaissance the fundamental narrative forms of allegory are still the journey, the battle or conflict, the quest or search, and transformation, some form of controlled or directed process. Both the allegorical journey and the allegorical battle descend from myths originating in classical texts. Clifford says that the



control is provided by the object of the activity: "We interpret the significance of the 'motion' of the characters and of the forces affecting them in the light of knowledge about the direction in which they travel" (15). This is possible because the direction of the action is usually signalled at the outset: "The dreamer hero of **Piers Plowman** asks, 'How may I save my soul? How may I know the true from the false?' and these questions initiate the movement of the poem. Christian asks, 'Whither must I fly?' Spenser's knightly heroes are assigned to particular tasks" (15). Clifford enumerates the diversity of objectives of allegorical heroes: "Salvation in **Piers Plowman**; true courtesy in Book VI of **The Faerie Queene**; sexual possession and pleasure in **Le Roman de la Rose**" (12).

She points out that all these allegories are concerned as much with the way in which the characters go about achieving these objects as with the actual achievement, the conclusion of the narrative (12). Lewis calls these fundamental narrative forms archetypal patterns which often appear in works as motifs (Coetser:20-21). Hönlig designates this allegorical quality "a twice-told tale", expressing a vital belief (1959:12). He calls the tale "twice-told" because it employs an old story, the allegorical motif, as the pattern for a new story. According to Rosamund Tuve it does not matter where the parallels are fetched from in allegory: "What counts is whether a metaphorically understood relation is used to take off into areas where a similitude can point to valuable human action, or to matters of spiritual import" (13).

Coetser agrees with the idea of a basic structure, pattern or pre-text forming the basis of allegory. As an example he cites **Don Quixote**. He is of the opinion that the chivalric romances, of which **Don Quixote** was intended to be a satire, form its pre-text (36).

"Allegory requires not only an episodic narrative which can be extended at will, but also means for the analysis of that narrative.

Exposition must co-exist with the dramatized substance of the exposition" (Clifford:23). Clifford finds that the form which ideally meets this requirement is the journey, "a metaphor for life which can be found at almost all periods of Western culture" (23). She says, furthermore, that "in journey, as in dream-vision, the traveller is an instrument whereby systems can be explored. Because he is an outsider he often possesses a special kind of objectivity about the newly encountered system as a whole while the sequential nature of his experiences provides for explaining its particularities" (23). The allegorical journey also takes the form of a quest, and need not be a physical journey, but a journey of the spirit. **Don Quixote**, for example, becomes a symbolic figure of a man and his quest for spiritual freedom (Coetser:39). Fletcher says that the traveller is a natural hero for allegory, because on his journey he is plausibly led into fresh situations, and new aspects of himself may be turned up (3).

MacNeice is of the opinion that the medieval morality play, **Everyman**, is an obvious prototype for Bunyan, "for Christian is Everyman again, and his quest can stand for any quest that begins in anguish and ends in self-conquest and death" (1965:29).

Zamora has her own views about the occurrence of the quest motif in allegory: "Though it is common enough in European medieval and renaissance allegories, the form itself was not presented as a quest so much as an assertion, or rather, a re-assertion of the institutional imperatives of church and crown" (1). Fletcher identifies a further guise under which the quest motif appears, being presented as "an eternally unsatisfied search for perfection, a sort of Platonic quest for the truly worthy loved object" (64). The imperfection of mortal love and life is illustrated by the fact that the typical knight in **The Faerie Queene** is rewarded for victory not with bliss, but with a further challenge (Fletcher:65).

Nuttall observes that the great critical error in dealing with the personifications in an allegory like Bunyan's, is "to suppose that

because the degree and elaboration of personification, etc., is so obviously fictional, the personification itself must be fictional also" (32). He explains that Bunyan probably believed that something bearing a recognisable resemblance to Apollyon did exist, just as he fully expected there to be a Heavenly City which he could not accurately describe because he had never been there. It is therefore not mere fiction, just as Apollyon is not mere fiction. "Bunyan uses his figures and personifications not because he believes in them **tout court**, be because he does not know how else to say what he wants to say" (32).

Frye remarks that often the allegorist is too interested in his additional meaning to care whether his fiction is consistent or not as a fiction. Bunyan, and even Spenser occasionally drop into naive allegory (Preminger:12) and this is possibly one of the reasons why allegory has met with criticism from the earliest times and is still frequently the object of derogatory comment.

According to Pehler, the importance of allegory as a serious genre waned in the fifteenth century "owing to the growing inability of allegorical poets to continue to achieve imaginative comprehension of the symbolical and mythical elements of the form" (20). A more strictly analytic approach to the phenomenal world had developed by the seventeenth century and made allegory seem trivial (20). McClennan points out, however, that the usefulness of allegory as a rhetorical device is never challenged, and that it is a highly effective mode. He holds that this is as true at the end as at the beginning of the period (37). The use of allegory to carefully veil contemporary references was firmly established in this period.

The image of the world as book survives into the seventeenth century, but after that becomes less common (Clifford:54). Clifford points out that Galileo spoke of the book of the universe being open, but illegible to most men, because they did not understand its language (65). This comment marked a great change, in fact a

complete contrast to the medieval encyclopaedic approach. It was "the beginning of the fragmentation of the intellectual world and the dividing up of the imaginative universalism available to Alain de Lille, Dante, Langland or Spenser. The fragmentation is suggested by the way in which attitudes to digression change" (Clifford:65).

## 2.5 EIGHTEENTH AND NINETEENTH-CENTURY ALLEGORY

From the late seventeenth century onwards, allegory underwent a drastic change. Even from a casual reading it is clear that far from offering "an ordered universe as an object of delighted contemplation", works are written with a sense of hostility towards any systematization of life. Clifford says that they are still frequently concerned with order, but as something threatening (110). She suggests that the capacity for constructing and believing in a coherent world view began to disintegrate in the eighteenth century as can be seen in Swift's **A tale of a tub** (1704), which is "a deliberate parody of the allegorical method, a brilliant palimpsest of irony", and in **Gulliver's travels** (1726) which ironically mocks and parodies cultural authority as well as its own textual authority (49). Leyburn points out that in **A tale of a tub**, the story is the determining force, but instead of finding a vehicle for his wit in the Bible and playing upon the familiarity of the borrowed story as Dryden has done, Swift chooses to make a narrative from his own "invention" (22).

Clifford advances three plausible reasons for this radical change in attitude: the growth of a materialistic, mercantile ethic in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the subjectivism of the Romantics, and the rise of Freudian and post-Freudian psychology in the twentieth century (117). Piehler explains the change: which has taken place by pointing out that by the seventeenth century an increasingly analytical approach to the phenomenal world made allegory seem trivial. He says that "the attenuated allegory

of the eighteenth century, appealing to the reader on the allegorical level alone, bereft of serious psycho-therapeutic purpose and of support from dialogue or symbolism, is responsible for the low opinion of allegory as a genre at the present time, as well as the lack of understanding of the complex and profound character of medieval visionary allegory" (20). Buning goes so far as to declare that the end of allegory in the Augustan period (early and mid-eighteenth century) was heralded by Swift and Pope. Their satires mocked the older forms of allegory and allegoresis, and replaced commentary by parody (39).

Allegory and satire are the two extremest forms of didactic narrative. In general allegory tends to result from the exertion of intellectual control over aesthetic forms like romance and folk-tale. Satire, on the other hand, tends to result from intellectual control over such empirical forms as history, travel narrative and novella. Allegories and satire are mixed forms (Scholes & Kellogg:111). They are not mutually exclusive modes. "Whereas the defining characteristic of allegory is its symbolic imagery rather than its meaning, satire is most conveniently defined in terms of its meaning" (Scholes & Kellogg:111). Historically satire appears as a precursor of realism. In the satire of Augustan Rome and Augustan England the ironical juxtaposition of a highly representational fictional world against the suggestion of an ideal world whose values are denied in practice is of the essence. The ideal world is good and the real world is bad, with the result that satire flourishes when the world is in transition from "an ideally oriented moral scheme of the cosmos to an empirically oriented non-moral scheme" (Scholes & Kellogg:112). The values of the satirist himself are difficult to locate because the satire strikes out against a particular society for falling away from conformity to an ideal past, and against the ideals of the past for having so little relevance to the real world (Scholes & Kellogg: 113).

Scholes and Kellogg are of the opinion that in the "Voyage to Lil-

liput" (*Gulliver's travels*) the political allegory operates in much the same way as in Book V of *The Faerie Queene*. It is fairly easy, when reading *Gulliver*, to identify those passages which have allegorical significance. The reader reacts to the Yahoos, for example, as illustrations of certain aspects of human nature carried to extremes because of the absence of rational or other restraints, although the Yahoos are also shown to be images of human flesh in a highly representational way. Gulliver himself is a kind of Everyman, illustrating the norm of humanity in contrast with the Yahoos, but is also a representative individual with a complex personality (Scholes & Kellogg:114). Swift achieves his finest effects and subtlest meanings by maintaining the delicate balance between the two.

Scholes contends that allegory amounts to seeing life through "ideational filters provided by philosophy or theology" (100). He says that when realism supplanted allegory as the great form of serious narrative, it is precisely because it looked directly at life, without filters, that it claimed to be superior (100).

Piehler believes that allegory has weakened, but Clifford is convinced that it survives because it has changed: "In a sense what happens is that allegory goes underground: from being the advocate of conventional social values, or at least of a conservative kind of wisdom, it tends to become subversive, satirical, and concerned with the predicament of the rebel and the outsider" (115-116). She admits that allegories become scarcer and more covert at the beginning of this period. Those works which are allegorical are hostile to the conventions and structures of society. These conventions and structures are shown as threatening rather than supporting the heroes. She says that the allegorical action in modern works is more obscure, so that it becomes almost impossible to ascertain its ultimate meaning. At the same time allusions to mythology, history and theology become less frequent as allegories lose their confident encyclopaedism and become more exclusively "personal odysseys" (116).

Sir Richard Blackmore identifies a large measure of esthetic value separable from the didactic, moralistic intention of allegory. He seems even to imply that the didactic appeal is secondary and incidental, so that it appears that allegory was slowly coming to be recognized as a literary form with esthetic as well as didactic properties (Bloom:169). In Bloom's opinion it is the increasing maturity of critical judgment and the growing recognition of literary forms as more than "the superficial support and subordination of a secondary moral notion" (181-182) that causes allegory to fall into disfavour.

Buning is of the opinion that it was with the eighteenth-century enlightenment that allegory radically changed its purpose, but not its method: "from being an essentially **affirmative** mode of writing, which celebrated a structured, authoritative and basically Christian view of reality, it became an increasingly **ironic** mode of writing, sceptical of any publicly shared cosmic or collective system of thought or values, and concerned with highly subjective and fragmented presentations of reality and the self" (13). Kundera points out that the world had acquired a frightening ambiguity, and the single divine truth had decomposed into a myriad relative truths shared among men (1984:15). Bloom takes note of the fact that it was common eighteenth-century practice to attack one's personal enemies under cover of allegory (177).

Allegories were, nevertheless, still being written by English Romantics, and Zamora points out that they still looked mainly to myth to provide the descriptive or surface level of their work (2). Bloomfield, in fact, states that personification allegory experienced a period of resurgence in the late eighteenth-century ode, and to some extent in modern poetry, beginning with Baudelaire. He remarks that even Wordsworth used personification allegory in his poetry (1963:163). The aim of medieval poetry is to express traditional ideas, while the idea of poetry to evoke feeling, is a development of the Romantic poets (Sattin:8). Allegory had become an intellectualized literature against which the Romantics revolted.

Zamora confirms that it is in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that the doubleness of allegory begins to reveal the disparity between the world as it is and the world as it ought to be. It is in this period that the great English political satirists, Pope, Dryden and Swift, "adjust the relation between the realistic and symbolic levels of allegory" (2). Irony now becomes a regular feature of allegory, and allegory is established in English as a tool of political protest (2). Zamora finds it necessary, however, to point out that in contrast to modern allegorists, these seventeenth and eighteenth-century satirists were hardly revolutionaries. "The motives impelling their allegorical satires were optimistic, conciliatory and essentially conservative. Underlying their allegories is the same hope which underlies medieval and renaissance allegory - that their disparate levels of signification may yet be reconciled in friendly fashion" (2). Allegory has traditionally been a conservative rather than a subversive form (1).

Bloom is of the opinion that the most commonly acceptable feeling through the eighteenth century is that "the moral equivalent of the allegorical fabrication must be transparent enough to be accessible" (175). He points out that until the rise of esthetic criticism in the nineteenth and twentieth century, there has been a tendency for allegory to be judged mainly for its message, and to neglect its literary merits (175).

Although Blake, Wordsworth and Byron are often referred to as revolutionaries, their allegories move mainly in the field of aesthetics and psychology rather than in politics: "The English Romantics were inspired by individual imperatives, not communal ones: even their commitments to national revolutions were based on individualistic ethics. Their allegories were allegories of the self and the soul, not of the system" (Zamora:2).

Buning suspects that most modern critics have failed to do justice to allegory as one of the oldest and most expressive of literary techniques, since they remain in thrall to Romantic prejudice



against allegory (11). Whitman says that the widespread distinction between "allegory" and "symbol" is in many respects a development of the Romantic period (1987:267). This is largely due to Coleridge's theories, and in Germany, also to those of Schelling, Schlegel and particularly Goethe. In spite of his poor opinion of allegory, Coleridge paid it considerable attention in order to distinguish it from symbol. Despite their contradictions and shortcomings, his critical writings have had much influence. The following extracts provide ample proof of the similarity of Goethe's and Coleridge's approaches to the question of allegory versus symbol:

Allegory changes a phenomenon into a concept, a concept into an image, but in such a way that the concept is still limited and completely kept and held in the image and expressed by it, whereas symbolism changes the phenomenon into the idea, the idea into the image, in such a way that the idea remains always infinitely active and unapproachable in the image, and will remain inexpressible even though expressed in all languages (Maximen: 1112, 1113) (Buning:19).

According to Coleridge,

We may safely define allegoric writing as the employment of one set of agents and images with actions and accompaniments correspondent, so as to convey, while in disguise, either moral qualities or conceptions of the mind that are not in themselves objectives of the senses, or other images, agents, actions, fortunes and circumstances so that the difference is everywhere presented to the eye or imagination, while the likeness is suggested to the mind and this connectedly, so that the parts combine to form a consistent whole (Miscellaneous Criticism:30) (Buning:20-21).

Coleridge's theories therefore agree with the main trend of European Romantic thought. Ironically, Coleridge's descriptive definition of allegory, once it has been disentangled from the theory of symbolism, has stood the test of time remarkably well (Buning: 10).

William Blake is another English writer of this period who is explicitly concerned with formulating his strong reaction against allegory. Whenever he uses the word 'allegory' he means something falsified from an original (Buning:21).

Coleridge's influence has extended as far as the New Critics. I.A. Richards's *Coleridge on Imagination* and F.R. Leavis's advocacy of Coleridge in *Scrutiny* greatly influenced the New Critics on both sides of the Atlantic (Buning:24). Only William Empson has given allegory some independent attention, as a third type of ambiguity. In this he sees a means for stating one thing while meaning another (Bloom:173).

Hodgson, however, proffers an interesting theory. He points out that with the famous romantic opposition of symbol and allegory, errors and all, Coleridge opened the portals of discovery. "Beneath the false issue of synecdochic versus metaphoric tropes there lay hidden a genuine, significant crux, that of determined versus arbitrary figuration, the true and inescapable issue for any rhetoric that would strive to be transcendental. And the critic who so frequently and successfully worked to depreciate the practice of allegory became, in his last decade, the one who more than any other began finally to understand and reveal the uniquely privileged status of the mode" (1981:292).

Buning comes to the interesting conclusion that each of the cultural shifts identified by Clifford as economic, social and psychological transformations, has in turn become the subject of modern, post-Enlightenment allegory, and that we are left with the paradoxical conclusion that "the very forces that threatened to undermine allegory's existence are, in fact, responsible for its survival" (37). With the advent of the Enlightenment a fundamental epistemological shift occurred in Europe which caused, among other things "the break-down of the coherent, essentially Christian, totality of things in favour of increasingly sceptical, ironic, fragmented views of reality" (Buning:39).

Titlestadt believes that "the theological and emotional patterns expressed or expounded in treatise, allegory and autobiography, had their basis in Calvin's theology, particularly in the doctrine of predestination, and in the pastoral elaboration of this theology

by second generation calvinist divines" (1979:7).

Both Melville and Hawthorne were nineteenth-century allegorists who went to some lengths to deny the fact that they were in fact writing allegories, due no doubt to criticism biased against allegory. A brief glance at Hawthorne's work will perhaps illuminate the essential characteristics of modern allegory by contrast.

It will be noticed that his allegories are laboured and far more obvious than those of modern allegorists. The voice of the author intrudes repeatedly to focus the attention of the reader on the allegory, so that an awareness of allegory does not arise as spontaneously from the text as is the case with modern allegories.

Charles Feidelson Jnr. depicts Hawthorne as a writer torn between "a debilitating conflict between the symbolist and the allegorist", and he suggests that allegory was the brake that Hawthorne applied to his sensibility, imposing the pat moral and simplified character (Buning:35). Hawthorne was conscious of the fact that he was writing allegories, although he himself often expressed disapproval of the form that was becoming unpopular in the nineteenth century (Bloom:187). *The scarlet letter* can be regarded as Hawthorne's masterpiece, in which he achieves "the blend of the actual and the imaginary, of the realistic and the imaginary, of the human and the allegorical" (Fisher,1966:5) with which his name is synonymous. Fisher points out that the three sinners, Hester Prynne, Arthur Dimmesdale and Roger Chillingworth present three different shades of sin, and the symbolical nature of the child Pearl suggests that in Hawthorne people and objects have different levels of meaning (7).

In *The marble faun* the dark, mysterious Miriam and the fair-haired Saxon Hilda invite the comparison of their characters. Moreover, the flame at the Virgin's shrine, the shadow that dogs Miriam's steps, the Sunshine wine of Monte Beni, and the various myths and works of art take on a deeper meaning when compared with the events of the story (Fisher:7). The main allegory, and also the most ob-

vious one, is that of Donatello and his relation to the Faun. Their similarity is emphasised - not only their appearance, but also the Faun's 'character' as reflected on his marble features, is similar to that of Donatello's. Miriam's reference to the destruction of Eden by sin suggests a further allegory: "The history of the Counts of Monte Beni which Kenyon learns and his observations of the changed Donatello reveal that a natural spirit has gained a conscience. This is clearly shown when Donatello cannot commune with the happy creatures of nature as he once could. His altered state is certainly likened to that of Adam and Eve after Man's first sin" (Fisher:7).

Charles Feidelson Jr. is of the opinion that **Moby Dick** does not verge towards allegory (Buning:25), but Bloom believes that those who see **Moby Dick** as nothing more than an engrossing adventure story have failed to take cognizance of Melville's "complex and conscious union of the moral intellect and the esthetic imagination" (188). Like Hawthorne, Melville expresses anxiety that his story may be misconstrued as an allegory. The protestations of these two writers may safely be regarded as purely conventional (Bloom:188).

This brief conducted tour through allegory from its beginnings to the nineteenth century, illustrates persuasively that allegory has developed and adapted through the years. While adjusting to various requirements, commitments and objectives and in spite of much criticism, it has remained recognisably allegorical in form, its flexibility making it an eminently suitable structure for the adequate expression of a variety of themes.

## 2.6 SOME CONTENTIONS SURROUNDING ALLEGORY

### 2.6.1 ALLEGORY AS GENRE

The question, whether allegory qualifies as a genre or not, is one

that has been debated from time to time. It must be conceded that there are not many allegorical works that contain all the qualities of an allegory. Northrop Frye suggests a workable method of identification: "If the allegorical reference is continuous throughout the narrative, the fiction 'is' an allegory. If it is intermittent, if allegory is picked up and dropped again at pleasure - ... we say only that the fiction shows allegorical tendencies" (Preminger:12). Fletcher declares that whenever a literary work is dominated by its theme, it is likely to be called an allegory, on the grounds that thematic content is not usually so free of control that it could be there by accident (220). This definition is supported by Abrams's definition of the term 'theme' as "a thesis or doctrine which an imaginative work is designed to incorporate and make persuasive to the reader" (111).

Piehler quotes Frye, saying that he has pointed out in a recent discussion of allegory that allegories are genres of fiction, epic, romance, drama, and Piehler adds the genre of dialogue to the list (10). He alleges that allegory is not so much a genre itself as something which happens to other forms of literature, and he finds that he cannot agree with Frye's conclusion that allegory is a "structural principle in fiction" (10). He substantiates his view: "It would be difficult to demonstrate, for example, that **The Faerie Queene** differs in respect of structural principles from the Italian romances to which it owes much of its form. In fact, it is just the basing of an allegory quite rigidly on the Italianate epic structures that constitutes much of what is remarkable and important in the form of **The Faerie Queene**" (10). Once Piehler has raised his objections and stated his case, he concedes that "one may admit that a general class, of dubious authenticity, has been made out of all the literary works transformed in this manner, which has been termed allegory" (10). He then proceeds to describe allegory as a type of writing and says that "allegory proper pleases by the appropriateness, ingenuity and wit displayed in the translation of the basic material into allegorical form" (11). He makes another distinction between the allegory that encompasses

everything to be found in a work of literature with an allegorical dimension, and pure, sometimes over-refined allegorical writing (11). He explains that the second meaning arose from the fact that in the eighteenth century "allegory became separated from its function of representing the spiritual world of external phenomena, and concentrated merely on the representation of abstract ideas" (11). He declares that this led to Coleridge's definition of allegory as "the translation of a non-poetic structure, usually of abstract ideas, into poetic imagery" (11). Piehler regards this definition as justified in terms of contemporary allegory, but being so widely accepted, it has distorted the understanding of pre-eighteenth-century allegory up to the present time (11).

Allegory proper, according to Piehler, is the one element in medieval allegory that answers to Coleridge's definition: "It arises basically from the interplay of the rational mind and the mythical, symbolic and intuitional elements, and manifests itself as a type of symbolism in which the symbolic element is translatable with relative directness into rational terms" (11). In medieval allegory, however, in contrast to that of the eighteenth century, this is only one dimension of a complex symbolic pattern, "and is only distinguishable from it in what one might term a Coleridgean analysis" (11).

Fletcher is of the opinion that allegory in the simplest terms, saying one thing and meaning another, characterizes a quite extraordinary variety of literary kinds: "chivalric or picaresque romances and their modern equivalent, the 'western', utopian political satires, quasi-political anatomies ... pastorals ... naturalistic muck-raking novels whose aim is to propagandize social change ..." (2-3). The conflict of the cowboy and the villain, and the protagonists in the detective thriller, follow the traditional dualism of good and evil (7).

Quilligan does not deny that many works show allegorical tendencies, as Fletcher has consummately proved, but she presents a per-

suasive argument for the fact that among all the many works displaying allegorical modalities, there is to be discerned a group of works which reveals the classic form of a distinct genre. Particular emphasis on language is its first focus and ultimate object. "All true narrative allegory has its source in a culture's attitude toward language, and in that attitude as embodied in the language itself, allegory finds the limits of its possibility. It is a genre beginning in, focused on, and ending with 'words, words'" (1979:14-15). She concedes that perhaps all fiction may be said to concern itself self-reflexively with language, "but allegories are about the making of allegory in extremely particular ways; and whether written in 1379 or 1966, they all signal that they are about language by using methods that have remained remarkably constant over the centuries" (1979:15).

Clifford points out that certain features of allegory could be seen as generic: "the extended and extensive use of personification and personified abstractions and, especially the incorporation of commentary and interpretation into the action" (5). She is, however, of the opinion that allegory is a mode, like irony, and not a genre. It is to be found in many genres. She mentions the following examples: comic allegory in *Gulliver's travels* and *A tale of a tub*; tragic allegory in *Frankenstein*; allegorical chivalric romance in *The Faerie Queene*; historical allegory in *Animal Farm*; an allegorical journey in *Pilgrim's Progress*, and satirical allegory, and journey combined with debate and vision in *Piers Plowman* (5).

Alistair Fowler's recent study would appear to confirm that allegory might indeed be considered more of a mode than a genre. It has distinct signals, but lacks an overall external structure. A genre is more circumscribed (1982:191-193). Allegory is "a mixture of genres in which one genre is only a modal abstraction with a token repertoire, including such features as personification, abstraction, metaphorically doubled chains of discourse and narrative, generated sub-characters, deletion of non-significant des-

cription, and several topics (journey, battle, monster, disease)" (Fowler:197). Buning suggests that the topics of monster and disease should be removed from Fowler's list, and the following devices added: punning or wordplay, the threshold or seminal image and the incorporation of commentary and interpretation into the symbolic action (40). Quilligan, on the other hand, says that 'genre' codifies the rules for reader expectations (1979:16) and feels that allegory has a generic stature much like satire, which is a genre in its own right, but shares a quality we call 'satire' with other works. The same can be said of allegory (1979:18).

Clifford disagrees with Lewis when he says in **The allegory of love** (48) that symbolism is a mode of thought but allegory is a mode of expression. She is of the opinion that allegory is also a mode of thought "in that it represents a way of thinking about the world" (14). "The author of allegory believes in pattern, he believes that it is valid to talk about human experience in terms of repetition and generalization, and he assumes that his readers will understand his narrative, not just as the record of a unique human experience ... but as an expression of larger kinds of truth" (14). As examples of "unique human experience" she mentions Dante's journey through hell to heaven, K.'s journey through the "exhausting ramifications" of the Law, or Calidore's journey through the world of pastoral (14).

Brink (1975a:42) notes the connection between the basic structure and the allegorical text. He says that allegory has developed into a highly refined structural method in which a more or less familiar pattern, often a myth, is used as the basis of its paradigm. It is in fact the familiar literary reference technique carried through to its logical consequences (Coetser:53). Clifford confirms that the repetition of similar incidents and the episodic structure of allegory derive from the need to present abstract principles as fundamentally unchanging but applicable in diverse contexts (22).



### 2.6.2 METAPHOR OR METONYMY?

Clifford agrees that the commonplace definition of allegory as an "extended metaphor" is still one of the most useful (10), and believes that allegory is "a natural language for visionary strangeness and intensity, and its moral and intellectual preoccupation strengthen rather than diminish this visionary power" (4). According to Leyburn, what is essential to allegory is indirection; and this is also essential to metaphor. "It is a work of imagination, a conveying of one thing in terms of another quite as actually as is metaphor" (4).

Culler acknowledges the difficulty of studying literature: more is required than a knowledge of the language in which it is written, but it is difficult to establish precisely what supplementary knowledge is required for the interpretation of literary works, neither can the codes be supplied by keys or code books. It is precisely this difficulty that makes "the semiological study of literature and of other aesthetic codes" so extraordinarily interesting (1976:100). He points out that works of art question, parody and undermine the code "while exploring its possible mutations and extensions" (100).

Culler calls literature a "second order" semiological system: "It has language as its basis and its supplementary conventions are conventions about special uses of language" (104). He names rhetorical figures such as metaphor, metonymy, hyperbole and synecdoche as operations of a second-order literary code, citing the following example: "When Shakespeare writes 'But thy eternal summer shall not fade', his words are signs which have a literal meaning in the linguistic code of English, but the rhetorical figure of metaphor is part of a second-order literary code which allows one to use the linguistic signs, *eternal summer*, to mean something like 'a full, langorous beauty which will always remain at its peak'" (105). Literary works are fundamentally an exploration of the possibilities of experience and as such are continually violat-

ing codes - literary works therefore never lie wholly within the codes that define them (105).

Buning points out that in the light of recent post-structuralist and semiotic studies of metaphor, particularly by Paul de Man and Umberto Eco, a fundamental opposition between metaphor and metonymy as propagated by Jakobson, cannot be maintained. It has been argued that metaphorical production depends on an underlying metonymic process and it seems safe to conclude that allegory employs both metaphor and metonymy, which interpenetrate one another in various ways (14). Buning comments that in Jakobsonian theory metaphor and metonymy are usually seen as being in competition with each other, so that the one will tend to dominate the other. In more recent work on this subject, the relation between the two is becoming increasingly problematic, with a tendency to emphasise the dominance of metonymy (43). Similarly Paul de Man assimilates metaphor to metonymy, with the resultant undermining of the privileged status of metaphor (1979:65-66).

Umberto Eco practically inverts Jakobson's model, and Buning quotes the following from Eco's **The role of the reader: Explorations in the semiotics of texts**: "... each metaphor can be traced back to a subjacent chain of metonymic connections which constitute the framework of the code and upon which is based the constitution of any semantic field whether partial or (in theory) global ... (243)" (Buning:43).

Buning points out that "we have become much more aware of the arbitrary nature of the linguistic sign and the unstable relationship between metaphor and metonymy. Although we still uphold the primacy of the metaphorical, we shall have to accept the paradoxical fact that allegory depends for its production and interpretation to a large extent on the metonymical effects of contiguity, and that allegory is particularly inclined to combine metaphor and metonymy (45).

### 2.6.3 SYMBOLS AND SYMBOLISM IN ALLEGORY

The frequently invoked distinction between allegory and symbolism poses a problem of definition. According to the distinction established by Blake and Yeats, following Coleridge, symbolism is organic and non-intellectual, "pointing to some mystical connection between the mind of the poet and that unreal world which is the shaping mind or soul behind actuality, wearing what we call the 'real' world as its vestment" (Scholes & Kellogg:106). This view is essentially romantic and it is contrasted with allegory which is seen as being overtly intellectual and didactic, reflecting the real world in a mechanical and superficial way (Scholes & Kellogg:107).

In the practice of narrative art this distinction is hardly tenable, although it may have validity in lyric art. In narrative art any recurring symbol becomes defined and limited by its contexts. Narrative requires an irreducible minimum of rationality which limits the image (Scholes & Kellogg:107).

Buning draws attention to the fact that Northrop Frye's theory of symbols subverts the preference of the New Critics for symbolism over allegory. Frye says that the symbol becomes a potential allegory of events and ideas, and critical commentary or allegoresis becomes the process of translating into explicit and discursive language that which was implicit in the poem (Buning:31). In fact, Buning regards Frye's sophisticated concept of allegory as a form of polysemy or manifold meaning which constitutes a considerable advance over earlier literary theory (31).

Bamber Gascoigne says that in allegorical structure the action is symbolic (Coetser:66) while Chadwick defines symbolism as the act of expressing ideas and emotions by recreating them in the mind of the reader through the use of unexplained symbols (Coetser:66).

Clifford points out that the need to give allegorical meaning a

material form makes symbols an important component in allegory, and she mentions a few examples: "... the bubbling still of crude alcohol in *L'Assomoir*, the mounds of carefully gleaned and picked dust and rubbish in *Our Mutual Friend*, and the garden in Marvell's poem are all intense analogies for something other than themselves" (10). MacNeice points out that in most successful symbolical writing such as *The ancient mariner*, there tends to be a spine of allegory (54).

Clifford explains that because allegory relies on the visual and concrete to convey abstract and moral meaning, it necessarily employs symbols in a similar way, though with equal emphasis on the intellectual and emotive significance of the image (10). She adds that the authors of allegory "invent objects to suggest the essentials of the concept they wish to explore. They also use established traditional symbols, particularly in earlier allegories" (10). She is of the opinion, however, that the use of the traditional or conventional symbol in later periods could be counter-productive, serving only to create obscurity (11). She posits as the reason why writers need to use increasingly commonplace symbols, the fact that the symbols of classical myth and the Christian Middle Ages have become embarrassingly artificial (11). Ordinary events and objects have to undergo intensification and made to carry a concentration of meaning if they are to have symbolic force (11). These symbols - objects, events or persons - stand for something other and generally greater than themselves, and are fundamental to allegory (11). Clifford requires some discipline: "A symbol in allegory has to be susceptible to the sort of description that tells us what it means, but it should not suggest so many meanings that the dramatic continuum is shattered, for it is on this continuum that the overall sense of the allegory depends" (11).

Symbols tend to be static, "with all the ramifications of meanings focused within the symbol" (11). In allegory the concern is with the process, the way in which the "various elements of an imagina-

tive or intellectual system interact, and with the effects of this system or structure on and within individuals" (Clifford:11).

Clifford points out that symbols cannot express progress on their own because "symbols are primarily static, and allegory is kinetic. The kinesis of an allegory, its narrative movement, is directed by the major objective and by the author's desire that readers should perceive what the objective is. This limits the symbolic meaning that any object or event may have" (Clifford:12).

Buning is of the opinion that Paul de Man is largely responsible for the ultimate promotion of allegory over the symbol in some forms of contemporary criticism (45). In de Man's important essay, 'The Rhetoric of Temporality', the symbol is effectively deconstructed and allegory persuasively revalued, "both terms being themselves seen as tropes or figures for language and thought and for certain forms of blindness and insight" (Buning:45).

#### 2.6.4 ALLEGORY AND MYTH

In classical Greek, 'mythos' signified any story or plot, but in its central modern significance, a myth is one story in a 'mythology', which is a system of hereditary stories once believed to be true by a particular cultural group (Abrams:111).

Piehler emphasises the importance of the medieval handling of myth and its contribution to allegory: "The particular contribution of the Middle Ages was to achieve a type of mythopoeia in which neither the pre-rational intuitive elements nor the reason had excessive domination. Medieval allegory at its best achieved a balance of rational and intuitive elements, an acceptance of all levels on which the mind functions, which is the goal of those who seek psychic integration" (7).

Allegory shows an obvious affinity with myth, both being concerned with a complex and coherent system of explanation. Clifford ex-

plains: "It is true that not all myths function equally as a vehicle for inherited belief about the historical past and the structure of the cosmos, or as explanation of that inheritance, nor indeed are particular myths always expressed in identical narrative forms. None the less, all these elements exist in varying proportions in myth, and they are elements also to be found in allegory" (66).

Abrams points out that the myth critics, among whom he counts Northrop Frye, view the genres and individual plot patterns of most literature, including apparently highly sophisticated and realistic works, as recurrences of certain archetypes and essential mythic formulas (112).

The difference between allegory and myth is that myth attempts to explain a barely known past, being in a sense pre-literary, and allegory uses that past as a stylistic device to comment on and explain the present, even if the present takes on a fictional form. Allegory is consciously employed as a mode of writing. Myth is neither conscious nor invented (Clifford:66). Despite the similarities between the workings of myth and allegory, Clifford emphasizes that myth is only one of the means used by allegory to give extra force and complexity to its action and significance (70).

#### 2.6.5 PERSONIFICATION AND AGENTS IN ALLEGORY

Leyburn points out that the medieval instructor in morals often made use simultaneously of symbol and personification, and is of the opinion that it is the proliferation of personified abstractions in medieval works that is responsible for the gradual linking of personification with the definition of allegory. She declares that there is nothing inherently allegorical about personification, and as proof of this she offers the fact that Quintilian discusses them in two different books of the *Institutio Oratoria*. Indeed, she feels that the naming of an abstraction, which is per-

sonification, is contrary to the conception of concealment which is basic in allegory. "Allegory begins only when the quality is set in motion" (3-4). Leyburn blames this usurpation of the word allegory by personification for the disrepute in which the term began to fall in the late eighteenth century and from which it is only beginning to emerge (4).

Whitman distinguishes two meanings of the word 'personification'. One refers to the practice of giving an **actual** personality to an abstraction, and he finds the origins of this practice in animism and ancient religion. The other, more common meaning refers to the practice of giving a consciously **fictional** personality to an abstraction, thus impersonating it (1987:271). He says that the first full-scale deployment of personification occurs with the **Psychomachia** of Prudentius (1987:4).

Clifford warns that personification is only one of the means by which ideas can be made concrete. It is poor allegory, however, which uses it exclusively (9). Rosamund Tuve rejects the notion of personification allegory, since she does not regard the personification of abstractions as a defining or causative element in allegory (25-26). Ian Bishop supports this view, saying that personification is not classically defined as allegory at all (Boucher, 1981:130).

Coleridge treated allegory as if it were always narrative or drama, and therefore always had agents (Fletcher:25). Mackenzie identifies three groups of allegorical agents: the individual man, the universalized types, and the Morality hero who represents the entire human family (Coetser:27). Fletcher identifies two, the agents which represent abstract ideas, and those that represent actual historical persons (26). Although personified abstractions are probably the most obviously allegorical agents, and they represent ideas and not real people, they are real enough, and have what Fletcher calls "adequate representational power" (32). Dante's Beatrice, the protagonists of **The Faerie Queene** and Bunyan's

Christian are not one-sided characters. They are complex figures, a fact which suggests that they have very human qualities (Fletcher:35). Aeneas is the 'type' of single-mindedness, his single-minded acts lending themselves to single-track interpretations (Fletcher:34).

Fletcher says that daemonic agency implies an impossible desire to become one with an image of unchanging purity (65). Daemons are not necessarily bad. They may be extremely good, through all the stages of good and evil to the extremely bad (Fletcher:40). He confirms that in Greek myth and in Hebrew religious myth the daemons could be either good or evil spirits (42) and that very early in history the term daemon had a religious and spiritual significance (43). Fletcher explains that daemons were thought to inhabit a spiritual realm between gods and men, and to govern the irrational in human life, and in both pagan and Christian antiquity were considered to be the guardians of the human species (43). It was when the development of daemonic agency was checked by Christianity that the dualistic division of spirits into good angels and evil daemons came about. They merely fell into two groups more sharply divided than in pagan religious practice. This division does not, however, change the essential nature of daemons (46-47).

Each daemon had only one function, and Fletcher calls a literary character a daemon when he is identified with the dictates of his daemon to such an extent that there is no apparent difference between his character and the daemonic force which governs it (48). Everything about the allegorical protagonists who answer to the description of daemons, points to the single idea: their names, images and actions. The protagonist is then obsessed with a certain idea. This obsession tends to isolate him from his fellows. Fletcher describes this as the lack of common humanity among the characteristic allegorical characters (30).

The daemon is a generator of secondary personalities "which are



partial aspects of himself" (Fletcher:35). A complicated character will generate a large number of other protagonists. They seem to create the world around them. Fletcher finds that they are like "those people in real life who 'project', ascribing fictitious personalities to those whom they meet and live with" (36). By analysing the projections one can come to understand the mind of the projector. He reveals himself facet by facet through these sub-characters (36).

Clifford warns, however, that it is only by retaining some element in the action that corresponds to human experience that the adventures of the hero can be understood by the morally and imaginatively interested reader. Correspondence to the abstract patterns of allegory alone is not sufficient (20).

### 3 MODERN ALLEGORY

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

Gay Clifford complains that while readers will readily acknowledge the existence of allegory as a literary form in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, few will concede its survival into modern times, even denying the value of works which suggest its continuance (5).

Buning expresses his surprise at noting how many modern reviewers and critics tend to refer to allegory, either there or imagined, in an invariably slighting and superficial manner (26), for example, "an allegory is a novel that you're not supposed to try to believe in. Instead of empathizing into the characters, you're expected to go along with an idea poorly disguised as a situation" (Broyard, 1972:39). Northrop Frye expresses the suspicion that the reason why critics dislike allegory is because continuous allegory prescribes the direction of the critics' commentary, and restricts its freedom (Preminger:13). This is not necessarily true, however, as allegory is not a closed, but essentially an open-ended structure of meaning. Buning insists that allegory is always capable of further meanings and new interpretations, "so there remains enough hermeneutical freedom for the critic to practise his art" (12). Clifford responds to this complaint that allegories inherently limit interpretation. She believes that all literary works, by their very nature, impose certain limits upon interpretation, and argues that certain great allegories like those of Spenser and Dante are not really the rigid forms they are sometimes supposed to be. "Elasticity and room for manoeuvre through shades of meaning are provided not only by the reader's imagination, his 'strong thoughts', his own experience of tradition, his own memory, but by the massiveness and enigma of the central concepts" (Clifford:94). It is the comparative inaccessibility of allegory that poses special problems for both readers and critics (Clifford:3).

Bloom is of the opinion that in modern times allegory has become something of a problem. His reason: "Although the present-day attitudes toward allegory have been complicated by the technical complexity of modern knowledge, the basic issue remains inherently the same, that of the multiplicity of intention" (172). He mentions that Lewis defines a radical allegory as a story which can be translated into literal narration, without confusion, but not without loss (173).

Nevertheless, Sattin uncovered such intense animosity towards allegory that he felt that some degree of defence was inevitable (1). Critics were raising the banner of myth or symbol, while the term 'allegory' "had become a kind of literary heresy, a violation of the rules and regulations of contemporary literary belief" (2). Whitman describes the various forms that the defence of allegory has taken: "allegorical language preserves the truth for those worthy of it, or increases the pleasure of those who penetrate its secrets, or refracts and magnifies the direct light of truth" (1981:63-64).

Northrop Frye's influence has been incalculable in reversing the attitude of antipathy towards allegory. Indeed, he may be said to have resurrected allegory and restored respect for one of the oldest techniques of literary expression (Buning:32). Frye has been supported in bringing about this resurrection by Edwin Höning's **Dark Conceit: the making of allegory**, by Angus Fletcher's **Allegory: the theory of a symbolic mode**, and particularly by de Man's 'The Rhetoric of Temporality' (Krieger, 1981:14). Krieger says that "De Man's stalwart attack upon symbol in the name of allegory is a climactic moment in the theoretical turn-about against the long and impressive development of organic poetics from the late eighteenth century through the New Criticism" (13).

Quilligan confirms that allegory has recently become a very fashionable term, as distinctly modish as it used to be quite declassé. She finds that it has become a major method of critical discourse,

particularly in the context of contemporary Structuralist and Post-structuralist methods of reading (1981:163). She believes that it is allegoresis, which is textual commentary or discursive interpretation rather than allegory itself which has come into fashion (163). Lodge, however, supports the existence of allegory in modern literature. He quotes Scholes and Kellogg who describe allegory as one sub-division of modern fictional narrative, that part which cultivates goodness and aims to instruct (1977b:84). He makes an acute observation when he remarks that "it is realism which holds history, romance and allegory together in precarious synthesis, making a bridge between the world of discrete facts (history) and the patterned, economized world of art and imagination (allegory and romance)" (86). Buning goes so far as to say that the scales are now almost completely reversed, "with allegory being revalued in certain forms of contemporary criticism even to the extent that it has become a privileged term, the representative of the figurative nature of language and even synonymous with the act of interpretation itself" (41). Bronson in fact says that allegory is the most forthright method of conveying an ethical message in representational form (1947:169).

Lewis points out that allegory does not belong to medieval man only but is universal, and that "it is of the very nature of thought and language to represent what is immaterial in picturable terms" (44). Fletcher, too, is convinced that there is a bridge between medieval and modern allegory, and cites as proof the fact that allegory is as vigorous today as during earlier centuries (135). Scholes explains his view of the bridge between medieval and modern allegory. He says that allegory was the great narrative form of the later Middle Ages and early Renaissance because the types of allegory are committed to the invisible, not to the visible as the types of realism are. "When the Christian cosmos, based on the invisible world of eternity, was challenged by a humanism that put man and his visible world at the cosmic centre of things, allegory became the best literary mode for controlling and reconciling these two visions" (101).

Buning quotes Maureen Quilligan as arguing that modern allegory is rooted in New England Puritan fiction (mainly Hawthorne and Melville) and in the general resurgence of interest in the study of language in the early nineteenth century, a trend which was to continue well into the twentieth century (39).

### 3.2 THE NATURE OF MODERN ALLEGORY

Clifford says that allegory has undergone radical changes which cannot be accounted for solely in literary critical terms. Writing changes because its material changes and this is as true of allegory as of any other form of writing. Its procedures are reversed because "the existence of real value independent of the individual becomes at least questionable" (43). The mode no longer endorses the conventions and norms of established society, but criticizes, satirizes and rejects them (43). Referring to Kafka's *The Trial* and *The Castle*, Clifford points out that in these modern allegories the locality and action are constantly shifting, and defy any attempt on the part of K. or the reader to arrive at any ultimate definition (16). She calls this "floating imagery" which, according to Fletcher, "becomes imbued with doubt and anxiety; hierarchy itself causes fear, hatred, tentative retreat. The sure sense of one's place in the sun has gone. The sure identification of the hero with governing political or cultural ideals has gone. Doubt inhibits action. Piety of any kind becomes difficult or impossible" (Fletcher:143).

Clifford defines the function of allegory as follows: "the allegorist wants to communicate certain generalized formulations about the nature of human experience and the organization of the world and shapes his narrative so as to reveal these gradually and persuasively to the reader" (7). She admits that it is an over-simplification but it does cover a fairly wide field. Allegory indicates, from the outset, that there is an ideological role to be read simultaneously with the fictional. She quotes Northrop Frye:

"We have actual allegory when a poet explicitly indicates the relationship of his images to examples and precepts" (8). Paradoxically, "though allegory is the most abstract and intellectual of all forms of fiction, its authors need a strong sense of the concrete and a lively visual imagination" (Clifford:8).

Buning says that "given the absence of any overall cultural authority or appeal to shared values, the twentieth-century allegorist will 'internalize' his subject-matter or vital belief, and he will put the stress on the internal authority of the text itself" (39). He explains that it is such strategies that add to the obscurity of modern allegories such as Franz Kafka's *The Castle* or Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* (39).

According to Frye "allegorical interpretation, as a method of interpretation, begins with the fact that allegory is a structural element in narrative: it has to be there, and is not added by critical interpretation alone" (Preminger:12). Norris, however, says that allegory perpetually redirects attention to its own arbitrary character, the fact that any meaning there to be read is the product of interpretive codes and conventions "with no claim to ultimate, authentic priority" (1985:81).

Bloomfield points out that it is the multiplicity of possible interpretations that gives a great literary work its power to appeal over centuries. He is of the opinion that it is this variety of interpretations that has recently given rise to deconstruction. He is convinced that deconstruction adds to the problem of the polysemy of literary works: "The deconstructionists ... aim at as many meanings as possible. New Criticism admired a multiplicity of meanings provided they cohered organically" (1981:vi). Quilligan, however, disagrees, finding that allegory does not lend itself easily to 'deconstruction'. The reason she puts forward is that allegory frustrates the commenting critic by pre-empting his imposition of his own brand of allegoresis (1981:182).

Buning says that in his later work, *Allegories of reading*, Paul de Man extends the emphasis on allegory as an inescapable condition of language and writing, and includes the act of discursive interpretation and argument as well. This will be inevitably rhetorical and paradoxical since according to de Man, each text is the allegorical narrative of its own deconstruction (46). There is no present moment of self-possessed meaning where signs and experience would be so perfectly matched as to obviate the need for further interpretation. "Allegory in de Man exerts something like the power of deconstructive leverage that Derrida brings to bear through his key term **differance**" (Norris:82).<sup>1</sup>

Sadler is of the opinion that allegory may be said to function in any situation, real or fictitious, in which the conflicting elements may be translated from particular effects into general terms and that whether the author intended any such interpretation or not is irrelevant. "It is the degree of similarity and not the author's intention which makes an allegorical interpretation valid" (10).

One of the most important means by which interpretation is assisted and directed in allegory is its visual element. "Narrative provides a basis of metaphor which expresses the ultimate purpose of the allegory and defines the limits of possible meaning: the energy of its forward movement enables the author to express process, the kinetic interrelationship between the various elements, abstractions, and powers in an imaginative system" (Clifford:71). Narrative provides the energy and coherence, but the visual detail and imagery establish the clarity of the particular parts of the system and their connection with the whole (Clifford:71). "Details of a character's appearance, of a landscape, of architecture, help us to interpret their essential nature and to fix them in our memory, while visual similarities and connections build up a pattern

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1. Incidentally, with this point of view de Man has arrived by circular route at Frye's theory that all literary criticism is, in a broad sense, allegorical interpretation or allegoresis (Buning:46).

of thematic association" (71). She says that allegorists constantly make use of visual detail to make the literal level of their narrative more explicit and imaginable and to reinforce the significance of events by association (73). It is clear that the "heavily charged nature of the visual surface in allegory" is often most apparent in the description of setting or landscape rather than of characters (Clifford:84). Nuttall is also of the opinion that with Dante, as well as with Bunyan, it is the landscape that keeps the allegory vigorous (31). Fletcher confirms this point of view when he observes that in the westerns of Zane Grey, for example, the scenery is used as a device, a "paysage-moralisé" and the hero is in harmony with or in opposition to the backdrop against which the action takes place (6-7). Coetzee too uses this device, the background reflecting the action, or placing it in sharp relief.

A location cannot be extended dramatically as it is more inert than a person, but "the dramatic acts which happen in a given location can interact with the description of it, and our interpretation of the allegorical meaning of those acts can be assisted by visual details in the description of the setting" (Clifford:84). She adds that it is the significance of the narrative that activates the setting in which an allegorical action occurs.

Bloomfield remarks that we now realise how germane the notion of allegory is to the problem of interpretation, which is the primary activity in approaching a literary work (1981:v). He explains that allegory, myth and symbol are terms used to explain the polysemous meaning of literature: "The literary text usually has a literal meaning. To get at its underlying meaning or significance we interpret it allegorically, mythically and symbolically, often employing more than one of these modes, depending on the nature of the text" (vi). Myth and symbol can even be seen as aspects of allegory.

Coetser points out that an allegory need not confine itself to a



single structure, but that various basic structures may be used, different allegories interweaved (36). Philip Wheelwright adds that instead of making use of an extant basic structure, an author might create his own mythical basis, drawing on "certain deeplying aspects of human and transhuman existence" (Coetser:36). Allegory does not consist of a single recognised symbol, but is a series of linked images, which then constitute allegory; not an isolated image, but a series of images supplying a sub-structure to the surface story.

Clifford complains that as a result of Fletcher and others' view that allegory is omnipresent, the term "allegorical" is applied too vaguely and impressionistically, particularly to modern works. She gives Fletcher full credit for the scrupulosity of his definitions, but does not always agree with the criteria by which he defines allegory (5). It is of course possible to make an allegorical interpretation of most literary works, but this does not necessarily turn the works in question into fully-fledged allegories. For example, reading *Hamlet* as a tragedy of indecision indicates the possibility of an allegorical interpretation, but it does not justify terming the play an allegory (Preminger:13). Scholes is of the opinion that the great allegories are never entirely allegorical, just as the great realistic novels are never entirely real. He contends that in allegory, it is often the tension between the ideational side of a situation and the human side which makes for the power and the meaning - and the power of meaning (99).

To illustrate the fact that a whole work need not be allegorical, Sattin refers to Tolstoy's *The death of Ivan Illych*. The narrative has symbolic significance, but the end of the narrative becomes allegorical. The symbolic events are also real events in the context of the narrative, but in addition they take on significances beyond themselves by their pattern and as the pattern becomes clear, so does the allegory (33). He states, moreover, that the pattern is directly related to the thematic purpose of the se-

cond half of the novella, which is to justify the suffering and answer the questions that Ivan Illych asks at the height of his suffering, as Job does: "Why hast Thou done all this? Why hast Thou brought me here? Why dost Thou torment me so terribly?" Sattin calls this a little allegory which becomes part of the larger pattern and gives the novella an allegorical edge, while the overall story is not allegorical (34).

There is apparently general consensus about the fact that the presence of allegory implies some other meaning than the superficial, that the story is a vehicle for a second more complex and less readily accessible meaning. As Rosamund Tuve says, "The reason for reading any piece of work allegorically is to come at meanings which are truly in the work - but hidden therein" (219).

It is typical of allegory that the surface narrative can be read without further interpretation, but that interpretation of the allegory reveals depths not readily accessible to the casual reader. Sattin calls this allegorical interpretation "an intuitive apprehension of meaning" (6), while Norris says that to interpret allegorically is "to read in the knowledge that there always exists, in the nature of language, a constitutive gap between words and experience, between signs and the reality they seek to evoke" (81). Fletcher says that allegories are based on parallels between two levels of being that correspond to each other, the one supposed by the reader, the other literally presented in the fable (113). The allegory is only acceptable provided the story is interesting in itself. Sattin feels that in allegory the relationship between the literal surface and the allegorical meaning works in two directions: the literal surface suggesting other, allegorical levels of meaning, and those levels in turn adding poignance and drama to the literal (14). The one level supports and enriches the other. He refers to *The fox*, a novella by D.H. Lawrence, explaining that although the narrative is allegorical, it does not mean that the characters lose their fictional reality. They are not symbolic personages, or merely the illustration of an idea:

"Character and idea can be associated without making that character into an allegorical or symbolic personage ... that is, without seriously compromising the roundness of the character" (37).

Fletcher, too, emphasises that the whole point of allegory is that it does not **need** to be read exegetically (7). It is precisely this facet of allegory that invites criticism, as it easily becomes a vehicle for biased writing, whether the bias be religious, political or dissident, serving non-literary purposes and destroying its literary value. Allegorical reading may also lead to mere displays of cleverness and wit, such as the interpretation of the hidden meanings in the nursery tales of Beatrice Potter (Sattin: 7).

Scholes contends that allegory is notoriously an affair of "levels", but feels that this description implies more of a fixed hierarchy among kinds of meaning and a stricter separation among them than he believes exists. He admits, though, that there are different kinds of meaning, facets or dimensions in any richly imagined allegory (150): "For our reading of multi-dimensional allegory depends not only on our apprehending all the dimensions of the narrative, but also, even mainly, on our being aware of the interaction among them" (151).

Sattin finds that allegory has always been an ideal vehicle for uniting ideas with concrete images, bringing together universals and particulars (1). He defines allegory as a function of the narrative structure of a work, not a particular kind of image or trope (2). The allegorist sets up a pattern of oppositional relationships which allows for a conflict between rival authorities. Webb believes that it is this conflict, with one ideal pitted against another, which becomes the motive force that underlies the development of the narrated action (66).

Fletcher points out that one of the oldest types of allegory, the **anigma**, is reflected in the modern "whodunit", in which a riddle

is to be solved (6). Sattin does not like the idea of westerns, mysteries, etc. being regarded as allegorical merely because of the presence of an archetypal pattern. He concedes, however, that there is a relationship between archetypal patterns and allegory.

Maureen Quilligan argues that the allegorical text always echoes the language of a prior and potentially sacred pre-text, such as in modern allegory, the language of myth or the Freudian subconscious (1979:100,152). She says that allegory incorporates all intertextual references and allusions to other texts in its central polysemous image (Buning:48).

According to Barthes there is no such thing as literary 'originality'. All literature is 'intertextual' in the sense that it is a reworking of all other writings which precede or surround the individual work. No writer works in a vacuum. "A specific piece of writing thus has no clearly defined boundaries: it spills over constantly into the works clustered around it, generating a hundred different perspectives which dwindle to vanishing point" (Eagleton,1983:138).

Although Paul de Man does not use the term 'intertextuality' as such, his remark that "it remains necessary, if there is to be allegory, that the sign refer to another sign that precedes it", may be taken as a definition of its meaning (Buning:46). Intertextuality turns out to be a useful method of interpretation particularly when it is understood in a narrower sense as referring to "the existence, either in the **sign** or the **referent**, of prior texts or textual fragments or echoes which help to shape textual meaning in particular texts" (Buning:48).

Buning points out that although the relations between the text and the pre-text are complex, they tend to conform to one of two patterns: they are either 'prophetic', in which the narrative reinforces the truth of the pre-text, or they are 'apocalyptic', in which case the narrative questions or contradicts the pre-text

(38). Although there are weaknesses in Quilligan's theory, her work provides a valuable insight into the complex nature of allegory.

Clifford refers to the apparently incompatible tendencies displayed by the narrative form of many allegories. These incompatible tendencies are "toward the repetition of structurally similar incidents which produces the effect of immobility, and towards some kind of large-scale movement, which suggests the possibility of radical change" (33). She explains that these paradoxical tendencies derive from the fact that most allegories are striving towards a dual effect. "On the one hand the allegorist wishes to create or reflect an imagined model of the universe, or of the psyche, or of the forces operating in human society ... [on the other hand] his concern with process, with progression" (33). The anagogic significance of the action is as important to the modern allegorist as it was to his medieval predecessor, hence the recurrence of motifs such as the journey or the quest, "with their emphasis on directed energy, and on the progressive evolution, education and enlightenment of the heroes" (33). Levine says that allusions to specific works of literature are also allegorical, because they summon another character to stand behind the protagonist (1982:427), giving breadth and depth to the character as the pattern develops, and we discover that the protagonist is not the first to have stood in that situation.

Clifford points out that the allegorical mode is ironic and that figures are simultaneously one thing and another, sometimes several others. It also reveals a deliberate ambiguity in the recurrence of double plots and identities, transformations and metempsychoses. Its most important ambiguity is the way in which the concept of time operates (95). As an example she refers to *The Castle* and *The Trial*, in which Kafka uses "both a description of chronology and causality (in characteristically inverted way) the sense of past time" (101). She points out that K.'s relationships with other characters "develop with extraordinary and elliptical

speed, and the consequences of certain actions take effect with unpredictable rapidity. The past imposes itself upon the present, although not as a source of meaning and understanding, but of their opposites" (101). K. is made liable to the judgment "guilty" because of something which has happened in the past, which is as impenetrable to him as to the reader. "It is the origin of threat and fallibility rather than of security and value. Kafka thus employed two standard allegorical procedures to achieve a standard allegorical effect" (101).

In his work *American Drama*, Broussard declares that art in the twentieth century has developed a questioning attitude to ideologies of the past, and that this has resulted in the evolution of a type of drama that is more allegorical than any since the Middle Ages (1962:3). He clarifies this statement by explaining that American playwrights have produced plays which "engage their hero in an action appropriately suited to the problems of all men in this period" (4). In this pronouncement there is an implied definition that allegory explores universal problems, and that universality might indicate the presence of allegory. "The allegorical theme of twentieth-century man journeying through the confusion of this period is the most unifying element to appear thus far in American drama" (4).

Buning links allegorical writing with modern linguistics. He points out that a structural, semiotic view of language in which every language unit can be defined only in relation to the other units within the system in terms of its syntagmatic and paradigmatic relationships, is particularly relevant to the study of allegory as symbolic form (11-12). He is of the opinion that any theory of a particular literary phenomenon should relate to semantics, a theory of significance. He recognises this method in Angus Fletcher's theory, "which views allegory not only as a radically linguistic procedure but also as essentially a means of structuring language in such a way that the reader is encouraged to look continuously for meanings above or beyond the literal level of the fiction" (12).

Webb finds allegory particularly useful to portray the modern African socio-political situation. The form does not imply a sterile, abstract or irrelevant approach, but allows for a re-examination of the objective norms of experience, and appears to be well-suited to an investigation of competing life-styles and beliefs (67).

### 3.3 COMPARING EARLIER AND MODERN ALLEGORY

Fletcher is of the opinion that readers of *Animal Farm* and *1984* may feel that the difference between these and *The Faerie Queene* is too great to allow them both to be termed allegories. He points out that the earlier allegories require constant interpretation while Orwell's two books and many modern allegories require a single act of translation, from fiction to history, for example, and can then be read as straight narratives. Fletcher feels that the greatest similarity between modern and earlier allegories is that they are both analyses of the societies for which they were written, in which certain characters and institutions play representative roles (46). Buning, on the other hand, sees little difference between medieval and modern allegory, saying that we consider the fundamental tenet of allegory theory to be the standard view of allegory as an essentially polysemous, metaphorical language construct. He opines that basically this view has undergone no change in the course of its long history, although its interpretation and appreciation has fluctuated from time to time (54-55).

MacNeice defines one thing that Spenser, Bunyan, Kafka, Beckett, Pinter and Golding have in common, and that is that they all create special worlds (5). He says that this special world is most obvious in *The Faerie Queene*, possibly mainly because it is written in verse (5), while in Bunyan the allegory is most consistent and manifest. "In spite of that the characters keep assuming the features and voices of the solid townsfolk of seventeenth-century

Bedford" (6). Kinkead-Weekes and Gregor point out that the fabulous world is one that is made up. "It exists deliberately outside the world which we inhabit, and fidelity to common experience is a very minor or even an irrelevant consideration" (1984:241).

There is, however, a subtle difference between the worlds created by Spenser and Bunyan, and those created by modern allegorists. Kafka caricatures his contemporary world, "but in the process he lifts it - or rather lowers it - to the plane of an admittedly very sinister fairy story" (MacNeice:6). Coetzee isolates his characters in the dreary basement of the Harry S. Truman Library, in the desolate wastes of Namaqualand, on a lonely Karoo farm, in an outpost of the Empire on some distant border, and on Crusoe's island, employing a similar technique. Pinter in his plays does something similar, while Golding in **Lord of the Flies**, **The Inheritors** and **Pincher Martin** produces in each a world that is a parable of the human situation today (MacNeice:6).

Medieval allegorists used allegory because they believed that "the inward events in the life of the soul ... cannot be rendered from an external perspective" (Levine,1982:422). George Eliot appears to entertain a similar conviction. Most of her novels are written in the realistic mode, but **Daniel Deronda**, for example, has an underlying allegorical theme which Eliot uses to portray "the inner depths of the protagonists' lives" (Levine,1982:421).

Clifford says that while earlier allegories assert that the world is capable of being understood, that all phenomena can be seen as part of a system, coherence and order are not so easily perceived in modern allegories. "They require an elaborate process of breaking down and re-unification to become perceptible" (71). She believes that the reader's willingness to engage in interpretation is crucial, for "the ultimate validity of that interpretation ... determines how any detail is read" (71). This point of view is supported by Zamora: "traditional allegory involves the interpretation of a set of symbols or circumstances, and the transference



of that interpretation to a context beyond the text itself. Allegory announces its figural status ... its connection to the world; it depends upon the reader's acceptance of that connection" (7).

Clifford proceeds to compare the methods employed by Kafka and by Spenser, and comes to the conclusion that Kafka's method of building up a series of associations round a single idea (the Law) is arguably the same as Spenser's in dealing with 'love': "Both are making it possible for their readers to possess something more than a wordish description or definition. The ideas are not limited to any single context either temporal or fictional; in the course of the allegory they become both grander and more multi-dimensional than either any intellectual definition or any one image in the allegory" (103). Clifford points out that while Spenser's narrative is overtly fantastic, Kafka's narratives appear to be realistic, but in the end the question arises whether there is any such thing as 'the law' (105).

As in medieval allegory, the main direction of the action is usually signalled at the outset. For example, in *The Metamorphosis* the physical change of Gregor Samsa into a beetle has already occurred at the beginning of the story (Clifford:32). Clifford elaborates: the paradox suggested in allegorical action is reflected in the two directions in which transformations may work, either towards greater freedom, or the end of freedom. She mentions that the beetle trapped in a single room is only a short step from the beetle pinned in a specimen case (33). The notion of progress is retained emblematically, the expectation of progress being created and then frustrated in a series of fragmented incidents (Clifford: 16).

According to Wimsatt medieval writers found in personification allegory and allied narrative "a natural medium for conveying in a pleasing story the truth they found in the world" (1970:27) whereas modern allegory reveals the lack of truth, and the often unstable surface narrative emphasises the absence of any fixed terms

of reference.

Nevertheless, modern allegorists continue to make use of many of the basic allegorical precepts. Gay Clifford emphasises that in allegories, medieval and modern, change or progress often takes the form of a journey, a quest or a pursuit, the journey becoming the metaphor for the process of learning which both protagonists and readers undergo. "In the course of their adventures the heroes of allegory discover which ideals are worth pursuing and what things are obstacles to that pursuit" (11). Webb confirms that within the scheme of moral polarities the allegorical hero generally moves through a pattern of action, a network of obstacles and temptation. "Thus the motif of the quest (usually archetypal and of more than individual significance) is commonly present in allegory" (66).

Fletcher gives examples of allegorical journeys and quests: Christian leaves the City of Destruction to reach the true home of all believers, the Celestial City. Sometimes, having made the journey, the hero comes back, like Gulliver, but is now so changed that he cannot take up his former position. Self-knowledge is the goal (152). Travel can also be presented as a sort of introspective journey through the self (153). He points out that the norm in this type is "a straight-line movement that is obsessive in its single-mindedness". This straight line conveys a daemonic effect, since the daemonic agent can only progress in one direction (156).

In the allegorical journey the idea of conflict is of primary importance. Often equated with a typical battle (phases of attack, retreat, regrouping, etc.) it can be a physical battle with allegorical meaning, or an abstract battle, also a lawsuit. Sometimes it can take the form of the conquering of a castle or a house (Coetser:39). The allegorical battle is characterized by a symmetrical arrangement of action and re-action (Coetser:56). MacKenzie points out that the fact that a battle between good and evil can be identified in a work does not make it an allegory, but

it may be allegorical, because the battle between good and evil is basically allegoric (Coetser:26).

Scholes believes that Freud and Jung have presented the modern writer with a new scheme of the invisible which can best be conveyed by allegory: "The depths, of course, are murkier than the heavens, and any allegory based on depth psychology will have to be more tentative than an allegory based on the Christian cosmos needed to be. But the archetypal system of Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake* is as allegorical as anything in Dante" (102).

Lewis contrasts realistic and allegorical writing: "Realistic writing, by imitating the fluidity of ordinary experience, gives the novelist access to an audience that wishes to see images of its life duplicated in art. Allegorical writing, by contrast, with its systematic patterning of experience, gives the novelist access to the conventions of world literature and religion, which extend beyond the quotidian to heavenly and infernal realms" (1938:442).

In earlier allegories the conflicts were public ones, individual protagonists encountering monstrous, fabulous and supernatural agencies, and the audience, having a certain system of values, would respond in a specific way. In modern allegories protagonists endure commonplace experiences, but both meaning and value are internal and personal. "The collective values are precisely those that threaten or obstruct the individual, and the significance of the action is often an assertion of solipsism against these" (43). Clifford says that the most didactic allegories are those where the validity of some collective morality is most confidently asserted. While one would expect these to leave the critic with least room for manoeuvre, she states that this is not the case, contending that the individual reader's freedom is greater than with these modern allegories where the subject is so often the frustration of the individual (47). The isolation of the individual is explored and the action appears inconsequential and confusing, while alienation is a central concept in modern allego-

ries. Nevertheless, in allegory microcosm always implies macrocosm: "What happens in the life of a daemonic agent personifies the whole human species' relationship to God" (Levine, 1982:425). Sattin also finds modern allegorical fiction often to be an expression of alienation: "the main character is often a kind of faceless everyman on an allegorical journey to find a face or to discover that he has none, even though he thought he did" (54). This type of narrative leaves one with uncertainty, and a multiplicity of interpretations.

Early allegorists could make use of enigmas, obscurities and metaphors of allegory, being confident of the moral function of allegory, that in the end the discovery by hero and reader would justify the vagaries of the quest. This cannot be said of modern allegory - reading Kafka or Melville leads to a denial that there is anything to find out: "there is no end but the means" (Clifford: 52). In modern allegory digression is not "an excursion into another part of the same coherent system", but is a mere parody, a reflection of the essential fragmentation of the universe (Clifford: 53-54).

Fletcher identifies a further major difference between modern and medieval allegory: "While allegory in the middle ages came to the people from the pulpit, it comes to the modern reader in secular, but no less popular form" (5). This is the reason why the older allegories require so much interpretation. They represent a world which is utterly remote from ours (5-6). The fact that medieval allegory is so obviously 'allegorical' complicates the modern reader's ability to recognise the modern allegory which is far more subtle, yielding only to careful study. Rosamund Tuve promises that the allegorical reading of a text will lead to the uncovering of meanings that are truly in the work, but hidden and inaccessible to the casual reader (219). Clifford confirms this when she speaks of experiencing "a sense of the increasingly massive nature of central concepts while reading an allegory, and this is related to the cumulative and trans-temporal way in which the action un-

folds" (103).

Satire is a feature of modern allegory. Fletcher says that many modern allegories such as those of Kafka, the brothers Čapek or Orwell are closer to satire in effect than earlier allegories. He warns that satire risks movement towards despair, tragedy and nihilism. They are more negative, showing what is wrong or evil or hostile, rather than what is good or beneficent. He agrees with Clifford that modern allegories tend to allow the reader rather less liberty of interpretation and possible application (44).

In modern allegory, as in medieval allegory, dreams play an important role. Sattin explains that dreams, which he calls "conspicuous irrelevance", are particularly important because they make it possible for the writer to create his allegory without isolating the realism of his work (52).

#### 3.4 SYMBOLS AND MODERN ALLEGORY

Clifford concedes that modern allegories differ from their predecessors in that there is no firmly established hierarchy of value to define or give meaning to the progress of the characters (16). As traditional symbols lose their power, ordinary events have to take their place. As an example she mentions **The Trial**, in which Kafka allows the legal process to stand among other things for "all the complex means by which bureaucratic societies thwart and obfuscate the desires and ambitions of the individual" (11). She points out, however, that a comparable central image occurs in the non-allegorical **Bleak House** (11), which proves that symbol alone does not make a work allegorical. Sattin refers to James's **Golden Bowl** and Chekhov's **Sea-gull**, which both contain a central symbol, but are not allegorical: "In allegory there is not merely a central unifying image or symbol; rather, the work must contain a continued or extended symbolism whereby the symbols and images are related to each other so that they form a coherent framework" (16).

According to Clifford, the concern is always with the process, with the way in which various elements interact, and their effects on and within individuals. This change and process is often expressed by allegorical action taking the form of a journey, a quest or a pursuit, having a variety of objectives, the value or worthlessness of which is discovered by the heroes in the course of their journey/quest/pursuit (11). A modern example is K.'s attempt to establish his identity and gain access to the Castellán in **The Castle** (12). Clifford is quite clear on this point: "It is this process which symbols on their own cannot express, for symbols are primarily static and allegory is kinetic. One might say that in **The Trial** and **The Castle**, the Law and the Castellán are symbols, while K.'s involvement in the process of law and his attempt to reach the Castellán are allegories" (12). In these two major works "the arbitrary and often obscure nature of the action, the suggestion that only the hero (like the reader of a symbolist poem) can assign meaning to his experiences, of course suggest affinities with symbolist literature" (13-14). Allegory is, however, distinguished from symbolism by the former's reliance on structured narrative. Symbolism is possible without narrative, but allegory is not (14).

De Man's essay, 'The Rhetoric of Temporality', first published in 1969, turns on the cardinal distinction between 'symbol' and 'allegory'. He conceives them not so much as two distinct orders of language, but as two strategies for making sense of linguistic figuration (Norris:80). Since symbol, for de Man, always resolves back into allegory, he substitutes allegory for symbol as the ground of all linguistic understanding. "Allegory becomes the demystifying trope **par excellence**, the determinate negation of everything claimed on behalf of symbolic transcendence" (Norris:81).

Norris quotes a passage from de Man's **Blindness and insight: Essays in the rhetoric of contemporary criticism** (1983, Methuen, London, p. 207) which brings out the underlying ethical dimension of de Man's argument:

Whereas the symbol postulates the possibility of an identity or identification, allegory designates primarily a distance in relation to its own origin, and, renouncing the nostalgia and the desire to coincide, it establishes its language in the void of this temporal difference. In so doing, it prevents the self from an illusory identification with the non-self, which is now fully, though painfully, recognised as a non-self. It is this painful knowledge that we perceive at the moments when early romantic literature finds its true voice (Norris:82).

Buning illustrates the cyclic nature of much of literary theory when he ironically points out that if we should substitute 'symbol' for 'metaphor' and 'allegory' for 'metonymy', we would be back with Coleridge and the romantic critics (44)!

### 3.5 MYTH AND MODERN ALLEGORY

As a result of research in recent years, Dr Carl G. Jung postulates a 'collective unconscious' which consists of 'primordial images' or 'archetypes' (Preminger:540). Following this idea, Kinkead-Weekes and Gregor propose that literary myth so deals with men as to reveal an archetypal 'truth' hidden below the surface of everyday life (243). They warn, however, that this 'truth' has to be 'discovered'. They are of the opinion that the essence of literary myth is process, and, more precisely, reversal and discovery. "Fable offers the pleasures of analysis, history of recognition, myth those of revelation" (243). In fact, Campbell goes so far as to say that "myth is the secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into human cultural manifestation. Religions, philosophies, arts, the social forms of primitive and historic man, prime discoveries in science and technology, the very dreams that blister sleep, boil up from the basic, magic ring of myth" (1968:3).

Bloomfield confirms that 'myth' has been expanded in our times to include the recurrent patterns of action and meaning in literature and no longer only refers to Greek and Latin beliefs about the heroes and gods (1981:v).

Jung holds that these archetypal story elements are buried deep in man's psyche, below the suppressed or inchoate memories belonging to the individual, and that the emergence of a definite mythology, recognised as such, represents on the whole a later and more sophisticated stage of human thought, so that the older mythic stories have become materials to be embellished, recontextualised, and reinterpreted (Preminger:540).

Scholes believes that the mythic and archetypal dimension of literature, fundamental as it is, has only recently begun to be understood: "a criticism and understanding of fiction based upon an awareness of the archetypal patterns of mythology and their relationship to the human psyche is a fairly recent development" (171). He does not, however, agree that a new age of myth is in-cipient. He explains his contention: "Once so much is known **about** myths and archetypes, they can no longer be used innocently. Even their connection to the unconscious finally becomes attenuated as the mythic materials are used more consciously. All symbols become allegorical to the extent that we understand them. Thus the really perceptive writer is not merely conscious that he is using mythic materials. He is conscious that he is using them consciously. He **knows**, finally, that he is allegorizing" (171). Piehler points out that "modern man is not so much concerned with the mythical for its own sake, as with the function of the mythical and intuitional elements in the human consciousness as they relate to and interact with the rational elements of his psychic life" (7).

Quilligan believes that the 'pretext' refers to that source which always stands outside any allegorical narrative, and becomes the key to its interpretability (1979:23).

### 3.6 FABULATION

Scholes feels very strongly that the whole question of allegory is



one that no treatment of modern fabulation can afford to ignore. "Along with romance, satire, and picaresque, allegory is an important mode of fabulation" (66).

A sense of pleasure in form is one characteristic of fabulation (Scholes:10). Scholes uses a medieval fable to illustrate his thesis, namely the eighth fable of *Alfonse*, Englished by Caxton, 1484, which is a tale (about sheep) within a tale (about king and fabulator) within a tale (about master and disciple). The innermost tale is by its nature unending (8). "With its wheels within wheels, rhythms and counterpoints, this shape is partly to be admired for its own sake" (10).

As narrative becomes less specifically related to the real world, and closer to a more generalized ideal than to specific facts, it becomes more fictional. This fictional generalization of reality tends towards two opposing impulses, the esthetic and the intellectual, the desire for beauty and the desire for truth (Scholes & Kellogg:105).

It is to emphasise these qualities of art and joy and to suggest the related qualities that Scholes chooses to term certain modern writers 'fabulators' (10). "Modern fabulation, like the ancient fables of Aesop, tends away from the representation of reality but returns toward actual human life by way of ethically controlled fantasy" (10). It means a return to a less realistic and more artistic kind of narrative (12).

Lodge defines fabulation as follows: "Such narratives suspend realistic illusion in some significant degree in the interests of a freedom in plotting characteristics of romance or in the interest of an explicitly allegorical manipulation of meaning or both" (1977b:102).<sup>1</sup>

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1. Lodge identifies yet another kind of novel which he calls the "problematic novel", which has affinities with the non-fiction novel and with fabulation (1977b:105).

Kinkead-Weekes and Gregor point out that if the world of fable is quite unlike the world of everyday, it has a direct bearing on it. We enter the other world to analyse our own with greater clarity and freedom. We look continually for point, so that the process of reading involves a continuous need for translation. Our awareness of meaning depends on our awareness of correspondence. "Nothing is offered for its own sake. Situations, relationships, protagonists, figures, are selected, controlled for a purpose beyond themselves, serving an analytic design or debate" (24).

Scholes is of the opinion that it is Proust who "explodes the empirical notions of characterization so essential to realistic and naturalistic fiction, by demonstrating the artificiality of the real and the reality of the artificial" (2). He declares that just as Cervantes's work was an anti-romance, Durrell's work is an anti-novel: "Both men were faced with a constricting literary tradition and revolted against it" (19).

Scholes considers the English writers William Golding, Iris Murdoch and Lawrence Durrell to be clearly committed to fabulation as a mode of fiction, while Anthony Burgess and Kingsley Amis have moved in that direction. He mentions Nabokov "and a host of younger men" in America who can properly be called fabulators (13), while in South Africa we might add at least J.M. Coetzee and Sheila Fugard. Scholes points out that the response to their work is baffled, mainly because reviewers and critics have inadequate understanding of "this new literary mode I have called fabulation" (13). Viljoen believes that fabulation represents an effort to transcend the limiting effect of realism, to avoid the necessity of remaining close to the facts of the South African situation (1986:114).

### 3.7 THE IMPORTANCE OF THE READER

Quilligan points out that currently the 'reader' has been experi-

encing a revival in literary criticism for the same reasons that allegory has recently again become a privileged genre: "From structuralism to affective stylistics, the reader has once again become the producer of meaning" (1979:21). Leyburn bears this out when she says that by its very nature allegory presupposes an imaginative act on the part of the reader to correspond to the author's act of creative imagination (135). As Barth says, "... The reader! You, dogged, unsultable, print-oriented bastard, it's you I'm addressing, who else, from inside this monstrous fiction ..." (1975:209).

Quilligan contends that the final focus of any allegory is its reader, and the real 'actions' of any allegory is the reader's learning to read the text properly:

We laugh at comedy, wonder at romance, snort at satire, feel pity and terror at tragedy, and admire a hero after reading an epic. The work's forms are designed to evoke these responses. After reading an allegory, however, we only realise what kind of readers we are, and what kind we must become in order to interpret our significance in the cosmos. Other genres appeal to readers as human beings; allegory appeals to readers as readers of a system of signs, but this may be only to say that allegory appeals to readers in terms of their most distinguishing human characteristic, as readers of, and therefore as creatures finally shaped by their language (1979:24).

She believes that a level of meaning 'beyond' the literal is located in the self-consciousness of the reader, who gradually becomes aware, as he reads, of the way in which he is creating the meaning of the text (28).

In his own inimical style, Barth describes the predicament of the author: "Why has he as it were ruthlessly set about not to win you over but to turn you away? Because your own author, bless and damn you his life is in your hands! He writes and reads himself, don't you think he knows who gives his creatures their lives and deaths? Do they exist except as he or others read their words? Age except we turn their pages? And can he die until you have no more of him?" (210).

Kermode explains Roland Barthes's stand: "A text, he argues, is not to be referred to a structural model, but understood as a series of invitations to the reader to **structurate** it. It is a network of significations, of **signifiants** lacking transcendent **signifiés**, and a reader can enter it anywhere" (1983:66).

### 3.8 LITTÉRATURE ENGAGÉE

Edna Deudney (1979) has made a study of the concept 'commitment' and has come to the conclusion that the term implies a critical awareness of contemporariness, particularly political contemporariness, and a desire to bring about change.

Van der Elst expresses the opinion that all literature is engaged in one way or another, particularly when it centres around universal human emotions like love, sorrow, and the experience of beauty (1985:1-2). In a country like South Africa where the political situation is an inescapable reality of everyday existence, of every situation, it is inevitable that most literary works will not only centre around universal human emotions, but will also be committed to particular political viewpoints and the question of human rights and human relations.

Committed literature is of course not by any means limited to South African literature. Most novels concerned with revealing the weaknesses of society in an attempt to "draw attention to the fractures" (Zamora:2) can be interpreted as committed literature and are often allegorical in nature, when social commentary is obliquely delivered. Orwell's *Animal Farm* and *1984* may be considered to fall into this category, also Solzhenitsyn's *One day in the life of Ivan Denisovich*, as well as most of the novels discussed in Chapter 4 of this study.

Malan stresses the fact that the pathological fear, loneliness, dehumanization and blatantly realistic sexuality are not limited

to South African writing, but appear all over the world in contemporary literature (1982c:21-22).

Deudney is of the opinion that the origins of contemporary committed literature can be traced to surrealism, absurdism, existentialism and historical materialism. In this respect she refers particularly to the works of André Breton, Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre and George Lukács (42). The writer is interpreter of a philosophy of life or world-view, and the a priori subject matter (55). She declares that the writer's perspective on the social and political system is determined by his personal or ideological scale of values (64). As example she mentions the poetry of William Blake, which is largely committed to criticizing contemporary social and political events (79). She quotes David Erdman as pointing out that Blake was careful to disguise his references to contemporary people and events by employing allegory (79). The use of allegory has the additional advantage of being a surrealist procedure by which history is placed in a kind of didactic perspective (80).

Yeats is also cited as an example of a poet committed to inspiring the present with the past. Deudney mentions his Cuchulainn dramas in this respect (86) and one might add at least the two dramas discussed in the following chapter, *Cathleen ni Houlihan* and *The dreaming of the bones*.

Orwell's *Animal Farm* and *1984* are intended to reveal to the readers the irrational powers threatening man and his world (Deudney: 126). Deudney reveals the allegorical nature of these examples of committed literature. She identifies three levels of meaning in *Animal Farm*: a successful animal fable for children; a parody of the Russian revolution; a revelation of the inescapable fate of all revolutions inspired by a lust for power (127). In *1984* Orwell tries to sensitize his readers to the dangers of totalitarianism (128).

Camus' allegorical novel, **The Plague**, is also interpreted as a committed attack upon Naziism, and above all offering irrefutable evidence of human behaviour, suffering and battle in a hard world in which the germ of the plague is never eradicated (132).

Deudney comes to the conclusion that all literature that is really committed has a contemporary political and/or socio-economic-moral ideal of change, and that topical literature is not necessarily committed.

### 3.9 A WORKING DEFINITION OF MODERN ALLEGORY

Buning quotes Sir Karl Popper (1974, **Objective Knowledge**, Oxford, p. 341-61) as follows: "The hypothesis ... precedes the observation, even though an observation that refutes a certain hypothesis may stimulate a new (and therefore a temporally later) hypothesis ... For we learn only from our hypothesis to what kind of observations we ought to direct our attention; wherein to take an interest. Thus it is the hypothesis which becomes our guide, and which leads us to new observable results" (54).

It is therefore now necessary to arrive at a hypothesis which will be a guide to the study of a number of modern allegories, a study which may refute this hypothesis, but will nevertheless hopefully lead to "new observable results".

Zamora has already recognised that to suggest that allegory is a prominent literary vehicle for political dissent is to require a redefinition of our conventional sense of its nature and purpose (1). Sattin, too, concedes that allegory needs redefining as it is modified by new ways of thinking and perceiving. This naturally applies to every literary device and genre and not only to allegory, for literature is dynamic, and so are the terms defining it. Allegory is flexible. "It moves from neo-classical optimism and a world view marked by confidence and faith that an objective

truth has indeed been discovered to romantic doubt and the subsequent challenge to man's most basic beliefs" (Sattin:250).

Hugh Webb agrees that it is necessary to look closely at the nature of allegory to gain a clearer understanding of the artistic potential made available by the use of the form (66). He proceeds to give his definition of allegory: "The allegory is a narrative in which details of the presented world possess pluri-significance. They are ordered not only to make sense in themselves but also to signify a correlated, second order of events or concepts" (66). This description emphasises the tendency in modern allegory for the allegorist to create a special world, which he presents as a microcosm, of which every detail makes a significant contribution to the meaning of the allegory.

Allegory has in fact redefined itself. It is indeed a flexible mode, and as in medieval times it was the ideal form to convey man's search for the perfection that existed in his belief in a fixed hierarchy of power and condition, it is now the ideal form to convey the desires, frustrations, suffering and disillusionment of modern man.

Literature has always reflected man and his involvement with his environment, be it social, political or bureaucratic. It is "the oscillation of the allegorical fable between public and private realms and between realistic and symbolic narration that makes it a particularly useful mode for Coetzee and others" (Zamora:1). Fletcher recognises, as a function of allegory, the ability to express conflict between rival authorities. He mentions the use of what he calls "Aesop-language", the purpose of which is to avoid censorship of dissident thought (22). The widespread use of allegory to express dissidence by authors of undisputed literary merit, should afford allegory an undisputed place in modern literature.

Allegory as a literary form is structured in such a way as to en-

courage and sometimes compel the reader to look for further meanings which are not literally in the text. "It is the peculiar contribution of deconstructionist criticism to have emphasized, even at the risk of over-exposure, the absence of stable meaning in the text" (Buning:46). Buning takes an interesting stance. He is of the opinion that the very concept of allegory can be broken down from the most to the least allegorical, "depending on the kind and quality of the interaction between them and image, or abstraction and concretion" (13). In accepting this view he feels that we liberate ourselves from the notion that allegory should involve a point-to-point, compulsive relation between theme and image. He argues for freestyle allegory and intermittent allegorical interpretation (13). Buning emphasises that in good, effective, imaginative allegory, the metaphysical relationship between particulars (characters, actions, situations) and universals (concepts and ideas) has allusive and revelatory power (192).

To read a literary work as an allegory is more adequately to interpret its meaning, which is the primary reason for reading it in the first place. An allegorical interpretation leads from the particular to the general, and this interpretation need not have been the author's intention. On the other hand, allegory cannot be read into a work if it is not already, though perhaps latently, there. The reader's willingness to interpret is crucial, because modern allegories do not depend on the stable, coherent system of reference that was the basis of medieval allegory. An allegorical interpretation requires greater insight than that of the casual reader. Nevertheless, allegory does not need to be read exegetically.

Modern allegory differs from earlier allegory mainly because its material has changed. The allegorist can make no appeal to shared values, and the emphasis falls on the internal authority of the text itself. On the other hand, allegory is intimately associated with the society in which the poet writes; it demands human participation and must be explicable in social terms (Riggio:187).



The modern novel is often psychological, and allegory is the ideal vehicle for the inner conflict being examined. In medieval allegory the literal and abstract levels remain separate. In modern allegory alienation is a central concept, based on uncertainty, the protagonists and their actions having no logical purpose or planned destination, "no end but the means" (Clifford:52), and digression reflects the essential fragmentation of the universe (53-54). The narrative basis is still present so that allegories need not be read exegetically and the surface narrative is capable of maintaining interest by itself, but the typical multilevel nature of allegory is there. It explores man's reaction to the chaotic world in which he finds himself, a world in which established norms and principles have lost their meaning. This is reflected in the manner in which the surface level sometimes tends to disintegrate, reflecting the incoherence of experience.

The fundamental forms of allegory are still the journey, the battle or conflict, the quest or search, transformation, and some form of process, but the purpose of this process has become diffused and is no longer controlled or directed towards some ideal condition or destination. The referential certainty upon which allegory has always stood, is repeatedly deconstructed. It does not make any pretence of cohering experience, but it does by its very form manage to express the otherwise inexpressible, while retaining its universality, which is characteristic of allegory.

In conclusion, it appears that modern allegory needs to be defined in terms of its nature and its purpose. A working definition of allegory recognises the presence of the following characteristics:

- \* Its nature is multi-level, which is the literal or surface level, and any number of underlying levels of meaning;
- \* realism is often abandoned in favour of imaginative projection;

- \* the writer's craft is often examined and the problem of communication explored;
- \* it has an inherently ironical and satirical nature;
- \* it is largely psychological, concerned with inner rather than external conflict;
- \* it employs personification, but far more subtly and indirectly than in earlier allegory.

The purpose of the use of allegory may be suggested as follows:

- \* To examine the relationships between master and servant, powerful and oppressed, parent and child;
- \* to deliver disguised political and social commentary, being an oblique method of dissent;
- \* to reflect man's alienation and his futile search for meaning;
- \* to treat universal themes, universality being the underlying level of meaning.

In the following chapter, even a cursory glance at the selection of works reveals that allegory, far from being an anachronism that has somehow survived the middle ages, is indeed a living, dynamic mode, particularly suited to conveying and interpreting contemporary society and its problems.



#### 4 SOME MODERN ALLEGORISTS

The first two allegorists to be discussed, Yeats and Conrad, will be found not to be modern allegorists in the true sense of the term. They appear not to have broken entirely free of the nineteenth century, although their work does reveal some characteristics of modern allegory, such as being vehicles of political dissent. They represent a period of transition from the ultimately optimistic end-view of earlier allegory, to the pervasive pessimism of modern allegory.

##### 4.1 WILLIAM B. YEATS (1865-1939)

Joseph Chadwick (1986) examines two plays by Yeats and finds them to be recognisably allegorical. *Cathleen ni Houlihan* (1902) examines the 1798 rebellion, and *The dreaming of the bones* (1917) the 1916 Rising.

*Cathleen ni Houlihan* is a family romance and Chadwick argues that it forms the basis of an extremely idealistic national and nationalistic allegory. It defines a clear-cut conflict between colonizer and colonized as the most fundamental problem facing Irish society. The family romance of *The dreaming of the bones*, however, is an allegory which claims equal importance for the conflicts within the colonized society and the psyche (155-6). Chadwick is of the opinion that *The dreaming of the bones* offers a critical rewriting of *Cathleen ni Houlihan* which radically revises the earlier play's allegory, and sketches the crisis in social relations posed by Ireland's attempts to "awaken from the nightmare of its history" (156). This play moves closer to modern allegory in its exploration of psychological, internalized conflict. In *Cathleen ni Houlihan* Ireland is personified as the Old Woman, "a supernatural, phantasmal mother-figure" (156). She was put to wandering because of "too many strangers in the house" and has lost the "four beautiful green fields" of Leinster, Ulster, Mun-

ster, and Connaught (156). By representing Michael's decision to join the rebellion as a choice between the young woman, his fiancée, and the Old Woman, the play identifies a certain pattern of Oedipal desire as a psychic mechanism through which nationalist political devotion may operate (156). In this case the son devotes himself to an idealized political version of the mother who is also a lover, and rebels against the political version of paternal authority, "John Bull" (156). Although the play has an Irish background, the allegory itself is flexible enough to have universal appeal, because it supports a transcendent spiritual ideal of nationality.

**The dreaming of the bones** can be read as a national allegory, which is a response to the allegory proposed in **Cathleen ni Houlihan**. Focusing on Diarmuid and Dervorgilla, the lovers who brought the Normans to Ireland and so began the 700 years of English domination, this play proposes a critical rather than an idealistic allegory of Irish nationality and its family romance explores, in psychic terms, the historical roots of the earlier play's idealistic devotion (159-160). The Young Man associates the lovers and their act (the act of love interpreted as an act of violence through which he was engendered) with the twelfth-century Norman invasion, and also with the present-day violence in the west of Ireland (162). Diarmuid and Dervorgilla's love is synonymous with the whole chain of violent acts by which English colonial rule had been maintained (162). Their love is the primal 'crime' which determines the course of Irish history. Chadwick interprets the Young Man's refusal to forgive the lovers as essentially a refusal to acknowledge the similarities between the lovers' crime and his own acts of political violence in the Rising (163).

**The dreaming of the bones** does what Zamora calls "[drawing] attention to the fractures" (2): it criticizes an ideological position which refuses to acknowledge the internal conflicts in which violence might flare (Chadwick:166).

The main difference between these two allegories and true modern allegory is to be found in their purpose. **Cathleen ni Houlihan** supports the spiritual ideal of nationalism, while **The dreaming of the bones** acknowledges the weaknesses within Ireland, but remains inherently idealistic. This idealism is the antithesis of the alienation and futility expressed in the typical modern allegory.

#### 4.2 JOSEPH CONRAD (1857-1924)

Of Conrad's last completed text, **The Rover** (1923), W.R. Martin says that it reminds him of Hemingway's **The old man and the sea**: "beneath the smooth surface of the tale there are depths that have been plumbed by a writer who has thought long and felt deeply" (1967:186). Running true to modern allegorical tendencies, it has full, natural and convincing detail, but also has a strong allegorical undercurrent.

The allegory concerns France, Peyrol representing the ancient, at first slumbering, but enduring finer spirit of France (Martin:186). The fraternity of the "Brothers of the Coast" is strange, but real and practical, unlike the unreal theoretical "fraternity", which is a catchword of the Revolution which has convulsed France while he has been away (187).

The excesses following the Revolution are symbolized by the glut of paper money, but Peyrol secretly brings home a fortune in foreign coins, genuine currency, which he hides. Eugène and his wife, who discover it, represent the "new purged France" that Peyrol has restored (Martin:188). His death is symbolic of the sacrifice which is necessary before rebirth is possible.

Martin points out that like Arlette, and like Escampobar Farm, the tartane suffers the fortunes of France: "it is stained by the Terror, seized by a wrongful owner, neglected, and having

been restored by Peyrol, it is liberated when he takes it to sea" (188).

Martin identifies Scevola as representative of the temporary aberration of "the genius of France, the madness of the Revolution" (189). Arlette is the France that Scevola has taken illegal possession of. When she recovers her senses by falling in love, Conrad describes her in exaggerated and sentimental terms that identify her as "la belle France" (189). Réal, who is ready for despair, and Catharine who is tired of life, reflect the condition of the French people. Their illness is cured by Peyrol's sacrifice (190). With the marriage of Réal and Arlette, "the usurper has been routed and France restored" (190). Eugène and Arlette retire to lead a withdrawn but dignified life, symbolically restoring the dignity of France.

In spite of the clearly allegorical nature of this novel, it is not thoroughly modern. It reflects an age of violence and disruption, yet remains idealistic, having a purpose, the restoration of France. In modern allegory such an ideal would have been lost in a labyrinth of confusion.

#### 4.3 FRANZ KAFKA (1883-1924)

Bloom points out that the complex nature of allegory makes exceptional demands on its practitioners, requiring a combination of creative imagination and perception of universal truths that is seldom achieved. "Not only must the great allegorist be endowed with esthetic genius, but he must also be intensely sensitive to those human problems which transcend everyday reality and which either aspire to supernal ideals or suggest the need for those ideals" (189).

Kafka has proved himself equal to these exceptional demands and has produced allegories which satisfy and transcend the defined

characteristics and purpose of allegory. He may indeed be described as one of the pioneers of modern allegory, the mould which has had a profound influence on the form of allegorical literature in the twentieth century.

Most of Kafka's short stories are allegorical and in **The Metamorphosis** (1915) the effects of metamorphosis in terms of the internal, psychological effects of transformation are studied. Transformation is a recognised allegorical device, and Kafka employs it in this work to explore man's reaction to the world he lives in, and to illustrate his alienation.

Angus recognises certain traits found in folklore in this surrealist story. He points out that not only is the story steeped in symbolism, but it is specifically concerned with the metamorphosis of a human being into a lower form of life (1954:69). "Metamorphosis followed by a repeated appeal for love is one of the most widespread narrative patterns of myth and ballad, to be found in the 'beauty and the beast' and the 'loathly lady' tales" (69). In the most famous version of the 'beauty and the beast' fable, a prince is cast into the form of a hideous beast through an evil spell, and appeals humbly to a beautiful girl for her love. When the girl overcomes her natural repugnance and kisses the beast, the spell is broken, the prince regains his human form and marries the girl (Angus:70). Whereas in the folklore the appeal for love is usually eventually granted, ensuring a "happy ever after" ending, Kafka denies any such happy ending, leaving the 'beetle' to die of humiliation. The two most mysterious parts of the fable, the evil metamorphosis itself, and the beast's repeated appeal for love, are the two phases paralleled in Kafka's **The Metamorphosis**.

Angus identifies autobiographical tendencies in this tale: "All our knowledge of Kafka's life and story technique suggests that it is a precipitation in fantasy of his lifelong sense of loneliness and exclusion, of physical inferiority, and of an ingrained



hypochondria" (70). He points out that the story is obviously one long, varied and agonised appeal for love. Three times the 'black beetle' comes forth to make the symbolic revelation of repulsiveness and the humble appeal for love, and each time he is rewarded with cruelty, derision, or indifference, until finally, when even his kindly sister Grete deserts him, he resorts to the last desperate appeal of the narcissistic neurotic and dies for pity (rationalising the act as a sacrifice to free his family from the burden of his presence) (70-71).

The subhuman state to which Gregor Samsa is reduced by his metamorphosis, is a reflection of the degradation imposed upon him by the work he hates, the tyranny of his employers, and his father's exploitation. His metamorphosis is the physical confirmation of his psychic condition. This is supported by his ability to understand, but inability to communicate, and the lack of sensitivity revealed by his family. The 'beetle's' consideration for the sensibilities of his family is in ironic contrast to their 'human' selfishness. At the same time it reflects the degradation of man and his desperate plea for recognition of his individuality which is symbolized by his inability to eat, once his sister has given up taking trouble to provide for his transformed tastes. No allowance is made for change, and in his new repulsive shape he is a frightening presence and an embarrassment, not to be understood or pitied, but feared and neglected. Clifford says that the paradox suggested in allegorical action is reflected in the two directions in which transformations may work, either towards greater freedom, or the end of freedom. She mentions that the beetle trapped in a single room is only a short step from the beetle pinned in a specimen case (33).

Fowler draws attention to the fact that with his creation of Josef K., Kafka started a new alphabet of initials: "[Kafka's] K. is generally taken to refer to his own name ... But he subsequently became the paradigm of a new tradition" (86). Since Kafka a prominent initial name has come to indicate a "non-probable or

experimental novel" and the unnamed protagonist need not be identified with the author (86). According to Trilling Kafka has explored the Freudian conceptions of guilt and punishment, of the dream, and of fear of the father (1972:279).

Lukács believes that Kafka's artistic ingenuity is directed towards substituting his "angst-ridden vision of the world" for objective reality. "The realistic detail is the expression of a ghostly unreality, of a nightmare world, whose function is to evoke **angst**" (1972:480).

**The Trial** (1925) is recognised as an allegory. In this novel the Law as such is a symbol, while K.'s involvement in its processes is the allegory. K.'s journey through the exhausting ramifications of the Law is as allegorical as Christian's journey through the world, but the difference between modern and earlier allegory is clearly illustrated by the two journeys. Christian's journey has a definite end in view, a condition of bliss to look forward to, while K.'s journey ends in meaningless confusion and death. Clifford points out that the notion of progress is retained emblematically, the expectation of progress being created and then frustrated in a series of fragmented incidents (16). Clifford is of the opinion that Kafka's method of building up a series of associations round the idea of 'the law' is arguably the same as Spenser's in dealing with the idea of 'love'. The ideas are not limited to any single context, either temporal or fictional. This becoming grander and more multi-dimensional than any intellectual definition or any one image, is characteristic of allegory and is due to the cumulative and trans-temporal way in which the action unfolds (103). This allegory of Kafka's is superficially realistic, where Spenser's is overtly fantastic. But what eventually emerges from this mundane surface, a narrative which involves an ordinary man in an ordinary career caught up in the inexplicable coils of the law, is the allegory which, instead of elevating one's thoughts to an expectation of divine mercy, reduces them to the chilling fear that there can be no mercy because the law is

an illusion. The narrative reflects not only a unique human experience, but also a universalization of the human condition. Underlying K.'s predicament is the allegory of man's helplessness in the face of the incomprehensibly capricious powers of bureaucracy that control his life.

Doložel points out that from the very beginning Josef K. is under the authority of invisible agents. The first clue comes in the speech of Willem when he mentions his "instructions" and "the choice of Josef K.'s warders". These phrases presuppose the existence of an authority which has given the instruction, the order to arrest Josef K. and has appointed his warders. Even though the seat of this authority is later given a name, the Court, it remains hidden and unknown (1983:129).

The cathedral scene near the end of the novel takes this conception of power a step further when even the servant of God appears to be a representative of the force that is destroying K.'s life. The impartial justice expected of the Law has been replaced by the entirely arbitrary actions of a 'court' which has no definable justice or purpose, or comprehensible procedure. Josef K.'s feelings, his fear, his sense of being threatened and exhausted are intensely real, but the things that inspire those feelings remain intangible. His attempts to come to grips with his alleged 'crime', with his Advocate, with the elusive 'court' itself are repeatedly frustrated, and result in a labyrinthine nightmare imaginatively projected by Kafka, in which reality and illusion merge until they cannot be distinguished from each other.

The locality and the action are constantly shifting, and they defy any attempt on the part of K. or the reader to arrive at any ultimate definition. Hierarchy, instead of being a source of comfort and confidence, causes fear, hatred, and resists any form of progress. The background interacts with the actions, intensifying their allegorical meaning. The drab city environment, grey, overcast skies, rain, darkness, all serve to intensify the sense

of gloomy hopelessness which pervades the novel. The court and its appendages are housed in an unlikely block of tenements in an unlikely residential suburb. Rooms change their appearance from one visit to the next as furniture is moved in and out, depending on whether there is to be a hearing or not, adding to K.'s confusion and disorientation. The air of the lobby is difficult to breathe and K. feels faint, being unaccustomed to this muggy 'atmosphere'. The girl's attempt to let in some fresh air only shows them with soot, confirming that there is to be no surcease. Ironically, the clerk of inquiries and the girl feel as ill in the fresh air as K. does in the stuffy atmosphere of the garret.

A surrealistic note is introduced with the incident in the bank when K. hears sounds of sighing from behind the door of a lumber-room, intervenes to try and prevent the punishment of the warders, and the following day comes upon exactly the same scene in the same place. The ordered world of the Bank, representing a complete antithesis to the corrupt and disorderly world of the Law, has now been invaded and undermined by the latter. Although this unlikely scene is realistically described, its repetition the next day and K.'s subsequent reaction suggest its surreal character, implying that it might have been a figment of K.'s 'guilt'-ridden conscience. The priest's appeal to him in the dark, empty cathedral, calling him by name, also reveals a touch of the surrealist-ic, where the allegorist has abandoned realism in favour of imaginative projection, to illustrate the full extent of Josef K.'s 'guilt'.

In this nightmare world that Kafka has created, K.'s relationships with other characters develop with unexpected speed and take effect with unpredictable rapidity. The young woman doing washing in the room next to the room in which K.'s preliminary hearing is held on his first visit, turns out, on his second visit, to be the wife of the Law-Court Attendant. In the space of one meeting his feelings towards her develop from disgust at her behaviour and resolution not to be corrupted, to a desire to yield to her attraction.

His first visit to the Advocate ends in his making love to the Advocate's housemaid and mistress. This unprecedented development of relationships compacts the narrative and complicates all further relationships.

This novel examines the relationship between oppressor and oppressed, between bureaucracy, the power of which lies in its capriciousness, and the powerless individual, who cannot defend himself because he doesn't know what he stands accused of. K. is made liable to the judgment 'guilty' because of something he has done, or what has happened in the past, but that past is as impenetrable to him as to the reader. The law is the origin of threat and fallibility rather than of security and value (Clifford:102). As Fletcher expresses it, "The sure sense of one's place in the sun has gone. The sure identification of the hero with governing political or cultural ideals has gone. Doubt inhibits action" (143). Kundera remarks that the dream of the infinite expansion of the soul has lost its magic. Faced with a 'court', K. is helpless. He cannot even dream, as the trap is too terrible and it absorbs all his thoughts and feelings - all he can think of is his trial (1984:15).

The metaphysical relationship between particulars and universals, characters and concepts, is one of the qualities of allegory, revealing that there is more at stake than a single man's guilt, more than the surface level of the narrative. Kafka presents us with the arbitrariness of an ordinary man waking one morning to find his routinated bachelor existence invaded and disrupted by two warders who inform him of his arrest. This nightmare quality has even greater impact because in Kafka the descriptive detail is of an extraordinary immediacy and authenticity. Kafka is at pains to present Josef K. as an ordinary man, of regular habits, neither better nor worse than millions of other men, and this makes him the perfect Everyman. It is precisely the random quality of his selection by the Court which extends its power over everyone. It invades the life of individuals suddenly, without warn-

ing, and without justification (Doležel, 1983:133). Kundera points out that the court has no reason to hunt down K. "The will to power is quite disinterested; it is unmotivated; it wills only its own will; it is pure irrationality" (1984:16).

Kafka remarks of Josef K. as he is being led to execution: "Into his mind came a recollection of flies struggling away from the fly-paper till their little legs were torn off" (1953:247). This mood of total impotence, of paralysis in the face of the unintelligible power, informs all Kafka's work (Lukács:487). This view of the world from the perspective of a human being as trapped as the struggling fly, is all-pervasive. Kundera terms this unintelligible power the "will to power" which dominates the world scene, because there is no longer any generally accepted value system to block its path (1984:16). K. dies an ignominious death, "like a dog", still a rebel, still asking questions, still trying but failing to come to terms with the 'law' that has destroyed his very existence. Kafka's pessimistic view of the world is unequivocally revealed. He has no hope for the individual in a world dominated by arbitrary, uncontrolled power. In Kafka's work the will to power is naked, showing itself in the incomprehensible machinations of the Court. This vision of a world dominated by *angst*, and of man at the mercy of terrors which he cannot understand, makes Kafka's work typical of modernist art. The techniques he employs evoke a primitive awe in the presence of an utterly strange and hostile reality (Lukács:487).

**The Castle** (1926) is an elaboration of the theme explored in **The Trial**. Clifford points out that in both these novels Kafka uses a disruption of chronology and causality and also (in characteristically inverted way) the sense of past time (101). She contends that in **The Castle**, as in many modern allegories, "hierarchy and objectives are both blurred and a source of threat" (19). The distinction between the two kinds of progress is ideological rather than formal.

The allegorical progress in **The Castle** takes a slightly different course, but the end is equally inconclusive. The castle remains mistily veiled and illusory, and the castellan as inaccessible as the final authority in the Court. The basic structure of the action is similar in both allegories, relying on metaphors of progress such as the quest, and on repeated encounters taking the form of dialogue, combat or imprisonment (Clifford:19). Kafka caricatures his contemporary world, and in the process lowers it to a very sinister fairy story.

Doležel points out the difference between the village and the castle. The village is expressed by explicit texture and, therefore, appears as a visible world. The Castle is in the implicit, indeterminate domain, an invisible world. The visible world in which Kafka's heroes live, borders on the mysterious, inaccessible and all-powerful invisible domain (1983:129). "Kafka's fictional world is the space of a specific modern myth. The modern character of Kafka's myth consists in the fact that his invisible world is not supernatural; on the contrary, it forms an integral part of the natural world" (Doležel,1983:129).

The castle is identified and given a name early in the novel, the Castle of Count West-west. At the same time its invisibility is established. It is veiled in mist, with no glimmer of light to reveal its presence. Only once does K. observe the castle, and then it is seen from a "distant prospect".

The inn, Herrenhof, represents a bridge between the castle and the village, but this does not serve to make the officials any more accessible to K. He really tries to gain access but his contact is limited to peeping at Klamm through a hole in a door, and waiting interminably for him in the courtyard. K. has arrived to take up the position of Land-surveyor, an appointment which everyone appears to be aware of, but no-one has any use for. The novel is also an ironic comment on bureaucracy, on the masses of paperwork keeping all manner of officials occupied right through

the night, without any discernable purpose or having any visible result. As in **The Trial**, there is the terrifying presence of some obscure source of power, vested in an unattainable, unidentifiable authority, capable of destroying everything a man has worked for, his very hope for the future, at a whim. Control is maintained by repeatedly and randomly reversing decisions, while maintaining the most meticulous bureaucracy.

Doležel points out that while the lack of individuality of the judges and officials of **The Trial** is manifest in the way they are named according to their functions only, the names of the officials in **The Castle** are either symbolic like Klamm, or confusing, such as Sortini/Sordini (1983:134). It is precisely this anonymity that gives bureaucracy its power over the individual.

Fowler says that in gothic science fiction the politics become overt, and Kafka's **In the penal colony** finds a metaphysical or political sense in the gothic apparatus itself (163-4). The theme of this work suggests that it may be considered a concentration and condensation of Kafka's modern allegories. The simple soldier who has been condemned to death without a hearing for some trifling trespass, may be seen to represent the individual who has already been revealed in **The Trial** and **The Castle**. He is at the mercy of uncontrolled, destructive power which he cannot understand. A vast machinery is set in motion to deal with something inherently negligible, suggesting the ponderous movement of the Law in **The Trial** and of the bureaucracy in **The Castle**. Tragically, what is at stake is not a trifle, but life itself. In **The Trial** Josef K. is executed; in **The Castle** K. is reduced to a condition of perpetual uncertainty; in **The Metamorphosis** Gregor Samsa quietly dies of neglect. Only in **The penal colony** is there any indication of hope: the officer is killed as the machine disintegrates. The whole political apparatus is destroyed with its perpetrator. Nevertheless, the prophecy engraved on the tombstone of the old Commandant denies this hope. After a certain number of years he will rise again and recover the colony. This



possibility is confirmed by the attempts of the soldier and the condemned man to escape from the colony with the explorer. The explorer deliberately prevents them from boarding the boat, emphasising the impossibility of escaping the bonds of power.

From these few selected works, it is clear that Kafka has provided a blueprint for modern allegory. The multi-level nature emerges within the first few lines of each work. Kafka abandons realism in favour of imaginative projection which nevertheless keeps in touch with reality. It is this quality that permits their inherent political and social commentary to emerge with such force. The themes that are explored are universal so that the works remain topical. The novels and short stories are a devastating indictment of the tyranny of uncontrolled power and the futility of man's search for meaning in a world from which he has become progressively more alienated.

#### 4.4 HERMANN HESSE (1877-1962)

*Steppenwolf* (1927) does not begin as an allegory. The first part of the novel reveals a man alienated from society by a schizophrenic quality which manifests itself in his own consciousness as the presence of a dehumanizing wolf quality in himself. This split personality places him in constant conflict with himself and his environment, a conflict which has a destructive effect on his personal as well as his public relationships, destroying his marriage, his friendships, and his publications cause people to hate him. His human part loves the bourgeois background he comes from, and he always takes lodgings in a solid middleclass home; the wolf in him despises these petty conventions and drives him out into the cold time and again.

The author employs changing perspectives, first the narrative of an impartial, objective observer, and then a documented first person account, which places the observations of the first narrator

in perspective.

The novel becomes allegorical when Harry Haller begins his peregrinations through the streets of the city. As Clifford points out, "the basic structure of the action ... relies on metaphors of progress such as the journey or the quest, and on repeated encounters taking the form of dialogue, or combat, or imprisonment" (19). Haller comes upon a door in an old wall, a door that was not there before, with the almost invisible legend 'Magic Theatre/Entrance not for everybody', and later he distinguishes the words 'For madmen only'. The door resists his efforts to open it, suggesting that the time is not yet ripe. From this point the novel becomes a curious mixture of realism and surrealism. His wanderings through the city and his internal monologues, and the brief respites when his human half gains control, convey the suffering of this middle-aged misanthrope in nightmarish detail. Between them, Hermine, Pablo and Maria, representatives of the ordinary, sane world which he has always despised, undertake his humanization. The climax of this process is the masked ball at which he enters the Magic Theatre which is for madmen only, with the aid of drugs provided by Pablo. Hermine, the enigmatic hermaphrodite, is the agent of his release.

Various interpretations of this novel have been undertaken, and Hesse himself says that it is the most consistently misinterpreted of his novels (1965:5). The allegory that suggests itself is the underlying awareness of man's loneliness and his inherent need of love and the warmth of friendship, as the only means of taming the Steppenwolf. The allegory is a condemnation of intellectual hypocrisy, and a recognition of the animal nature which is part of man's make-up.

Each door he enters in the Magic Theatre illustrates an aspect of modern life, magnified to the point of grotesque distortion, and so revealed in all its horror. First there is the senseless violence that leaves no time for theorizing, and Haller discovers

for himself the compulsive excitement of killing. The next scene reveals man's shattered personality and the impossibility of repair. His third encounter mirrors his own life, the perpetual oscillation of control, from animal tamer to wolf, but it is the docile man who eventually breaks loose and reveals the most perverted behaviour. The next door admits him into a world in which all his unsuccessful encounters with women are brought to a meaningful, successful conclusion. In the next vision he murders Hermine, while in the final scene he is 'condemned' to everlasting life. Hesse says that the story of *Steppenwolf* pictures a disease and crisis, leading not to death but to healing (6). Perhaps the hope of which Hesse speaks is conveyed in the narrator's conviction that Haller has not committed suicide, and also the hope that he may perhaps one day come to terms with himself, learn to laugh, and be united with the immortals.

#### 4.5 DINO BUZZATI (1906-1972)

**The Tartar Steppe** (1945) has many qualities which qualify it as a modern allegory. At the literal level there is the depressing story of a young officer allowing his entire life to slip by as he waits, watching the desolate Tartar Steppe, for an enemy to materialize.

One is immediately struck by the similarity suggested in Cavafy's poem, 'Waiting for the Barbarians', and Coetzee's novel of the same name, that it is the 'barbarians' or the enemy that gives purpose to the lives of these people. To give up hope that the enemy will ever come, even though centuries have passed since he last put in an appearance, is to court despair, to destroy the purpose of living.

The description of the journey to Fort Bastiani, Drogo's vision from afar of the fort itself, is reminiscent of Kafka's **The Castle**. The fort is much further off than he anticipated, and no

one whom he encounters on the way appears to know of the existence of such a fort. When he does eventually see it from a distance, it seems an impressive structure, but shrinks in stature as he approaches.

In Kafka's novel the castle remains an enigma. In Buzzati's novel it is the barren Steppe which gains the hold of fascination over the souls of the men who stand guard over it in the fort. There is something surrealistic about its enslaving fascination. Within the walls of the fort time loses its meaning and the only reality is the strict routine to which the soldiers are forced to adhere. The dehumanizing effect on their lives is illustrated by the shooting of the soldier who tries to return without a password, after slipping out to catch a riderless horse. The inexplicable appearance and disappearance of the horse suggests the presence of some evil illusion.

The soldiers inhabit an enclosed world, a special world like Kafka's village, Golding's island, or Orwell's farm. Although the narration is realistic, there are symbolic undertones. Once an officer has entered the fort, there is likely to be no release. The illusion is created that he has only to make the request in order to be transferred, but as it transpires, this is a fallacy which undermines Drogo's confidence in himself as a good officer. There is a metaphysical relationship between the particulars of his 'confinement' to the fort and the universality of the idea of there being no escape from a given journey through life, no matter how arbitrary the original choice, or lack of choice. The fort requires a monastic devotion from the soldiers, but the gods that are worshipped in this 'monastery' are those of heroism and self-denial, which the absence of an enemy reduces to a farcical game, a waste of human potential.

The oblique style that Buzzati uses is suggestive of the truths of military life and war, the waste of human lives sacrificed to an abstract thirst for glory, a thirst that rages when the world

is at peace and can only be slaked by violence. The general to whom Drogo pays a visit in the city, appears to be separated from the realities of life in the fort by an opaque screen of ignorance, of negligently studied or perhaps incorrect reports, an impregnable screen of half-truths and misunderstandings which prevents Drogo from getting through to him to successfully engineer a transfer, and although they are conversing face to face, the general is in reality as vague and unapproachable as the Castellan in Kafka's novel.

In the microcosm of the fort the author conveys all the desires, frustrations, suffering and disillusionment of modern man. There are the petty jealousies between men, one which results in the death of Angustina. There is the utter boredom of the daily routine in a place where nothing ever happens and the routine becomes an end in itself, where the days slip by unnoticed because every new day is exactly like the previous one, each season repeating itself in exactly the same way, ad infinitum. Yet this very boredom exerts some kind of hypnotism which makes its victims loath to break free. The wild excitement experienced when an approaching line of soldiers is noticed turns to disillusionment when it appears that they are merely a detail of soldiers sent to establish a certain section of the border.

Drogo's initial inner conflict is described, as he battles with the question of whether to stay or not, this battle itself a futile exercise, Drogo at this stage being unaware of the fact that he has no choice. His inability to fit into his old life after four years' absence from the city, his estrangement from his friends and his intended, destroy the comforting thought of a home to return to in the city. Even his mother has grown away from him so that his isolation is increased and intensified by his spell of leave. As is typical of modern man, Drogo is completely alienated, his actions having no logical purpose, his life no planned destination.

His continued examination of the Steppe for some sign of an enemy is indicative of his unending search for meaning and even when the telescope is handed in and his fellow officer leaves him in the lurch, his belief that there must be some truth in the illusion sustains him until the end.

The prohibition of the use of the telescope is an example of the petty bureaucracy which rules men's lives and takes the place of meaningful action.

The supreme irony is the fact that Drogo was right and there are eventually enemies approaching along a road which they have built, and he is too ill to have any part in the battle which will at last be fought. He is removed by carriage before the arrival of the enemy to make room for reinforcements sent from the city. He is left with one last enemy to face, death, and to the end he is tortured by the bleak certainty that his courage in facing this enemy will also turn out to be an illusion.

This allegory, like those of Kafka, examines and reveals the futility of man's life, his endless search for meaning, and the horror of being subjected to the whims of an unfathomable power, even though this power is vested in the mediocre web of bureaucracy.

#### 4.6 GEORGE ORWELL (1903-1950)

**Animal Farm** (1945) is a profound commentary on modern political philosophy, while at the same time it can be read purely as an entertaining story. This multi-level nature of the novel makes it an allegory.

The reduction of the principles of Animalism to Seven Commandments is an indictment of the distortion which is brought about by simplification. The final distortion, 'All animals are equal,

but some animals are more equal than others' is sickeningly cynical and contradictory.

The allegory underlying the often amusing fable, is a sombre warning, once again, of the danger of uncontrolled power. The intelligent pigs attain a position of power because the other uneducated animals are not in a position to contradict them when they gradually adapt and distort old Major's idealistic dream, to promote their own interests at the expense of the other animals.

Orwell creates a special world, Manor Farm, and 'peoples' it with talking animals, as in a typical beast fable. He conveys the suffering of the animals under the mismanagement of Jones, and creates sympathy for the animals' desire for freedom, as expressed by Major. From the beginning, however, Orwell leaves the reader in no doubt that the rebellion is doomed to fail. Major's theories are idealistic, his premises over-simplified, and over-simplification leads to falsification, making no allowance for the realities of 'human nature'. It is ironic that during Major's speech in which he expounds his slogan of 'All animals are equal', the dogs exhibit typical animal behaviour by chasing the rats that have joined Major's audience. This leads to a vote on whether the rats are equal or not, disproving Major's maxim from the start. Orwell systematically reveals the pigs' treachery, the impact of propaganda on simple, uneducated minds, the effect of one-sided reportage of half-truths, and the gradual deterioration of conditions on the farm as the pigs widen the gap between themselves and the other animals, and move towards the world of man, so that eventually they can agree with their human neighbours that the lower animals can be compared with the lower classes of people. Ironically, the animals looking in on the scene through the window, find it impossible to distinguish between man and pig.

The events in the novel are closely related to conditions which

Orwell recognised in the society in which he lived and wrote, the effect of unbridled power, and the exploitation of the masses for the benefit of a few. The fact that Orwell uses a beast fable, a form often used in a naïvely didactic manner, gives even greater impact to his revelations. He examines the relationship between the powerful and the oppressed, man and animal, animal and animal, revealing that to the oppressed oppression is experienced in exactly the same way, irrespective of who wields the power.

#### 4.7 WILLIAM GOLDING (1911- )

Kinkead-Weekes and Gregor are of the opinion that Golding's novels form a series of variations on a problem: "The twelve years' work can be seen as an exploration of the problem of disengaging myth from fable and giving it a sufficiently historical location" (247).

In a critical study of **Lord of the Flies** (1954), Kinkead-Weekes and Gregor point out the impressiveness with which Golding makes the reader aware that much more than the surface story is being told. "Indeed, a clearly focused and cohering body of meaning appears to be crystallizing out of every episode" (15). This remark confirms that **Lord of the Flies** is an allegory. Creating his 'special world', Golding reoccupies R.M. Ballantyne's Coral Island, in the same manner as which Coetzee, in his latest work, reoccupies Crusoe's island. In doing this, Golding presents a picture far more real than Ballantyne's romantically idealized island, and "shows the falsehood by producing an island and boys that are more convincing than Ballantyne's, and then gradually revealing what the difference implies" (Kinkead-Weekes & Gregor: 22), and this is the underlying allegory. MacNeice, in fact, says that **Lord of the Flies** is a frightening parody of modern society (6). It is the fact that the boys are entirely credible as boys that allows this allegory to succeed, for it compels one to look below the surface for the universal truths that are to



be discovered by the discerning reader.

The first indication of the evil that is within man himself, is the fact that the boys land on the island as the result of an event of supreme evil, an atomic war. The boys form a group on the beach and choose a leader - both actions reflecting mankind's primal instincts. Two important issues concerning leadership are raised, the motives and methods of those aspiring to command. Ralph's leadership is based on a desire to serve the group, while Jack's, which eventually prevails, is motivated by a desire for personal power.

The boys become aware of the necessity of rules to order their co-existence on the island, but the society represented by these rules, the 'civilized society' they have left behind, bears the seeds of violence and corruption within itself, and these are transferred to the boys' island world. Jack arrives on the island with the knife already in his pocket. His control of the choir is tyrannical.

The destructive power of the evil inherent in man is suggested by the fire that the boys allow to rage out of control and which leads to the death of at least one of the boys. Their intentions are good - to attract the attention of a passing ship in order to be rescued - but the rampant fire, neglected and allowed to get out of hand, foreshadows the heat of evil and destruction that will sweep the island.

The next manifestation is the desire to kill which is eventually experienced by all the boys with the exception of Simon. They attempt to externalize the evil, and the fear it brings in its wake, and this results in the establishment of the beast-myth. They seek to propitiate this external force by making sacrifices to it. Simon comes to realise that the source of evil lies within themselves, but in attempting to convey this to the group, he himself becomes their victim.

The painted faces sported by Jack's tribe, give the boys anonymity and so strip them of the last vestiges of civilized behaviour, and set them free to follow a course of violence. This gradual degeneration into violence is progressively illustrated. Roger throws stones at the child playing on the beach, but throws to miss, the child still being protected by an invisible circle of prohibition and punishment surviving from the society they come from. Gradually this circle dissipates, until its final destruction when Roger dislodges the rock that shatters both Piggy and the conch.

Piggy represents man's rational, intellectual understanding, but his refusal to acknowledge the realities of Simon's death is reflected by his short-sightedness and his broken spectacles. His vision, his understanding, is impaired, and he too falls victim to the forces of evil unleashed by Jack's uncontrolled power. The tribe's attempt to kill Ralph results in the destruction of the vegetation on the island by the fire deliberately lit to flush Ralph. The destruction of the vegetation means the destruction of their own means of survival, and only the timely arrival of the naval officer saves Ralph, and his persecutors. Only then does Ralph fully grasp the depths of the evil that is inherent in man, which is the loss of innocence over which he weeps.

This novel satisfies all the requirements of modern allegory. The surface story is a compelling narrative on its own, but the plurisignificance of this presented world and the events that take place, intrude themselves on the consciousness from the outset. The island at first presents all the perfection of an unspoiled paradise, but almost immediately one becomes aware of the underlying potential for evil. The crash-landing of the passenger tube has left a wound in the undergrowth. There is repeated reference to the intense heat, that presses down on them, and mirages that distort vision and create illusions. This endless shimmering heat is suggestive of the close proximity of Eden and hell. The special world that Golding has created is a microcosm

containing all the desires, frustrations, suffering and disillusionment of modern man, made all the more poignant because the world is scaled down to the lives of children, isolated in their island world as a result of the evil inherent in their elders, and having only the defective values of their inherited world to sustain them.

Piggy's unquestioning trust in adult authority as the ultimate security reflects his inability to recognise that evil is inherent in themselves, and this leads to his death when he attempts to confront Jack's unrestrained power with rational reasoning, holding the conch, the symbol of democracy, in his hands. The rock that kills him also shatters this symbol.

The novel focuses to a large extent on Ralph's consciousness, on his attempts to come to grips with the situation confronting them. He finds it difficult to think logically and to convey his thoughts to the others. Eventually his leadership fails because Jack's leadership has a more primitive appeal, to that part of the psyche that is subject to irrational fears and desires, to man's inherent evil.

The arrival of the naval officer brings rescue, but Ralph weeps, for the knowledge that he has at last gained but still eludes the officer, that man can be rescued from external dangers, but that the real danger, the evil within himself, is inescapable. The title of the novel is an indication of the pervasive presence of evil, in its many manifestations.

**The Inheritors** (1955) is set in the Stone Age and the sheer distance in time makes the moral conveyed in this allegory stand out more clearly (MacNeice:6). Kinkead-Weekes and Gregor have no doubt that this novel is allegorical: "Golding's Neanderthals are the true innocents, the harmless ones ... the title reveals a bitter irony, for it is not the meek who inherit the earth, but the killers of the meek" (69). They point out the way in which

Golding reveals the archetypal truth hidden within history (248). The Neanderthalers are gentle and loving, leading simple inarticulate lives. The creatures who invade their paradise show clear signs of the depravity associated with man, which is still foreign to them. Golding appears to suggest that each succeeding age brings 'development', closer to the human being inhabiting the earth today, further from the innocent love and consideration revealed by Golding's Neanderthalers, so that eventually all gentleness and love may disappear from the human race. Ironically, the Neanderthalers gaze with amazed fascination upon these more developed creatures, without initially realizing that they are admiring that which will bring about their own destruction.

Continuing Golding's theme of the evil that is inherent in man, **Pincher Martin** (1956) represents a solitary individual facing his own doom and coming to grips with life at the moment of his death (MacNeice:6). This novel is written on two levels, "raising the past and the question of its relation to the present" (Kinkead-Weekes & Gregor:251). The flashbacks from his past are not history, but explore allegorically the nature of his being. Golding moves from the collective problem of evil in mankind to the drama of the salvation or perdition of an individual soul (MacNeice:147).

The multi-level nature of the plot soon emerges. The sea which is so intimately and graphically described in its relation to the drowning man, is as brutal and tender, cruel and gentle as life itself. Although the description of Martin's struggle to survive seems compellingly realistic, the end of the novel elevates the action to an imaginative projection of a man's redemption or damnation. The flashbacks reveal the depths of his soul, his recognition of failure at every level. He recognises his childish fear of the dark, exemplified by the dark cellar, the depth of the ocean beneath his feet, the rock. His inability to love is explored, as well as his disastrous affairs with women who do not belong to him, and with a young boy. He is malicious,

dishonest, greedy, insincere. Mary, representing unassailable virginity, inspires an obsessive desire in him to possess and destroy. Nathaniel is a potential saviour. His unselfish, uncompromising love elicits from Martin the nearest approach to love that he is capable of. Martin's crazed jealousy when he hears of Nathaniel's intended marriage to Mary, drives him to attempt to kill Nathaniel, and this leads to his own death.

Martin's battle for survival in the sea is also his allegorical battle for survival in the deep water into which his unpremeditated deeds have precipitated him. This is proved by the mental flashbacks - the weeping boy, Alfred and Sybil weeping, Helen, the wife of his producer weeping. The novel's allegorical nature is emphasised by the role Pete offers Martin - to represent any one of the seven deadly sins. The only one he does not consider suitable for Martin is Sloth, while Greed is the most appropriate. His affair with Helen leads to his dismissal from the cast, and he is called up to join the Navy where he becomes 'Pincher' Martin, disliked, treated with contempt.

The image he retains from his childhood of a little glass figure in a jar of water, its movements manipulated by the pressure of a finger on the rubber membrane covering the jar, is transmuted into himself, controlled by some unsympathetic, implacable force, submerging or releasing him at will. As in all his novels, Golding reveals persuasively that this power is nowhere else but in man himself, that the nightmares tormenting Martin are of his own creation.

Golding suggests that salvation is to be had, but that man has the choice of accepting or rejecting it, as Martin does. The universality of man's desire to have some assurance of life after death is revealed by the question which Mr Campbell puts to the captain of the ship come to fetch Martin's body. He wants to know whether the smashed, lifeless body, the sagging, deteriorating shed, is all that is left. His implied desire to

be reassured that there is some other existence is misunderstood by the captain, and he leaves Mr Campbell without an answer, just as Golding himself leaves the question unanswered.

#### 4.8 LAWRENCE DURRELL (1912- )

Scholes regards Durrell's *The Alexandria Quartet* (1968) as a sophisticated exploitation of the intricate intrigues and reversals of Alexandrian romance (6). Allegory is one way of enriching pure romance, and Scholes finds a shadowy allegorical dimension to *The Alexandria Quartet*, which is mainly an esthetic allegory about ways of story-telling, a dimension which is in fact part of the story (30). Durrell's story is remarkably independent of its allegorical dimension, keeping his narrative squarely in the tradition of pure romance (31). What Scholes calls a revival of romance with a minimal amount of allegorizing, is precisely what modern allegory is.

Scholes focuses the reader's attention on the modernity of the work. It is preoccupied with story-telling. It is a portrait of the artist, about a character in a book who is writing a book in which he is a character (18). Durrell explains this in his novel: "'We live' writes Pursewarden somewhere 'lives based upon selected fictions. Our view of reality is conditioned by our position in space and time - not by our personalities as we like to think. Thus every interpretation is based upon a unique position. Two paces east or west and the whole picture is changed'" (1968:210). The novel is a brilliant palimpsest, revealing layer upon layer of interpretations of the same events, reported from different perspectives, influenced by different motives. As the narrator, Darley, remarks: "[The great interlinear] seemed to me then to be somehow symbolic of the very reality we had shared - a palimpsest upon which each of us had left his or her individual traces, layer by layer" (Durrell:215). In this sense the novel is true modern allegory, deeply involved in the exami-

nation of the writer's craft and the problem of communication and perspective. Durrell confirms this: "... for no sooner had I embalmed one aspect of [the past] in words than the intrusion of new knowledge disrupted the frame of reference, everything flew asunder only to reassemble again in unforeseen, unpredictable patterns ..." (657). Reality, the truth, wears masks, and every time a mask of perspective is removed a strange new face is revealed.

The first section, **Justine** (1957) is the "autobiography" of a writer, relating and attempting to interpret and rationalise his experiences in pre-Second World War Alexandria, particularly as regards his love for Melissa and for Justine, and various friendships, a closely interwoven tapestry of conflicting loyalties, duties, emotions and lies. It is written in retrospect, the narrator having retired to an island, his retirement made possible by a bequest from Pursewarden. On the Greek island he rears Melissa and Nessim's child. Something of the indifference of the universe to human machinations is revealed in the way Darley depends on Justine's diary for his interpretation of their relationship, while allowing some of the sheets to be destroyed by the child - his information must therefore of necessity be haphazard and fortuitous. Later it is revealed that this was not her diary at all, but Arnauti's discarded notes. At the end of this section he receives a letter from Clea, which falsifies his whole relationship with Justine, and proves his entire perception of her love for him to have been based upon a fabrication.

In the second part, **Balthazar** (1958) Durrell virtually rewrites the first part, this time depending upon Balthazar's interlinear to the manuscript of **Justine**, which Darley had posted to him to read. This section reveals with a cold objectivity the limited knowledge of the individual, and the danger of accepting events at face value. This document rearranges the facts and casts new light on the characters, revealing Darley to be subjective, romantic, and often incapable of making objective evaluations.

The heat, dust, filth and poverty, but also the charm and sumptuous wealth of Alexandria form a fitting background for the play of passions described in the novel, sometimes intensifying, sometimes acting as a neutral foil.

**Mountolive** (1958) provides an entirely new perspective on the same period covered in the previous two sections, also adding information that was unknown to or deliberately withheld by the main characters. Nessim, Narouz and Leila are revealed through the eyes of the young professional diplomat, a perspective quite different from the other two. The last section, **Clea** (1960) takes the action further into a time made possible by the combination of truths arrived at from the various perspectives that have become available.

The almost abnormally voluble introspection, self-examination and self-interpretation of the artist-protagonists keep intruding on the narrative, relating attitudes and anecdotes that are sometimes revealing, often confusing, but nevertheless emphasising the complexity of the human psyche. The private lives of the protagonists are inextricably linked with the pervasive atmosphere of Alexandria, local politics, world politics and a world war. The emphasis is, however, on the inner, the psychological conflicts arising from these links.

Justine's search for understanding is symbolised by her search for her child, whom she knows has died, but to accept the futility of the search is to acknowledge the futility of her life. All the protagonists undergo a certain amount of transformation, some more subtly than others, some ridiculously, like Scobie who is transformed into El Scob, a saint, with his own shrine and annual festival. Perhaps the most important transformation is the replacement of Clea's hand, her old hand having been destroyed by Balthazar's carelessness, Balthazar who has influenced so many lives, and has himself been rehabilitated by his friends. Clea's new hand seems to have an identity of its own, guiding Clea into



new dimensions of art.

Pursewarden provides the ironical and satirical note which places people and their attitudes in perspective, yet is unable to face the final reality, and opts out by taking his own life.

The revelations to which the narrator has been subjected has transformed him from a callow theorist and romantic to a mature being, once more capable of writing: "Yes, one day I found myself writing down with trembling fingers the four words (four letters! four faces!) with which every story-teller since the world began has staked his slender claim to the attention of his fellow-men. Words which presage simply the old story of an artist coming of age - I wrote: 'Once upon a time ...'" (877).

#### 4.9 IRIS MURDOCH (1916- )

Most of the novels written by this prolific writer tend towards allegory. *The Bell* (1958) is concerned with "the problem of ethical behaviour as it is influenced by modern religious and philosophical ideas" (Rabinovitz, 1976:313). The second order of events explores man's moral weakness, and his sincere but haphazard and eventually futile attempts to approach some form of clarity or truth. The dark lake surrounding the house with its surface of smooth silk, conceals the medieval symbol of power, the lost bell of the Abbey. The great bell, once retrieved from the lake and activated by Dora, emits a tremendous boom: "The thunderous noise continued, bellowing out in a voice that had been silent for centuries that some great thing was newly returned to the world" (271). The thunderous declaration of power is not supported and cohering, however. The incident peters out into a series of slightly ridiculous anti-climaxes - the unexpectedly large number of spectators obstruct the procession to the Abbey and upset the programme; the wooden section of the causeway collapses, precipitating the shiny new bell in its festive robe into the

murky depths of the lake, suggesting perhaps the inevitable fate of men's best intentions. The medieval bell is not reinstated to thunder its message of faith and solidarity across the earth, but is quietly removed to a museum to be studied. This bell, engraved with a frieze depicting the life of Jesus Christ, the symbol of faith, is enervated by becoming an object of intellectual study instead of being permitted to resume its true function.

Many of Murdoch's most gentle, sensitive characters are homosexuals whom she treats with tolerant sympathy, such as Michael, whom she contrasts with the handsome, upright, straightforward James Tayper Pace, who is nevertheless selfrighteous, unsympathetic and hopelessly obtuse. She does not, however, fail to reveal the heartbreak and frustration brought about by a socially unacceptable relationship like homosexuality.

The evil generated by perverse sexual relationships is illuminated in *The Unicorn* (1963). Peter, Gerald and Toby are homosexuals, while Violet is lesbian. Their perversities weave a dense web of evil which confines Hannah to the house and ensnares all those who come in contact with her. The underlying theme of the novel is expressed by Max Lejour: "Até is the name of the almost automatic transfer of suffering from one being to another. Power is a form of Até. The victims of power, any power has its victims, are themselves infected. They have then to pass it on, to use the power on others. This is evil and the crude image of the all-powerful God is a sacrilege. Good is not exactly powerless. For to be powerless, to be a complete victim, may be another source of power. But Good is non-powerful. And it is in the good that Até is finally quenched, when it encounters a pure being who only suffers and does not attempt to pass the suffering on" (116). The characters are all more or less involved in various attempts to understand what Hannah stands for. Max says that they cannot help using her as scapegoat, "she is our image of the significance of suffering" (115). He recognises, however, that she must also be seen as real, which means that she cannot suffer

in their stead. Effingham is inclined to think of her as "a legendary creature, a beautiful unicorn" (115) but Max corrects him: "The unicorn is also the image of Christ. But we have to do too with an ordinary guilty person" (115). Max resists the efforts of the other protagonists to deify Hannah. He imagines that she might just as well be seen as "an enchantress, like Circe, a spiritual Penelope keeping her suitors spellbound and enslaved" (116).

Of all the protagonists, Hannah is the only one who professes to be a Christian. The others, though declaring that they are not Christians, nevertheless reveal the basic human need for redemption, for a scapegoat, some expiatory power, and their treatment of Hannah reflects this need. She herself blames part of her condition on their attitude: "It was your belief in the significance of my suffering that kept me going. Ah, how much I needed you all! I have battered upon you like a secret vampire ... I needed my audience, I lived in your gaze like a false God. But it is the punishment of a false God to become unreal. I have become unreal. You have made me unreal by thinking about me so much. You have made me into an object of contemplation" (258).

Murdoch interweaves the actions of her characters so that eventually everyone stands in a more or less guilty relationship to everyone else. Even Marian who arrives as an innocent, becomes involved with Effingham, Toby, Violet, Gerald, Hannah, and eventually even with Denis. Murdoch reveals that no human being can dissociate himself from the fellow humans that inhabit his environment, who are all equally to blame for holding up false images one to the other, and not one is sufficiently pure to bear the sufferings of the others. This was the prerogative of Jesus Christ. The one who approaches nearest to the Christ-figure is Denis Nolan. He recognises the evil that has come of their deeds, and he takes the blame for Hannah's death upon himself, because he was faithless to her. "The guilt passes to me. That is why I must go away by myself" (310).

Murdoch uses the bleak setting, the unstable weather, the bog and the brilliantly described sea to emphasise events and attitudes. Marian's abortive attempt to swim in the rough sea foreshadows her failure to set Hannah free. The bog in which Effingham gets lost is indicative of his pompous self-importance, his insensitive egotism and lack of self-knowledge which cause him to flounder in and out of relationships. Like James Tayer Pace in *The Bell*, he is the only one obtuse enough to escape unscathed, with his ego intact.

A similar theme is explored in *The time of the angels* (1978). Sullivan suggests that Carel is Iris Murdoch's modern Faust who signals the end of a humane intellectual and ethical tradition (1977-78:566). Father Carel, enshrined in his tower of darkness, embodies the nihilism and interiority of his time. "The sense of the ending of an age and of a dying mythology is reinforced by the use of decaying characters whose loneliness is accentuated by their dark, ruined settings and by an oppressive atmosphere of terror, melancholy and evil. Within the rectory live the ruins of a diseased age - grotesque parodies of family, of religion, of sexuality and of love" (566). The title of the book which Marcus is writing is an ironic comment on Murdoch's novel: "Morality in a world without God" (O'Connell, 1984:55).

The theme of darkness is a black thread running through the novel. The fog-induced darkness suggests the unnatural isolation to which the inhabitants of the house are subjected. As Sullivan says, "The darkness of this fog multiplies as it penetrates the house, unnerving its inhabitants and merging with the darkness of Carel's cassock, Carel's black masses, black humour, and blackness of being" (566).

The entire vicinity, and Carel's parsonage itself, suggest the moral wasteland which he and his victims inhabit. The "special world" has shrunk to a dark, damp rectory, from which the adjacent building has been sliced away and demolished, surrounded by

a tract of land resembling a bomb site. Sullivan gives a good description of the situation: "The incestuous household that lives within a dark ruined rectory far from London, surrounded by fog and by wasteland, suggests metaphorically the perils of intellectual, spiritual and emotional solipsism ... unhealthy love that is immured, sealed-up, is a form of self-love or incest and can result in unexpected disaster" (562).

The way in which Murdoch's narrative oscillates between realistic and symbolic narration is typical of allegory, just as the protagonists are rounded characters in their own right, but also emerge as types: the unmitigated evil which is Carel; Marcus representing atheistic humanism; Norah Shadox-Brown standing for a commonsense goodness, for ordinary decency. The love that Carel inspires in so many people indicates the power and insidious attraction of evil.

Byatt describes the main protagonist in *A Word Child* (1975): "A character created by education, a man made civilized by learning grammar and language to a level of high proficiency, a man of clear mind on a limited front, and violent and ill-comprehended passions. His story, though dramatic, is cleverly related to the story of Peter Pan, a recurrent preoccupation" (1976:33).

Once again the description of the protagonist's surroundings forms part of the underlying allegory. The rubbish chute is jammed and the flat is smelly. The "badger" smell of his room suggests animality: his flat is a lair, a hide-out, not a home. Hilary himself confirms this: "I instinctively denigrate my flat: it was doubtless my own life which was small and nasty" (2).

Like Hesse's Harry Haller, one part of Hilary detests anything approaching homeliness, but the other part longs to be assimilated by a group. Routine, strictly adhered to, has taken the place of living and turned into survival, and his life becomes a paro-

dy of normality. He is incapable of realising that people exist outside his own consciousness, as if they freeze into immobility until he returns to provide reality. Hilary's predilection for riding the London Underground Circle line conveys the futility of his life, his loneliness and despair. Like Haller, much of his time is spent in pointless peregrinations around the city.

The Indian girl, Biscuit, an "Indian princess" born in Benares, brings brightness and interest to his life for a while, but this too is an illusion as she turns out to be a London-born lady's maid.

Starved of love as children, Crystal and Hilary succumb unconditionally to the least evidence of interest and affection shown towards them, and this makes them extremely vulnerable. The selfish nature of Hilary's love, however, brings disaster upon every person he becomes involved with. As in *The Unicorn*, Murdoch reveals a preoccupation with the nature of sin and forgiveness.

In *The Bell* Michael succumbs to Nick's attraction, and so loses his job and destroys his hopes of a career in the Church. Years later he repeats the identical mistake with Toby, which contributes to the breaking up of the lay religious community. Hilary falls in love with and eventually destroys Gunnar's wife, and years later, perversely falls in love with Gunnar's second wife, and history repeats itself once more. As Schneidermeyer says, "Only one so self-absorbed could repeat his exact sin, and under the same circumstances, only to suffer all over again the agony ..." (1974:63).

Murdoch's novels are patently not complete, pure allegories, but lend themselves to intermittent allegorical interpretation. Her protagonists do not move across a wide tapestry, but inhabit tight, controlled worlds: a lay religious community; an isolated house in an almost uninhabited region; a rectory surrounded

by an area resembling a bomb site; Hilary's controlled, routinized world. Her characters are persuasively human and for that reason retain the reader's sympathy, but at the same time often function as types, allowing the author to explore universal themes. Her novels are thoroughly modern, dealing with the suffering and frustrations of modern man in a world that no longer has any fixed values. They are fabulations, and deal mainly with the inner conflicts, men's striving towards self-knowledge from the moral confusion which arises from his feeling of alienation.

#### 4.10 JORGE LUIS BORGES (1899-1986)

In his introduction to *Labyrinths* (1964) James Irby remarks that for Borges no one has claim to originality in literature. All writers are "more or less faithful" translators and annotators of pre-existing archetypes (1970:19). In this he shows affinities with a modern theorist like Roland Barthes, who attacks the mimetic theory whereby literature is seen as a reflection of reality. For him a work of literature can never be anything but an inevitable intermingling of multiple writings. Intertextuality replaces both expressivity and mimesis (Gräbe, 1986:77).

Borges has often been compared with Kafka: "the similarity lies mainly in the narrators' [Kafka and Borges] pathetically inadequate examination of an impossible subject, and also the idea of an infinite, hierarchical universe, with its corollary of infinite regression" (Irby:19). The differences between the two writers may however be more significant than their likenesses: "Kafka's minutely and extensively established portrayals of degradation, his irreducible and enigmatic situations, contrast strongly with Borges's compact but vastly significant theorems, his all-dissolving ratiocination" (Irby:19-20). All Borges's works "contain the keys to their own elucidation in the form of clear parallelisms with other of his writings and explicit allusions to a definite literary and philosophical context within

which he has chosen to situate himself" (20).

Irby contends that Borges's idealistic insistence on knowledge and insight, which means finding order and becoming part of it, has definite moral significance, though there is an inextricable duality in that significance: his traitors are always somehow heroes as well. All his fictional situations are basically autobiographical (20). His fictions grow out of the deep confrontation of literature and life which is not only the central problem of all literature, but also that of all human experience, the problem of illusion and reality. "We are all at once writers, readers and protagonists of some eternal story; we fabricate our illusions, seek to decipher the symbols around us and see our efforts overtopped and cut short by a supreme Author: but in our defeat, as in the Mournful Knight's, there can come the glimpse of a higher understanding that prevails, at our expense" (Irby: 21).

Lodge points out that a radical way of denying the obligation to select is to exhaust all the possible combinations in a given field. Borges employs this technique in the imaginary world of 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius' (1956). This fable is one of the works of Borges that have exercised great influence over American postmodernist writers; a fiction containing a single plot, with all its imaginable combinations and transformations. The labyrinthine novel of Ts'ui Pen in Borges's 'The garden of the forking paths', is constructed on similar principles (Lodge, 1977a: 230). In this fictional work Borges emphasises the essence of fictionality, the fact that the author is confronted with choices from which he has to make a selection. Ts'ui Pen chooses all alternatives simultaneously, creating diverse futures and times, and this explains his novel's contradictions.

The device that Borges uses is one that Coetzee also employs. The narrator begins the story by giving it an aura of authenticity: an extract from a history book, and then quotes from a signed



statement by one Yu Tsun, of which the first two pages are missing. His efforts to convey to his master in Berlin the name of an artillery station from which an attack is to be launched, leads him to shooting a man bearing the same name as that of the city where the arsenal is located, assuming that the newspaper report of the murder, giving the name of the murderer as well, will be correctly interpreted as a clue to the name of the city. The underlying allegory is the labyrinthine, arbitrary nature of life and the decisions which govern it. Yu Tsun follows a labyrinthine road to reach the home of the Sinologist, Stephen Albert, an infinitely forking road on which he has to keep taking the left fork, following the common procedure for discovering the central point of certain labyrinths. Once there, he becomes involved in a discussion of the novel written by his ancestor, the novel itself being a labyrinth, an infinity of forking paths, each choice leading to a different future, a different outcome. One of these choices leads to the death of Stephen Albert and the execution of his murderer. Yet the instantaneous death of Stephen Albert is itself of arbitrary importance as its only observable result is five days' postponement of the attack on Germany, the postponement moreover being attributed to torrential rain, and not to a German counter-attack based on information provided by a spy. In his oblique style Borges has succeeded in emphasising the futility of man's attempts to make choices, as each choice leads to nothing but a further choice, and all of them equally arbitrary.

Borges's allegories are not allegories of political or social dissent. His works centre on the individual and his involvement with his social, political and psychological environment. The details of his world possess plurisignificance; beyond the literal level his works are a search for order, which appears to be there, but persists in eluding him. This interpretation is supported by his belief in intertextuality, of the influence of pre-existing archetypes on the work of every author. His theory implies a concatenation of theories, influences and conclusions

which suggests the expectation of an orderly and progressively illuminating development of insight into the problems of existence. His insistence on finding order and becoming part of it in fact succeeds only in illuminating the existing chaos, and the infinitesimal influence on the universe of individual endeavour.

**The library of Babel** (1956) supports this view of his work. This view of the universe as a library consisting of an indefinite/infinite number of hexagonal galleries, compels the reader to look for meanings not literally in the text, but implied, nevertheless. The mathematical precision of the library consisting of shelves of exactly the same length, lined with books of identical format, even as to the number of lines and letters per page, which "sinks abysmally and soars upward to remote distances" creates an illusion of meaningful order. But this order is only superficial because the contents of the books are meaningless. The apparent order is therefore either an illusion or it is there, but incomprehensible to the human mind. This is indicated by the nature of the letters on the spines of the books. They do not indicate what the pages say, and this adds to their incoherence.

This library, with its mirror which faithfully duplicates all experiences, suggests the labyrinthine library described by Umberto Eco in **The name of the rose** (1980), a library which preserves and hides knowledge instead of making it available to the benefit of mankind. Ironically it is this attempt to veil knowledge which leads to the destruction of the library and its blind librarian by fire.

The narrator of **The library of Babel** has spent his whole life in search of the catalogue of catalogues, that which would invest the library with meaning, but is preparing to die just a few leagues from the hexagon in which he was born. The library is an obvious metaphor for life. A life-time devoted to the search for meaning has been futile. This allegorical quest is as fruitless as all quests in a modern world that no longer has any fixed

system of values.

The question of individuality is also raised in this work. Each book in the library is unique and irreplaceable, but there are several hundred thousand imperfect facsimiles, differing only very slightly, so that the effect of any reduction is infinitesimal.

The infinity of the universe is implied in the "illuminated, solitary, infinite, perfectly motionless, equipped with precious volumes, useless, incorruptibly secret" library (Borges:85). Man's impact on the universe is negligible, his attempts to understand it futile.

#### 4.11 GABRIEL OKARA (1921 - )

Hugh Webb believes that a Nigerian writer like Okara is writing with the solid allegorical background of the African oral tradition behind him. Allegory is a particularly interesting form when seen in the context of modern African literature (67).

The basic pattern of oppositional values in which certain figures and ideas are ranged against one another, like the polarities of night and day, darkness and light, death and life (Webb:66), becomes clear very early in **The Voice** (1964). Okolo is almost immediately branded as an outsider, aligned only with Tuere the witch and Ukule the cripple, who share his moral position. "Okolo is shown struggling against the corrupt and conservative socio-political order of Izongo and his cronies" (Webb:68), Izongo being the Chief, and representative of the established but corrupt order. This grouping of figures, the moral and philosophical polarities, are clearly defined in **The Voice**.

Although there is much of the traditional allegory about this novel, Okolo is the typical modern allegorical hero, alienated

from his environment and, like Kafka's heroes, fighting a losing battle against a power that is unconquerable because it is unidentifiable. Izongo can be identified, and Abadi, but when it comes to include those who meet him at the canoe at Sologa, and the policeman, and the listeners of the Big One, and the psychiatrist, it assumes inconceivable proportions, intangible yet as palpably present as an evil miasma.

Okolo's alienation is established in the opening sentence of the novel. "Some of the townsmen said Okolo's eyes were not right, his head was not correct" (Okara:7). Because he is different, because he refuses to conform, he is gossiped about and ostracized. He is arrested by his friends who refuse to enlighten him out of fear for their own security within the system, and he stands alone, facing the ridicule of Izongo and the elders.

Tuere too is alienated, and in her isolation has carefully tended the little hearth fire, feeding it and blowing it with supreme dedication until to Okolo it resembles "a new-appearing sun or a going-down sun" (15) and Okolo visualises how many years she has been engaged in keeping this flame, the knowledge of men's insides, alive.

In the canoe en route to Sologa a similar alienation develops - Okolo and the silent girl against the other passengers who all reveal corrupted morals of varying degrees - the suspicious mother-in-law, the dishonest policeman, the fat whiteman's cook with his prospect of his son's joining the Council after which money will "like water flow" (37). When the girl falls asleep against Okolo under his raincoat in the rain, the corrupt passengers and suspicious mother-in-law refuse to believe the "straight things" he and the girl say, and Okolo's very silence throughout the journey is taken as evidence of his guilt.

Okolo's journey, another allegorical device, is typically futile and Sologa brings no peace or refuge but only darkness, captivity

and confusion. There it is Okolo alone against the listeners of the Big One, and the psychiatrist who wants to put him in an asylum, and when he is released once more to defend himself against the accusations of the mother-in-law, he turns his back on Sologga which appears to contain every vice known to modern man, and returns to his village where at least Tuere and Ukule await him. Those that share Okolo's position appear weak but possess moral strength, the type of moral strength that cannot condone the general corruption by power, possessions and fear, and can therefore not be tolerated in the community.

Okolo is introduced with a minimum of descriptive information so that he becomes known solely in terms of his moral campaign, and public attitudes towards him, the device allowing his actions to sustain a symbolic intensity of reference. Everything he says and does becomes significant (Webb:68). Okolo's name, translated, means 'the voice': "Okolo, the truth-seeker and then the truth-teller, is the voice - the voice of reason, goodness and honesty" (Webb:69). He represents the good that has fled from the others, or is still there in some cases, but suppressed by fear or greed. Only once does the author allow any sign of Okolo as human being with normal passions to emerge, and that is in the curiously touching incident in the canoe which gives rise to so much trouble, when he struggles with the emotions roused by the naked body of the girl sheltering against him under the raincoat by 'talking to his inside': "Protect her ... she is a male person, she is a male person, a male person, male person, male person ..." (41).

By describing Okolo so sparingly, Okara succeeds in giving him greater universality. He becomes not only the voice of reason in an Africa drunk with the new wine of Independence, but the representative of truth in the world, and he is supported only by those who have little to lose and have suffered so much that fear itself has lost its power over them. In the end when Tuere makes the decision to die with him she says, "Let them come and

take us. I have been dead many many years. So I fear no more. From this standing moment, wherever you go, I go" (96).

Another typically allegorical quality is Okara's use and description of background to reflect, intensify and sometimes place in sharp relief, the narrated action. Okolo stands looking at the river reflecting the setting sun "like a dying away memory" (9). A little later, when the messengers from Izongo are about to arrive, the moonlit sky takes on a menacing aspect when clouds move across it: "Larger and darker clouds, some to frowning faces, grimacing faces changing, were skulking past without the moon's ring, suffocating the stars until they too lost themselves in the threatening conformity of the dark cloud beyond" (10). This description not only prefigures the 'skulking' approach of the nervous messengers, but also reflects the condition of a society in which individualism is suffocated and conformity is enforced by fear.

Webb points out that, fittingly, it is on the level of words that Okara's scheme of signification begins to emerge: "'words of the coming thing' - Independence - are in the air. One of the chief's messengers asks another to 'stop talking words that create nothing', while Okolo, as he considers his moral predicament and the difference between money and words, comes to the conclusion that words are of paramount importance" (69). Okolo refers to himself as "the voice from the locked up insides" by which he implies that his people are not bad, but that fear and greed have caused them to lock away the goodness that is in them, and it is because Okolo expresses these feelings that his words cut to the quick, and he must be disposed of. As Webb points out, it is Okolo's struggle to make his voice heard that constitutes the central thread of the narrative exposition (69).

The universality of allegory is clearly illustrated in this novel. The hands clutching at Okolo to apprehend him, become the hands of the world, a thousand hands; the feet, a million pursuing feet;

faces, a mass of faces. Okara does not project any dichotomy between individual and collective values. The quest for 'it' becomes an inner search, it means being true to one's own conscience (Webb:69). Okolo becomes an allegorical figure, the moral crusader. Various temptations are placed on his way, in the form of advice from friends to avoid trouble by conforming. His refusal is a movement towards certainty, a process of purification (70). Webb elaborates: "To see these temptations as being of only personal significance ... would be to seriously neglect Okara's scheme of correlation. For these temptations clearly represent varying ways forward for the young, educated and idealistic African who wishes to preserve the best of the traditional values in the post-Independence era. By extension, they can also be seen as alternative directions for the nascent African states" (70). The concerns of this novel are indisputably socio-political directions: "Okolo, as allegorical observer, constantly functions as a voice of political dissent" (71), recognising that people are concerned only with sharing the spoils, with money, cars, and concrete houses (71). The spurious nature of the fight for freedom which Abadi uses to exploit the people of Amatu and keep them in fearful subjection to Chief Izongo, is revealed when Okolo confronts him: "'Whom are you fighting against?' Okolo again interrupted him. 'Are you not simply making a lot of noise because it is the fashion in order to share in the spoils. You are merely making a show of straining to open a door that is already open'" (25). Much the same argument is developed in Coetzee's **Waiting for the Barbarians**.

Webb stresses the universality of this allegory: "While **The Voice** is a political fable of immediate relevance to the Federation of Nigeria in the early 1960's, it can be seen to apply equally, to any community where the 'straight things' have been ignored" (71). He continues: "**The Voice**, an allegory of alienation, is a work concerned with the process by which people have been severed from the realisation of their true possibilities" (71).

The novel ends in death, but nevertheless on a note of hope. It is daybreak when the canoe bearing Okolo and Tuere aimlessly down the river is drawn into a whirlpool, disappears without a trace and leaves the river flowing smoothly over it as if nothing has happened. But Ukule is still there and he has undertaken to tend Okolo's words and see that they do not die.

Webb concludes: "What is certain is that **The Voice**, working from a pattern of oppositional relationships that combine to form the symbolic power struggle, incorporating an ordered scheme of signification, symbolic in method but realist-oriented in the nature of its perceptions, attempting to shape the group conscience, is an achieved allegory at the highest level of coherence" (72).

#### 4.12 JOAO UBALDO RIBEIRO (1941 - )

Robert DiAntonio (1986) has made a study of the Brazilian novel, **Sergeant Getúlio** (1971) by Ribeiro, in which it becomes clear that this novel reveals most of the qualities of modern allegory. The vision of the modern world that he projects is chthonic, the motif that of the innocent victim confronting torture, "so pandemic that it is now recognizable as a full-fledged archetype" (450).

Getúlio's Odysseyan journey becomes a symbolic Grail Quest, a vision of one man's journey to redemption. At the same time DiAntonio quotes Glucksburg's observation that the metaphorical metamorphosis with which the novel ends drives home the absurdity of investing human life with a divine purpose, or any purpose at all; "it reinforces the suspicion that the emergence of consciousness is in the service of instinct, an emanation of the blind energy of Nature" (DiAntonio:450). The journey itself, the hyperbolic nature of Getúlio's feats of violence, the larger-than-life aspect of his being, all add to the unmistakably alle-



goric nature of this novel. The archetypal richness of the novel precludes its being read merely as a sociological study. The epic anti-hero is not the embodiment of a nation's hopes and ideals, but "a hellish emanation of will, the violent will of the backlands" (452). As DiAntonio points out, in broader terms *Sergeant Getúlio* can be seen as an allegory of confrontation between civilization and the last stages of Brazilian barbarism. On the first level of this multilayered confrontation, the tension between victim and oppressor is dramatized. "The novel's victim is the true innocent who is totally dehumanized by Getúlio, who projects all his hatred upon this sacrificial lamb. The prisoner's life can be viewed in Kafkaesque terms as an absurd nightmare. Symbolically, he is the true innocent at the mercy of a ruthless political system that is as unfathomable as it is unjust. The prisoner is the quintessential Job figure with punishment after punishment heaped upon him by an irrational captor" (452-453). Even when the order to deliver the prisoner is repealed, Getúlio refuses to sacrifice his mission and cuts off the lieutenant's head in "a mythological accommodation of Perseus' beheading of Medusa" (453).

As is typical of modern allegory, this story is marked with strong psychological concerns, framed by Getúlio's perceptions of reality, with his obsessions.

The narrative tone in the concluding chapter becomes lyrical and mythic as the epic journey nears its end and the hero is being made ready for his deification. From being a man at odds with his own world he is metamorphosised into becoming one with the earth of the backlands. His violent will is transfigured into the clay of the backlands. DiAntonio comes to the conclusion that Ribeiro has fashioned one of the most complex and compelling Brazilian novels of the present age, masterfully comingling the art of the modern-day myth-maker with a persistent concern with exposing both individual and social problems. Once again it is clear that modern allegory is a consistently suitable vehicle for

this type of social comment.

#### 4.13 JOSÉ DONOSO (1924- )

**A house in the country** (1978) is a fascinating example of modern fabulation, with its overtly fictional quality and underlying allegory, revealing by means of irony and satire the depravity of a society addicted to pleasure and self-gratification.

The narrator claims his omniscience in terms of the declared fictionality of his fable and simultaneously succeeds in creating an absorbing narrative. He frankly reveals the narrative options available to the author, at times digressing for a short distance along an alternative path and dallying with the various possibilities of dénouement that present themselves. This preoccupation with the writer's craft is a quality typical of modern allegory. The author claims the privilege of presenting obviously fictional characters, events and situations in order to focus on universal human failings and social injustice.

This fictionality, and the narrator's choice, is referred to from time to time in the novel, also in connection with the protracted fiction enacted by the cousins: "You had the opportunity to alter the course of this story but you didn't have enough imagination to bring your characters to life" (160). The narrator's imagination has not failed him. He has an imaginary conversation with Silvestre on his way to the publishers with the manuscript of his novel, and later explains the attitude he expects of readers towards his characters: "I make no appeal to my readers to 'believe' my characters: I would rather they were taken as emblems - as characters, I insist, not as persons - who as such live entirely in an atmosphere of words" (286). He justifies his reluctance to surrender to the urge to give account of each of the characters: "I tell myself that real life, in fact, is made up of half-finished anecdotes, of inexplicable, ambigu-

ous, and lazy characters, of disjointed and confusing stories, with no beginning or end and almost as meaningless as a clumsy sentence" (347), revealing how close fiction and reality are, the one a reflection of the other.

Donoso creates a particular stylized, artificial world, like Golding's island and Orwell's farm, and peoples it with a large, immensely wealthy, decadent family, representing the privileged classes of the world. Attaining universality in this manner, he is able to deliver social criticism with impunity. Each member of the family reveals some quality which the author wishes to examine, making use of flashbacks to illuminate and explain various attitudes and events. Celeste's blindness, for example, is revealed to be of psychological origin, resulting from being raped as a child by her fourteen-year-old cousin, who eventually became her husband. Balbina's marriage to the brilliant doctor Adriano Gomara is explained by a flashback revealing her youth and their courtship.

This novel explores the relationship of master and servant, demonstrating Hegel's theory that the servant eventually becomes the master because he becomes indispensable. The Venturas are utterly dependent upon the army of servants employed from year to year on a seasonal basis to maintain the style required by the Venturas, and to control the children. The Majordomo is appointed not only because of certain inherent qualities, but also because of his physical ability to fill the huge uniform, which by its weight and dignity determines the behaviour of the person who currently fills it. The individuality of the servants is ignored. They have no identity, no emotions, their names are meaningless, their humanity denied.

This special world shrinks when the grown-ups leave on a picnic, taking with them all forms of transport, all arms and ammunition and all servants. The thirty-three cousins are left in the house behind the locked gates of the estate to fend for themselves and

to come to terms with the fear of the cannibals which their parents have instilled in them. They are as alone and isolated as the boys in *Lord of the Flies*. The children never really believe that their parents intend returning before nightfall.

The disintegration of their world is illustrated by the gradual deterioration of the house. The chess players smash a glass cabinet to gain access to a valuable set of jade chessmen. The closets of the grown-ups are raided for clothes for the next episode in *La Marquise Est Sortie à Cinq Heures*. The rules are broken and children slide down the banisters. The thistle grass takes root and grows on the roof, in cracks in the walls, in every available cranny, gradually blurring the outlines of the house. Eventually the aborigines move in and camp in the salons, making fire on the parquet, hanging skeins of wool to dry and drip dye on the floors. The returning servants wreak havoc, shooting tiles from the roof, shattering windows and works of art, and soaking the carpets with blood. The damage is patched up with disastrous results, succeeding only in demonstrating the impossibility of repairing and reinstating an anachronistic social system.

The adults, the servants, the children and the cannibals form four distinct levels or classes, each having its own customs and conventions, determined by generations before them and elevated to unbreakable laws by perpetuation. They also represent allegorically the various classes in society, and the relationship between master and servant, oppressor and oppressed, parent and child. The adults, or privileged classes, are self-indulgent and indolent, requiring of the servants to satisfy their every whim and to prevent the children from bothering them. The servants do this by presenting perfectly submissive, anonymous faces to the adults, and by terrorizing the children. They have no identity during their three months' service beyond that of the livery. This denial of the servants' personal identity is a factor contributing to the masters' final downfall, for to ignore their individuality is to be ignorant of them as a potential source of danger.

Júan Pérez hates Adriano for thwarting his desire for recognition, hates him enough to murder him. The masters fail to realise that the servants know them better than anyone else does, and have more contempt for them than anyone else. Pérez knows that the Ventura women are whores and that what Casilda reveals about conditions at the house during their absence is probably the truth. Their inferiority is mercilessly revealed by Júan Pérez: "To subsist they needed to preserve a stylized self-image, static and ideal: it was they, not he, [Júan Pérez] who lacked identity" (189).

The lightheartedness of the servants returning from the picnic reveals that they are becoming aware of the disintegration of their masters' power, that is gradually taking place. They offer to handle the crisis at Merulanda in the parents' stead. This increases their masters' dependence upon them, and also their own position. For the first time the Majordomo and his lackeys begin to be recognised as individuals and their masters are filled with fear, because the servants have suddenly become an unknown force to be reckoned with. They become aware of the Majordomo's features: "Was he really a man, this Majordomo, and not the incarnation of some vile force they had themselves created by investing him with that grand and glorious livery?" (192). The servants capitalize on the masters' fear of cannibals although they themselves know that their existence is a myth. This surrender to the servants is the beginning of the end for the Venturas. Ironically, the children are as anonymous to the Majordomo as the servants are to the Venturas.

Once the servants have subdued the aborigines and taken over the household once more, they make a pretence of returning to the old ways. They are supported mainly by Juvenal and Melania, who desire to return to the security of the fantasy which ruled their lives before their parents left. Juvenal surrenders the key of the larder to the Majordomo, voluntarily reinstating the servants in their position of power over the children. A 'dark curtain'

is dropped over the past and the damage crudely patched up. The Majordomo appropriates Terencio's office, and like Orwell's pigs who chase away the farmer and then make every effort to become exactly like him, the Majordomo imitates Terencio's elegant style. The servants fail, however, to break free of their menial class. They betray their masters, only to follow new masters who plan to mechanize the mines, eliminate the cannibals, which merely means a slightly different form of oppression.

The children survive at an ambiguous level between the paradoxical indulgence and neglect of the parents and the terrorisation of the servants by creating an imaginary, decadent world of their own, and practising perversities which are part of the convention inherited from previous generations of Ventura children. There is no innocence, no ignorance, no truth among them so that they function as parodies of normal children, the 'normal' progeny of a decadent society. The children are the ones who know everything, see everything, understand everything. Arabela keeps the secret of the library; Hermógenes's daughters are privy to his dishonesty; Wenceslao is in secret collusion with his father, and has trained the little Amadeo to act like an imbecile but to serve as a spy. Malvina lives a secret life of eavesdropping and petty thieving. Their exposure to the evil, loveless world represented by their parents, warps their natures so that they will eventually grow up into adults like them.

Ever-present is the threat, real or imagined, of the cannibals, as illusory and elusive as Coetzee's Barbarians. The attempt on the part of generations of grown-ups to externalize the evil which is in themselves, results in group fear which will hopefully remain a cohering power. This is something that is revealed in many allegories because it is true of so many situations that it has become universal. Orwell's pigs intimidate the animals by keeping them in constant fear of an incipient attack to recapture the farm; Okara's recently independent people are controlled by the fear, encouraged by their leaders, that their freedom

might be lost if they do not obey their obviously corrupt leaders unquestioningly. The existence of the Barbarians gives Coetzee's representatives of the Empire their reality, and their inability to force the Barbarians to reveal themselves destroys them. Any heretical whisper that the cannibals do not exist is hushed and punished, because the Venturas are dependent on the cannibals who serve to define their position. Should it be proved that there are no cannibals, their entire 'moral' structure would collapse, and another explanation for the children's failings would have to be found. It is therefore essential to maintain the myth of cannibalism. The 'cannibals' have a position of power, because only they know how to handle the gold laminas on which the wealth of the Venturas depends, and they are a further illustration of Hegel's master/servant theory. The aborigines only become aware of their power when Malvina introduces them to crime.

The revelation that the aborigines never were cannibals comes as no surprise, this ostensible horrible propensity having been invented by the ancestors of the Venturas to justify their massacre, and is an ironic comment on the practice of building great empires on the ruins of indigenous populations. The first ancestors came out to Marulanda on a 'civilizing mission'. "Slaughtering tribes and burning villages, the first fathers emerged triumphant from this crusade, vouchsafing to the Venturas not only the pride of their illustrious deeds but the benefit as well of lands and mines conquered from the aborigines" (18). Wenceslao's conviction that there are no cannibals, and that their parents will not return, begins the disintegration of the cousins' confidence and prepares for subsequent events. When the parents come across Fabio and Casilda on their return a year later, the children are tortured until they are prepared to declare that the house was in fact attacked by cannibals and that they have converted the children to cannibalism.

The moral degeneracy of the Venturas is disclosed in the first pages, ironically beginning with the children. Their incestuous

sexual perversities are an ironic denial of childish innocence. Gradually their perversities are placed in perspective by the decadence of their elders who simply 'drop a black curtain' and ignore anything unpleasant that might disturb their serenity and require them to emerge from their passivity and take action. The children's violence and promiscuity are inherited. Melania takes the precocious Wenceslao to bed. He is nine years old, but his mother perversely refuses to acknowledge that this beautiful child is a boy, and she dresses him like a girl and insists that he act and be treated like one. Melania flirts with her uncle Olegario, encouraged by his wife Celeste, whom he raped as a child. Juvenal is homosexual, and the last words he speaks to his father are to accuse him of being homosexual as well. In the light of this knowledge, it is ironic that 'hands under the sheets' is a crime punishable by the servants, because "'touching themselves' - is a filthy vice of obvious cannibal origin" (20). Mignon murders her sister Aída by roasting her head after they have witnessed the sacrificial killing of a pig, and is subsequently beaten to death by her father, Adriano. All these events are kept secret, and Melania expresses the family slogan when she says that "appearance is the only thing that never lies" (5).

Weaknesses in the elaborate structure of appearances soon become visible. Juan Pérez admits to having been employed year after year, in spite of the fact that this is prohibited by the Ventura policy. The Venturas themselves are guilty of deceiving one another. Hermógenes and his daughters enter only a fraction of the true value of the gold in the ledgers, and Lidia helps herself to a part of the money set aside for housekeeping.

All the depravities of which the cannibals stand accused, are ironically revealed by the Venturas. The servants are instructed to be severe with the children, as any bad behaviour is attributed to the insidious influence of the cannibals. The children are all emotionally twisted by their parents' lack of love.



'Fondle time' is a ritual aimed not at expressing love or consoling the children, but to win the battle of affections and be honoured as the most affectionate mother. The possibility that the children might acquire infectious disease is feared only to the extent that they themselves might be infected. Their expressions of love are all cannibalistic: "eat him alive", "gobble him up", etc. But the children never doubt that they are unloved and this certainty affects them in various ways, depending upon their intelligence and sensitivity. Arabella's reaction to her mother's lack of love is to feel her unattractiveness confirmed, and to withdraw from grown-ups and children alike, into the isolation of the library.

These unloved children are beginning to instil fear into their parents by their silence, their obedience, their secrecy, and the parents begin to doubt whether they can in fact depend on their children loving them, regardless. The children, being oppressed by the servants as well as by their parents, develop a feeling of solidarity and they withdraw into secrecy. This opposing force becomes a source of danger to the parents, because the children's secrecy neutralizes the parents' and the servants' power over them. This insidious fear, the power of the oppressed over the oppressor, encourages their decision to desert the children and go on a 'picnic'.

The magnificent library of leather-bound books affords further proof of the false values of the inhabitants of the house. Arabella discovers the lie: there is not one printed word to be found in the library, and it is therefore no source of knowledge. It was designed as one more way of keeping up appearances, and presenting a false image to the world.

The house, presenting its magnificent facade to the world, is built upon a warren of tunnels which used to be a salt mine. In these damp tunnels beds of mushrooms spawn out of control like malignant growths, and symbolize the spawning of evil. Deep in

the mines is the confiscated finery of the 'cannibals'. Their protest against this confiscation is to refuse to wear anything else, indicating their dauntless pride. In sharp contrast to the opulence of the house, are the furthest reaches of these damp, slimy tunnels in which the servants are accommodated, and the filthy straw pallets on which they sleep. These conditions are another denial of the humanity of the servants.

The house is situated on a plain of thistle grass, the seeds of which were accidentally sown and subsequently grew so prolifically that the natural vegetation was destroyed, destroying also the livelihood of the aborigines and forcing them to work the gold mines as their only alternative. This introduction of the thistle grass, a useless and malignant weed, is indicative of the destructive influence of 'civilization' on colonized areas. The thistle grass eventually invades not only the park, but also the house, taking root in every cranny, and the last survivors are reduced to the same level as the aborigines, lying on the ground together, breathing minimally to avoid being suffocated, subjected to the same fate and illustrating equality in the basic business of life and death. A further example of the detrimental effect of the foreign invaders on the aborigines is symbolized by the fact that they are poisoned and become diseased as a result of water polluted by the sewage from the Ventura residence.

Just as Golding's boys are initially controlled by the memory of the civilization from which they originate, the thirty-three cousins are also restrained by habit, until Wenceslao cuts his hair and discards his girlish clothes, and the 'security' of custom is gradually undermined by change. Mauro is the first to recognize that change is inevitable, while Juvenal and Melania attempt distractedly to maintain the appearance of normality by continuing with their game of fantasy.

The estate is surrounded by a fence of lances, planted close together in concrete to form an impenetrable hedge. The irony of

this 'impenetrability' is revealed when Mauro and his brothers loosen the lances one by one, until on the day of the picnic, thirty-three lances have been loosened, equal to the number of cousins left on the estate. The feeling that this coincidence should have some portentous meaning is destroyed when to their utter confusion they discover that only thirty-three lances were in fact fixed. The others have already been loosened. This means that for an unspecified period their safety has been an illusion. The function of the lances has been purely allegorical, representing safety without in reality providing it. They are neither imprisoned nor protected by the lances. All the children join in pulling up the lances of this fence and it becomes but a further frenzied chapter of their fantasy. When the lances have been removed, the park is 'invaded' by the thistles, so that the destruction wrought on the plain is extended to include those who are responsible for it. The grass is endowed with supernatural properties, taking advantage of the lengthening shadows and the destroyed fence to invade the park as stealthily as the 'cannibals' themselves.

In the first part of the novel, Wenceslao's is the voice of reason, attempting to expose the falsity of the mores by which they live. When he cuts his hair and casts off the girls' clothing, he comes to represent a desire for truth, for reform. He refers to his cousins as emotional cripples of whom only one or two might be salvageable. They are caught up like trapped insects in the web of the game, *La Marquise Est Sortie á Cinq Heures* in which they are compulsively involved, being a reflection of the unreality of their lives in the house in the country. Wenceslao's father, Adriano, is kept imprisoned in the tower, declared insane because he refused to condone the corrupt ways of the Venturas, confirming that the only way to survive in modern society is to conform. There is no room in the system for the individual, the outsider.

Wenceslao has been shaped by his father's ideas, communicated

through the bars of his prison while his guards were asleep, but once he has been set free they find themselves at cross purposes, Adriano wanting to change everything radically, while Wenceslao wants to follow a more rational course. Mauro supports his uncle and Wenceslao's rationality is ignored, with resultant chaos.

Adriano Gomara is the driving force behind the attempt to reinstate equality between the inhabitants of the house and the aborigines. Arabela is the one to recognise that it is an excess of pride which governs his behaviour and causes the revolution to fail. Adriano represents the oppressed turned oppressor in his desire to exercise his power which only Wenceslao is wise enough to understand and strong enough to resist, albeit passively. The revolution follows a predictable course, weakened by distrust and conflicting ideals.

Throughout the novel the idea of eating human flesh is represented as the supreme evil, and the children are kept in fear of being eaten. Nevertheless, Amadeo remarks that he believes that it is the Ventura girls who are the cannibals, and not the aborigines. The chef reveals a sick interest in human flesh and its preparation, illustrating the barbarous nature of the servants, but the chef's interest is condoned because it is 'scientific'. The children starve themselves when they are led to believe that they are being fed human flesh. They resist this final degradation.

When Wenceslao says that "... only when the natives decide to be cannibals in fact, not just symbolically, will they be saved from their fate as slaves" (274) he is converting 'cannibalism' into a symbolic eucharist. Amadeo dies trying to kill a wild boar, but when he fails, he offers his body for the survival of the others. It becomes the acceptance of one another on equal terms, accepting the right of one to sacrifice himself for another, in total unselfishness. Amadeo's act has mystical significance and deprives the myth of cannibalism of its power to instil

fear.

The return of the grown-ups with the foreigners reveals the full extent of their depravity. Their attempts to deceive the foreigners and maintain appearances are grotesque, to say the least. Significantly they stop at the gate and ceremoniously unlock it before entering, while the fence no longer exists. This farce is to insist that nothing has changed. The pretence is supported by the servants to further their own interests, and they force the children to dance on the lawn in a grotesque parody of happiness, while the servants have weapons concealed under their liveries to keep them at it.

Humourless, direct, and incapable of appreciating irony, the foreigners reveal the Ventura's decadence, making them aware that they are not what they possess. Their pretence disintegrates step by step. The children put in an appearance, obviously maimed and starved, pathetically clamouring for attention. The foreign woman is not taken in by Celeste's 'morbid sensibility' and seriously questions the objectivity of the Ventura's judgment when they agree wholeheartedly with the descriptions of a scene by a woman who is obviously blind. When Hermógenes sends for their paragon of knowledge, Arabela, she is eventually found and brought in, an emaciated scarecrow, and dies an hour later in the foreign woman's arms.

Malvina represents a new generation of exploiters. An illegitimate child, she rejects the love of her mother because it is not for herself, but for her father, another case of bitterness because of denied identity. The disgrace of being disinherited and poor makes her deceitful. She knows of all the secret activities - Wenceslao's task as his father's messenger, Mauro's activity at the fence of lances, and has decided that Casilda has most to offer. She and the aborigines help Casilda to steal the gold. Malvina represents a kind of progress, a departure from the devious trivialities which make up the existence of the Ven-

tura women. Returning with her aboriginal consort, she ignores the gate and enters through the gap, indicating an attitude diametrically opposed to that of the Venturas. She takes advantage of the breach in their defences, just as she has betrayed Casilda as a first step towards a new era of domination.

To the end the parents maintain their selfish nature, their resistance to change. They die trying to escape the threat of the thistle, once more abandoning their children to their fate. Their failure to learn a lesson from their experiences is pessimistic. On the other hand, the children left behind in the house are involved in a struggle for survival with the aborigines, suggesting the possibility of a new era.

#### 4.14 CONCLUSION

From this concise but representative selection it will be clear that allegory has become a valuable medium through which to express and examine the problems facing the individual in modern society, and to criticize a system which gives rise to such problems. This is *littérature engagée* at its best, committed to making readers aware of their emotional, moral, social and political environment, but without providing a blueprint for change.

It has been amply illustrated that the use of allegory has not been confined to any particular country or literature, but is used by authors all over the world to create a coherent narrative and convincing characters, but simultaneously to examine the underlying motivation for events which stem directly from the social and political conditions within which the author and his characters find themselves.

There are two aspects in particular which are emphasised in these novels. The first aspect is the consequences of the abuse of power, creating the conviction that this is one of the most

serious complications of modern society. The other important aspect is man's alienation, resulting from the disintegration of the authority of the Church, of belief in a controlling power, and man's failure to find sufficient resources within himself to serve as substitute for this Power.

## 5 ALLEGORICAL TENDENCIES IN SOUTH AFRICAN LITERATURE

### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

Allegory has held an important place in South African literature from a very early stage in its history, in Afrikaans literature developing from the naïvely didactic novellas of J. Lion Cachet, to the sophisticated modern allegories of authors like Etienne Leroux, Berta Smit and Anna M. Louw. In English South African literature Cherry Wilhelm traces allegory as far back as Olive Schreiner's fictions. In her Auetsa paper (1979) Wilhelm says that Schreiner's fictions "can best be understood as modern allegories, as extended narrative metaphors for the soul's timeless quest for the truth, but modified by the particular dilemma of the nineteenth-century soul, which needed to move out of the confining guilts of a punitive theology to the freer air of a new philosophical or artistic synthesis" (65).

The cryptic allegories of the One and the Many which Wilhelm identifies in Schreiner's *Stories, Dreams and Allegories*, reveal the philosophical basis of allegory which, according to Wilhelm, is the characteristic assumption underlying Schreiner's work (65). She says that there are two planes of experience, the plane of varied experience and the plane of the eternal, the latter being the eternal ONE. This mystical monism is a central tenet of Schreiner's fiction (65). The two ways of expressing this belief correspond to the two directions of Schreiner's allegorical journeys: "One is idealistic or transcendental; the spiritual grows out of the material and transcends it. This movement is upward ... the other is linear and chronological, or evolutionary: the movement is forward" (65).

Wilhelm points out that the mixed racial identity which Olive Schreiner identified in 1891 as the final problem of South Africa, is also the "problem" of South African writers, for "it is ... a basic structure, an awareness of dichotomy and an attempt to evade,



confront, heal or bridge that dichotomy through prophecy, satire, comedy, realism or fantasy" (1979b:38).

Certain trends have manifested themselves within the system to which the Afrikaans novel belongs. There is general dissatisfaction with the social order as it is at present. The prominence of the 'outsider' is probably the result of this dissatisfaction. Significantly, religion as a theme has disappeared from the literary scene. Authors have begun to experiment with point of view, and fantasy and surrealism have become important devices. Here two of Brink's novels may be mentioned as examples: *Lobola vir die lewe*, and *Houd-den-bek*. Irony and satire have become far more pervasive than in the past. These new trends have of course brought about a correlative shift in literary criticism (Van der Elst, 1985:6).

Authors like Brink, Leroux, Elsa Joubert, Menán du Plessis and others appear to have a particularly strong vocation to deal with the local scene. Van der Elst expresses the fear that this intensive engagement with the local scene may prevent their work from becoming universal manifestations of men in distress which can be disconnected from the South African scene (8). Nevertheless, the question of human relations is the common theme that unites the eleven or twelve literary languages in use in South Africa at the present time (Van der Elst:2).

Sheila Roberts comments that the South African political situation has had an adverse effect on literature. Censorship is one of the most harmful factors, but she also mentions the lack of enthusiasm that the English-speaking population has for its own literature, and the contempt for it expressed by many black writers (1981:85). On the other hand James Smith is of the opinion that 'apartheid' has fostered a rich body of South African literature (1984:9).

Charles Malan emphasises that South African literature not only

reflects local society, but functions as a social and political catalyst (1982c:9). Contemporary works have to do with the suffering of the individual, the social and racial order, and ideological conflicts resulting from the population structure in the country. There is also the tragedy of historical as opposed to contemporary conditions and the pain, pathos and joy of the individual experience within the greater order (9). These works have moved beyond the neurotic preoccupation with socio-political divisions, to focus on the intensely personal experience of being different, and on existential isolation. Malan ascribes this focal change to the fact that the myths of the South African society have at this stage been recorded, aspects like conflicting ideologies, racial division and the differences between rural and urban life have been explored and reflected in literature (10). His point of view is confirmed by the fact that both local and foreign news coverage gives an indication of the close correlation between major literary works and the country's socio-political climate (Malan,1982c:9). The contemporary writer feels himself free to undertake "a journey to the interior", the psyche of suffering man. The result is that contemporary "committed" literature can often be regarded as having undoubted literary merit, which is not always the case where the stridency of the message goes beyond a critical awareness of contemporariness and causes the delicate balance between "the world of discrete facts and the ... world of art and imagination" (Lodge,1977b:86) to shift and destroy the aesthetic value of the work.

Stanley Ridge agrees that the most persistent feature of works published late in the 1970's is their deep-lying concern with individuality. They explore the individual's sense of himself in relation to the local social environment (1981:22). It needs to be stressed, however, that the pathological fear, loneliness, dehumanization and blatantly realistic sexuality are not limited to South African writing, but appear all over the world (Malan, 1982c:22).

Gareth Cornwell makes the tentative suggestion that the front rank of South African writers - Coetzee, Gordimer, Gray, Brink, Peter Wilhelm - is turning away from the present to an imagined future, a re-animated past or a timeless zone outside of history in their search for the workable metaphor, "the pregnant correlative adequate to their experience" (1983:24).

Modern South African novels tend to show striking similarities in theme, tone and texture, thereby revealing a close kinship, sometimes amounting to a fated identification, with "the tormented land at the southern tip of Africa" (Malan,1982c:9). There is rage and rebellion against factors that ignore the kinship and stress the divisions between people, but "there is also compassion for the protagonists as well as the antagonists in a microcosmic situation that reflects the fragmentation of the modern world" (Malan,1982c:9).

Much of the *Littérature engagée* of the eighties has great literary merit and it is here that fabulation and allegory come into their own. In this new allegory there is little sign of "n parallele ontwikkeling van twee reekse gegewens ... wat n ooreenstemming punt vir punt besit" (Van Zuydam,1974:41). It is an art form strongly reminiscent of the traditional technique but revealing remarkable differences (Van Zuydam:39).

## 5.2 JAN LION CACHET (1838-1912)

As a poet, J. Lion Cachet is remembered for one poem only, "Die Afrikaanse Taal", in which the relationship between English, Dutch and Afrikaans is portrayed allegorically by the relationship between the Afrikaans country girl, her Dutch sister and English cousin. The Afrikaans language is the narrator, giving the work a certain naïveté (Kannemeyer,1978:65-66). Lion Cachet's masterpiece, however, is the collection of stories entitled *Sewe duiwels en wat hulle gedoen het*, and published as a volume in 1907.

Each of the novellas deals with one of the deadly sins. In each case the main character suffers from some vital weakness, and he is led into various situations which reveal this failing and eventually lead to either his downfall or his rehabilitation (Kannemeyer, 1978:66). In order to emphasise his didactic point, Lion Cachet often sacrifices the illusion of reality so that his characters predictably degenerate into types.

This traditional allegory provides a foundation and paradigm for writers like Anna M. Louw, Jan Rabie and Etienne Leroux to build upon. A line can be traced from this moralistic-didactic tradition, through Langenhoven and M.E.R., to contemporary writers, and in their hands the allegorical structure develops into the multi-faceted tool of expression it has become in contemporary South African and world literature.

### 5.3 N.P. VAN WYK LOUW (1906-1970)

*Die Dieper Reg* (1938) is a choral verse play written for the occasion of the Voortrekker Centenary. This work reveals strong affinities with the medieval morality play as far as the conflict between the Mediator and the Accuser is concerned, as well as the overtly allegorical nature of the characters. In the Court of Eternal Justice the choir of Voortrekkers gives lyrical support to the Mediator, Man, Woman and Youth, in their defence of the deeds and motives of the Great Trek (Kannemeyer, 1978:395-396). This work belongs to the mode of traditional allegory and is an important addition to allegorical drama following Langenhoven's *Die Hoop* and *Die Vrou van Suid-Afrika*, but reveals little sign of the qualities of modern allegory to be discerned in later works.

Van Wyk Louw's great epic poem, *Raka* (1941), is not generally described as an allegory, but has many recognisable qualities of modern allegory. The surface narrative relates the arrival in the

midst of a peaceful, relatively civilized tribe somewhere in Central Africa, of the strange ape-like creature, Raka, the fascination his sensuousness, gaiety and strength have for the people, their gradual degeneration, and the death of their spiritual leader, Koki. The underlying allegory can be interpreted as the danger of destruction confronting any culture which is exposed to too many foreign influences, or the biological fact that people of lower cultures multiply at a much faster rate than those of higher cultures, and by their eventual majority pose a threat to the intellectual civilization of the West (Kannemeyer,1978:401).

The setting is used to emphasise in the first place the peace and contentment reigning among the people of the tribe. Later, when Raka has established himself in the tribe, the gate of the kraal lies open, leaving the inmates without protection. The boundary between nature and culture is no longer clearly defined.

Raka and Koki personify the powers of good and evil, as in medieval morality plays. Raka is half-beast, Koki half-god. The similarity ends here, however. The representative of evil, Raka, kills Koki in battle, and Koki, symbolically, lies trampled in the mud, in contrast to the holy pool in which he was wont to cleanse himself. The tribe is now ruled by Raka.

**Raka** expresses the conflict between rival authorities, and is closely related to the changing world in which the author finds himself. The theme of the poem is universal, revealing man's susceptibility to the bestiality which is inherent in himself, but suppressed and controlled by culture. The end of the poem is ambiguous, revealing the death of that which is good, but the fact that Raka drinks from the clay pots in the kraal is redeeming, and suggests that he can be changed through evolution to higher cultural standards (Kannemeyer,1978:400).

#### 5.4 ETIENNE LEROUX (1922- )

In Leroux's work the term "mythology" can be understood as the collective noun denoting all extant myths of all the peoples of the earth, also all the tales of origin and of the gods by which a nation, group or tribe gives its own account of the origin of those things that control it (Botha, 1980:471). The widely divergent fields of reference, multiplicity, complexity and concentratedness of structure, and the allegorical element in the "archetypal" characters in Leroux's novels represent a complete break with the good-naturedly localized nature of Afrikaans literature before him, a complete break with tradition (Kannemeyer, 1983:346). His work can be described as the most overtly allegorical of all South African literature.

In a certain sense Leroux follows the tradition of James Joyce and T.S. Eliot by basing his novels on a myth or pretext, which provides a basic structure, although of all Leroux's novels only **Hilaria** has a sustained mythical pattern. Usually his novels reveal points of contact with a variety of myths which he mixes, so that where one has expected a familiar basis, the novel acquires a strangely bizarre appearance. This is also true of the primary realities of his novels. In Leroux's world an ordinary bull becomes a two-tone monster which bellows noiselessly, and the thunder of a diesel engine becomes the heartbeat of a whole society which depends upon the machine for the maintenance of its mechanized order. A modern shopping centre becomes a microcosmos of modern life. The relationship between known and unknown, reality and fantasy, specifically South African and international, often leads to comical, satirical and ironical situations, which occasionally lead to the grotesque, macabre and absurd in his work, and from there to the perversion of what are often profound philosophical ideas (Kannemeyer, 1983:347). He makes use of types rather than characters, using them to illustrate themes, so that they are often allegorical in nature. This is illustrated by the names of some of the characters: Van Velden, Edelhart, Van Eeden,

De Goede. Some names are indicated by a letter, following the tradition created by Kafka, others are named after mythological figures. Often the main character is an inarticulate bystander, while the supporting figures fill the role of guides (Kannemeyer, 1983:347). His novels are frankly intertextual, characters appearing in novel after novel, binding his oeuvre into a coherent unit, the preceding works functioning as a palimpsest for the sustained interpretative actions of the reader.

Leroux's works are allegories, revealing most of the characteristics of modern allegory. Although they cannot be said to be vehicles of political dissent, they are undoubtedly vehicles of social dissent. Each novel reveals the individual's attempt, usually unsuccessful, to make sense of the society in which he finds himself. In doing this Leroux reveals what he considers to be the many failings and the fundamental evil of modern society.

The surface narrative of **Die Mugu** (1959) is satirical and often farcical, but the underlying allegory exerts a strong influence which is impossible to ignore. **Die Mugu** relates the experiences of a bourgeois, middle-aged man on his leisurely way through the city to collect the lottery ticket that will prove him to be the winner of R50 000. For the first time there is the chance of his breaking free from the dull routine of his life. Every detail in the novel possesses plurisignificance and universality: the blighted beauty of the ex-beauty queen is also blighted youth, their degeneracy resulting from the materialism of their parents; he is befriended by a millionaire, only to be rejected when he fails to conform to the millionaire's preconceived idea of a tramp, and Gysbrecht confronts him with the truth of his experience. He is unceremoniously dumped, ironically, beside the refuse bin where he was found; he sleeps under a bush and awakens to the sounds of violence, rape and murder.

The special world that Leroux creates in this novel is Cape Town of the fifties and early sixties, revealing in allegorical terms

a cross-section of the society which he evokes. The desires, frustrations, suffering and disillusionment of modern man are illustrated in every encounter.

The preface to the novel explains its basic precepts. "Mugu" is a word used by the ducktails of the sixties to denote a "square", a "square peg" in a "round hole", which is the established order. This order does not necessarily mean the opposite of anarchy, but rather legalized, disguised anarchy, contained within a sarcophagus of forgetfulness and acceptance, induced by drugs, alcohol and sex. Leroux prefaces his narrative with the words, "Die wese van mugu is ongerymdheid. Daarom is die mens mugu". For this reason real inner freedom is foreign to the mugu. In his paradoxical idealism, he continually overthrows one order only to establish a new one, equally "mugu".

Kannemeyer identifies a certain resemblance to Joyce's *Ulysses* in Gysbrecht's two-day peregrinations through the city of Cape Town (1983:352). The microcosmos he traverses contains elements of the universal, but also of the uniquely South African world. The places he visits and the people he meets are representative of the two poles of society. At the one end there is Julius Johnson who represents a rigid, mechanised, ordered society, and at the other Juliana Doepels who wishes to destroy this demythologized order, and the ducktails who represent the disintegration of the order, but who have not succeeded in finding new symbols (Kannemeyer, 1983:352-353).

Empathetically, Gysbrecht reconnoitres Cape Town, which represents contemporary society, but at the same time he explores his own psyche. He is a tragic figure, the individual who attempts to break free from the claims of his own bourgeoisness, but can never become a complete individual, and remains and is doomed to remain an outsider. His pseudonym, 'Gargantua', is ironic, representing as it does, this little man, little in stature and in aspirations. It is allegorical as it signifies his longing for



a bigger and better deal for himself.

Nienaber criticizes Leroux for the fact that the characters in this novel lack development and multi-dimensionality, blaming this lack on the fact that the characters are allegorical representations of representatives of the system fighting for control of Mansoul, in this respect in traditional allegorical style (1982:545). The name of the main character, Gysbrecht Edelhart (in translation meaning "Noble heart") recalls the medieval morality play, and this gives his pilgrimage universal meaning (Botha, 1980:458). It also suggests that he is essentially a sympathetic character, for whom even the large sum of money eventually loses its power to attract and by inference to corrupt.

Leroux employs the enigma of the hermaphrodite in this novel and again in the last work of the following trilogy, *Die derde oog*, in the form of Juliana Doepels. The juxtaposition of Julius/Juliana emphasises their bipolarity, which is given an ironic twist by the fact that she is a hermaphrodite. Lodge calls the hermaphrodite one of the most powerful emblems of contradictions, affronting the most fundamental binary system of all (1977a:229). In his references to Juliana Doepels, the hermaphroditic revolutionary who also has prophetic qualities, Leroux proves his own prophetic vision. She prophesies violence and the destruction of the type of materialism and rationalism represented by Julius Johnson. She seeks this destruction in order to reinstate the precious uniqueness of the individual.

Her failure to do more than damage the hideous facade of the building which represents Julius Johnson's empire, is representative of man's failure to prevail against the system and regain his individuality. The ducktails' attempts to be different are a protest against society just as Juliana's are, but their attempts are neutralized by the fact that they always move and act in groups, and all wear similar clothes, a recognisable 'ducktail uniform'. They have merely exchanged one conformity for another.

Edelhart identifies the reason for the ducktails' violent behaviour as alienation, the sure knowledge that there is no safe harbour, that security is an illusion. This is the typical insecurity of modern man, manifested in social chaos. The novel reveals the destruction of the old myth, which has nothing to replace it, and warns that the mugu, like the poor, will always be with us.

In *Sewe dae by die Silbersteins* (1962) Henry van Eeden is taken to Welgevonden to meet the family of his bride-to-be, who are his equals except for the fact that they are not 'from Eden'. He has to get to know the anti-paradise of the Silbersteins within a short period of time. He must be initiated into the secrets of this strange world, he must become acquainted with fear, chaos and guilt (Antonissen, 1966:37). As is required of modern allegory, the surface narrative, although overtly fantastic, makes sense in itself. As is typical of Leroux's work, the allegory is there, intrusive, never far below the surface narrative. There is a continual interplay of narrative and setting, the strictly ordered existence reflected in the two-tone bull bred on the farm, the mathematical precision of the distribution of colour in the flower beds, the labyrinthine nature of the garden, with inexplicable walls built in unexpected places.

Leroux strips his characters of practically all their humanity, making of them two-dimensional types which symbolise archetypes and ideas in a multiplicity of ways.

In this novel realism is abandoned in favour of fantasy, a technique which favours allegory. The novelist is indeed at pains to point out that not only is there not a farm called Welgevonden, but there is no farm even like it. The fantasy functions within a particular stylized framework - seven days; seven chapters; seven episodes, each episode having a title suggesting stylized movement: "**Dans** van die rykes", "**Ballet** van die boere", "**Fuga** van geestelike herbewapening", "**Dood** van 'n heiden" and

others suggesting at least a typical pattern underlying each of the episodes (Botha,1980:432).

Botha is of the opinion that the sustained theme is more complex than it appears on the surface: it is the tragedy of maturity that one must lose one's innocence. Leroux suggests that one should rather flounder in evil than live in innocence, that one first has to get to know the devil before one can enter the gates of heaven (Botha,1980:432).

Leroux explores these themes allegorically by once again linking their development expressly to the allegorical journey, the tradition of the pilgrimage in literature, the stylized following of a particular literary tradition. It belongs to the same tradition as *Pilgrim's Progress* and *Gulliver's Travels*, and a host of German 'Bildungsromane'. In this novel, however, the traditional allegorical pilgrimage degenerates into a satirical fantasy. It is treated ironically, and is in fact entirely perverted. The psychological development of the 'Bildungsroman' is extended to include acquaintance with the collective unconscious and its archetypes (Nienaber,1982:548).

The purpose of Henry's peregrinations is to find Salome. But who and what is Salome? She must be thoroughly earthy, and yet have an element of the paradoxical. She eludes the perverted existence of *Welgevonden*, her presence everywhere supposed but never seen, and even at her ultimate arrival she does not become physically present to the reader. It is precisely this vagueness that increases the impact of the ending of the novel, because the question of who and what she is remains inconclusive, so that what she is depends entirely on faith (Antonissen:38).

Nienaber says that Henry's affirmation of the invisible at the end of his initiation should probably be attributed to the power of the mytho-religious and great paradigmatic symbols which speak in many languages. Jock Silberstein himself explains this during

the experiencing of symbols in the cellar. They are symbols that present themselves to Henry in the unlikely forms of wine which is "religiously" fermented, a bull representing the cosmic power of nature subdued by breeding, laboratory apparatus and computers that are handled like holy objects by contemporary "priests" and alchemists, etc. In the modern context of Welgevonden one might speak of a derailed symbol, which has degenerated into a stagnant sign ((1982:547).

A general facelessness or anonymity is the most permanent motif of this novel. Perversion of life and of the world, of good and of evil into this uniform lack of identity is the most daemonic destruction of the 'living myth' imaginable (Antonissen:39). Yet, contrary to all expectations, it is this anonymity that awakens the desire in Henry to escape his robot-like existence, to find a face, an image, a persona (Antonissen:39).

What he has had to learn is a kind of moral degeneracy. He is to be "mated" with Salome and for this purpose his innocence has been destroyed.

Man's alienation is illustrated by the fact that the individual no longer matters, he is merely a type, and the man without identity shares the fate of mankind. The sub-characters are activated with the sole purpose of placing the main figures in relief. Individually they are stripped to the bone, but each one plays a complex role in the collective image (Nienaber:548).

Malan points out that in this second trilogy the "outsider" is still present, but in *Een vir Azazel* (1964) becomes progressively more recognisable as the pilgrim journeying through modern life, to bring the "monsters" in it to light (1982b:335). The idea of a pilgrimage is becoming a more important aspect. Leroux's work reveals an intense preoccupation with man and his condition, the times in which we live.

Botha refers to T.S. Eliot's comment on James Joyce: "in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him ... It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history" (1980:449). The novel is not content with revealing the "futility and anarchy", but also reveals man's helplessness and the evil inherent in himself. Because man cannot accept that the evil is in himself, he allows it to exist outside of himself, and is therefore continually in search of a scapegoat. The novel reveals this, but also that man's salvation lies in faith which is often as unsuspectedly present in man as is evil.

Antonissen raises the question, with Dr Johns who is a key figure in the interpretation of the novel, whether Henry and Salome ever found one another (117). Their love might have been everyone's romantic dream, except for one stark reality: the birth of the idiot giant, Adam Kadmon, which claims Salome's life. He becomes the society's sacrifice to Azazel, their scapegoat for the murder of Lila the prostitute, idealized as a virgin. The name Adam carries a wealth of suggestion of expulsion from Paradise because of the woman's sin. Now Adam Kadmon is killed to avenge the death of another fallen woman, Lila the prostitute. The hero, who leads the attack which results in the death of the scapegoat, is the inarticulate detective sergeant Demosthenes H. de Goede. His name carries a wealth of suggestions. He is called Demosthenes because of his speech impediment. The H. stands for Herakles, the Greek mythological hero who supported the Olympic gods in their battle against the giants. His surname, de Goede, is an ironic appellative for the one who protects the community from the 'powers of evil', who traces the 'murderer', and mortally wounds him so that he is carried away by the flood.

The questions that should be asked by a detective, Quintilian's

order of rhetoric: who, what, where, with whom, why, with what, when, are used to name the seven main phases in the book. Dr Johns suggests that they start with 'who'. The fact that the novel has already started with 'where' alerts the reader to the fact that there is a reversal of sequence. The large plastic swan discovered on the lawn, prefigures the discovery of the bloated corpse of the giant, which will be washed over all obstructions to lie stranded on the lawn.

Like all modern allegory, *Een vir Azazel* has a concrete point of departure, a surface level which can be read for its own sake, but the allegorical aspect, once again the peregrinary "journey", the presence of a 'meturgeman', and an 'outsider' as main character are there and in this respect it is in the same tradition as *Sewe dae by die Silbersteins*. The special allegorical world is a sadly neglected Welgevonden, isolated by torrential rain which cuts the farm off from the rest of the world. The masks are made articulate by the water tearing through their mouths.

The degeneration of society is clearly illustrated: the issue of Henry 'from Eden' and the daughter of the inhabitants of the anti-paradise is the innocent idiot; the confessional has lost its efficacy and become a chamber of fear; the glutamic acid and thiamin bottled in the factory where wine used to be bottled, are used to treat alcoholism.

Kannemeyer identifies the main theme of *Een vir Azazel* as the problem of blame and moral judgment, which is a typically allegorical theme (1983:359). The objective and subjective levels are inextricably interwoven.

Irony plays an important role in this allegorical novel. Man's predisposition for externalizing evil is supported by Dr John's injunction to De Goede to examine the mourners, but not to delve too deeply. The coffin containing the 'light' Lila is heavy.

The murder of Adam Kadmon is truly tragic, on both the literal and the allegoric levels. His initial pleasure in the belief that at last someone is prepared to play with him, that he has been accepted into society and is no longer an outsider, is soon destroyed by pain. The setting is medieval. Adam Kadmon, in red, suggests daemonic power, but is in fact the Christ-figure, the innocent scapegoat. The crowd, as deluded as those who chose Barabbas, stone him, to avenge the death of the 'virgin': a prostitute and a nymphomaniac.

In 18-44 (1967) the narrator is a middle-aged literary hack, disappointed, confused, frightened, and driven to introspection. This self-examination involves various circumstances: the four women in his life and his relationship with them, also his authorship. He knows that to be a literary hack is not enough. He must understand the meaning of these women in relation to himself before he can answer the middle-aged's question of who he is, and so end his frightened quest for identity.

The situation affects the reader deeply because the novel deals with universalities, not merely with an individual 'case'. The narrator gives an account of himself and of the times in which he lives, which corresponds to our times. It becomes clear that the representation of the four women has to do with the manner in which we too are heirs, perhaps victims, of times past which have left their mark on the history of contemporary man (Botha, 1980:448).

Malan describes 18-44 as a masterly adaptation of the last lines of the first movement of *Burnt Norton*, the first of T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*:

Time past and time future  
 What might have been and what has been  
 Point to one end, which is always present  
 (Eliot, 1963:190).

Authorship itself is the theme of this work; the novel is an

image of the coming into being of a novel, but erected with such subtle control that at the same time it is the novel itself (Malan,1982 :335).

In this novel the process of growth is emphasised by the journey from East to West which must be undertaken. It is a symbolic journey. Meij points out that according to Jungian interpretation a journey of this nature is the symbol of man searching for enlightenment in himself, attempting to illuminate the darkness of his sub-conscious mind (1968:67).

18-44 is a clever title, the novel being the admonitions of a 44-year-old literary hack to an 18-year-old female letter writer who appears to be in love with him. At the end of the story the girl is 19 and he 45, 1945, a new era. He gives her advice gleaned from his own life, so that the girl will understand that she is merely passing through a phase, and eventually, as she gets to know him better, she stops writing, as he predicted she would (Meij,1968:68). Meij points out that this novel also belongs to the 'Bildungsroman' tradition (66). It becomes an allegory when it convinces that the narrator's accounting for the four women cannot be understood merely on the level of personal relationships. Each woman becomes the image of a phase in his existence, each having left a residue in his life, and each representing a facet of his personality (Botha,1980:447-448).

True to the multi-level nature of allegory, the underlying meaning of this novel is far more complex and subtle than the literal. At this level the novel illustrates the conflicting powers in man, and the attempt of every person to be physically 'whole'; the contention is that one should be prepared to take leave of familiar things to allow a process of growth. Meij says that what the author means by "primordiale verraad" probably is that man has to sacrifice the 'old man' in order to enter a new phase of development. Growth implies death (1968:66).



Botha emphasises that the purpose of the novel is not only to unmask and impair; its purpose is resurrection. The author must reinstate the Gift of God. Man's suffering is experienced as a melting pot. In each of us the Gift of God is mutilated and needs to be repaired. For this reason the progress of the novel may eventually be said to purify (1980:447-448).

Leroux does not allow the characters in this novel to figure forth deeper layers of meaning through their actions. He allows contemplation and speculation to emerge in the novel, often in the form of the literary hack's voiced thoughts (Meij,1968:67). He sees himself as Mercury, the invisible reconciler who helps to create new life through his conciliatory conduct. It is an almost hyperconscious definition of the position and function of the author in the community. The literary hack is therefore not involved with the four women that share his life only, but with the whole conflict of man in search of psychic balance, and the four women are, among other things, only aspects of the author's, and by implication, man's psyche (Meij,1968:68).

Botha interprets the novel *Isis...Isis...Isis* (1969) and its accumulation of sights related without style, as a bitter parody of the phenomenon of travel literature with which the Afrikaans market has been inundated in recent years. It reveals the propensity of man to confer lofty significance to his most banal undertakings. The Isis myth, in inverted form, is used as term of reference, a mocking framework for his flight from place to place and from woman to woman (1980:450).

The novel becomes an allegory when it can eventually be described as a reconnaissance and a revelation of what the narrator's country and he (and we) are. This novel, like Leroux's other works, reflects a deeply serious search for form and meaning in the wilderness of experiences (Botha,1980:450).

The first two chapters summarise the theme: the narrator's at-

tempt to come to rest, an attempt to make himself whole, to understand and make peace with himself, and he intends doing this by undertaking a journey to search for Isis, the healing agent (Botha,1980:450).

The tale involves a game of contrasts and parallelisms. The recounted journey is a construed attempt to experience the Isis myth. The literary hack himself is the mutilated Osiris seeking the Isis who will make him whole (Botha,1980:450). He believes himself to be in fourteen segments and falsely hopes that he will recover a section in each woman.

Botha believes that there are certain points of contact between the Isis myth and certain ingredients of Jung's conception of psychology and alchemy, of the Collective Unconscious and the universal Mother (450). This search for Isis is a real, experienced, painful search for healing, the quest of Everyman.

**Magersfontein, o Magersfontein** (1976) is perhaps Leroux's most realistic work since **Sewe dae by die Silbersteins**, but is nevertheless permeated with startling fantasy (Brink,1980:22).

Brink points out that it is in the third section that the novel attains true stature. The humorous nature of the novel is transcended by the relativation of the grotesquely macabre humour of man's games to an all-embracing Fate. Leroux rips open an apocalypse, an apocalypse of man and of Afrikaner. The historic Magersfontein is revealed as a ghastly joke, a shocking comedy of errors, and in this last instance it also becomes a historic novel of great meaning (1980:24).

The names and qualities of the characters immediately betray the allegorical nature of the novel. One of the leaders of the expedition to Magersfontein, Seldom, is half-deaf. The other leader, Sudden, is nearly blind, and these two symbolize the impaired perception of modern man. The Greek chauffeur-lover is mistaken

for the script writer, while the script writer himself has no literary standing. The midwife has had no training. All these people comprise a group singularly unsuited to their tasks; misfits, aliens therefore, in every sense. The traffic officer, Le Grange, is an Afrikaner archetype, and the unpretentious hotel soon acquires a "Kafka castle" atmosphere (Brink,1980:23).

Of this 'comedy' Brink says that the laugh changes to a scowling grimace; the comic mask deepens to the grimace of a skull. And through the historical and hysterical misfortunes, through the ridiculous fuss of acting people, something of the destiny of South Africa and of the Afrikaner is indicated (an own Deluge; a personal 'Götterdämmerung': because the old Germanic mythology lies threateningly only just below the surface) - grimmer than anything else Leroux has done so far (1980:24). In this parody lies the modernist, allegorical nature of the novel, that it predicts a country, humanity, going under while occupying itself with travesties, charades and farces, refighting its old battles without seriousness or necessity, but simply for the sake of spectacular display (1980:24).

In this novel Leroux mythifies a piece of South African history, and then bases paradigms upon this newly-created myth. People remain continually in search of archetypes, and when Garries buries his child and his victim, and decorates the grave with a hero's cross, it becomes the beginning of a new myth for the future (Brink,1980:23).

### 5.5 BARTHO SMIT (1924-1986)

Bartho Smit's *Putsonderwater* (1962) has as its theme the crisis of faith as experienced by Western man, which is a typical theme of modern allegory. The choice of characters, and their names, points to the play's affinity with medieval morality plays and with allegory. The play gathers together a whole series of Bibli-

cal references (Smuts,1980:51).

On the surface there is the typical Afrikaans 'dorp', with its church, police station, and the 'power politics' between typical characters in the hierarchy of the 'platteland'. From below this realistic world rises the larger, more universal plan of the allegory. The anonymous archetypes are represented, with the woman Maria as focal point (Kannemeyer,1983:433). Maria is a blend of good and evil, innocence and promiscuity. She is simultaneously seductress and abused. Because all are guilty, no one is prepared to take the blame for her predicament. When she kills the Dominee who attempts to rape her, her attempts to confess are frustrated, and forgiveness denied (Kannemeyer,1983:434). She demonstrates the impossibility of life without illusions, and believes that the child she bears might be a type of Messiah.

Antonissen calls this drama an allegory of an irreligiously fair-minded world, time and type of civilization which denies man the comfort of confession, and therefore forgiveness of his sins, and he is driven to despair (1964:332). Places and things tend to transcend the realistic and Putsonderwater itself becomes a symbol of desolation in a society in which humanity has withered. The cemetery becomes the gates of Heaven, and the brackish ditch the place of the outcasts of society, but not necessarily of God (Smuts,1980:52).

Typical of modern allegory, the characters have a strong symbolic dimension, but also figure realistically, so that the allegorical dimension can be shifted to the periphery, but when brought fully into play, adds immeasurably to the depth of the work.

## 5.6 ANDRÉ P. BRINK (1935- )

Brink believes that archetypal patterns are an important characteristic of modern allegory, but that they are distorted, so that

the modern allegory is not merely a variation of the archetypal pattern, but its re-creation (1975a:41). In contrast to traditional allegory, *Lobola vir die lewe* (1962) reveals freestyle allegory and intermittent allegorical interpretation (Van Zuydam: 46).

There are important similarities between certain characters in *Lobola* and important Biblical figures. The Biblical Patriarch, the Virgin, and the Redeemer, are perverted in Raubenheimer the fraud, Marie the woman of light morals, and Serfontein the impotent and innocent scapegoat (Van Zuydam:42). This distorted reflection proves that we no longer have to do with traditional allegory. Paradoxically, it is not Serfontein but Francois who follows the 'way of the cross', which can nevertheless not be compared with Christ's. The emphasis is clearly on the distortion of the Biblical 'myth' (Van Zuydam:43).

Serfontein is not Marie's son, but his sacrificial death suggests the death of Christ with one important difference: Serfontein dies because his world has become meaningless. He is no Christ figure in the true sense of the word, but a 'decadent Christ' (Van Zuydam:43).

Brink's technique of recalling historical parallels universalizes Francois's loneliness and alienation, so that Francois becomes the type of modern man (Van Zuydam:44). In *Lobola* the Christian dogma appears to have lost its value, illustrated by the perversion of the Bible story, and this leaves man searching for meaning and eventually finding a kind of perverse certainty in existentialism (Van Zuydam:45).

In the allegorical novel *Miskien nooit* (1967), Paris gradually comes to be associated with Hades, with the underworld. Together with the recurring image of the pomegranate, the paradigm reveals itself as the Greek mythological symbol of Persephone, wife of Pluto, king of the underworld (Meij, 1968:63-64). Gunhilde, the

girl in search of whom he combs the city sewers, becomes a symbol of the unattainable, ideal woman.

The narrator's search for Gunhilde becomes more than the literal search: it becomes a pilgrimage through the labyrinths of the human psyche, a descent into the 'Hades' of the subconscious, and a search of which the conclusion cannot be predicted (Meij, 1968:65).

### 5.7 BERTA SMIT (1926- )

Rialette Wiehahn describes Berta Smit's first novel, *Die vrou en die bees* (1964) as an allegorical representation of the Christian's perseverance in carrying out his greatest task, which is to love his neighbour (1965:270). Botha supports this finding and identifies the quality of fantasy in the novel, which is strongly reminiscent of Leroux's *Sewe dae by die Silbersteins* and *Een vir Azazel* (1980:539).

The characters are named in a way that suggests the medieval morality play: "Die Man, Die Verslaggewer, die Uitgewery", etc. (Botha, 1980:541). The Man who visits Maria represents Christ, and the task he gives her is to save Julia and the Typist from the World (Wiehahn:271). This novel is closer to traditional than to modern allegory, despite its modern milieu.

*Een plus een* (1967) is more successful as a modern allegory than *Die vrou en die bees*, perhaps because the surface story and characterization are more convincing and therefore provide a stronger vehicle for the allegory. Van Rensburg draws attention to the multi-level nature of the novel, a quality that is sustained throughout (1968) and Elize Botha confirms its allegorical nature (1980:338).

Meij is convinced that it is essential to read this novel as an

allegory in order to understand it. The names of the characters, for example, clearly have ambiguous, multi-faceted meanings. The most important key to the symbolical-allegorical in novel is the dominee, his birthmark, and the sun. Thomas Coetzee represents doubt, which is an obvious Biblical reference, but more subtly, the dominee often identifies with Thomas, for he too suffers from lack of faith. Ou-Koot Gouws represents a child-like surrender to God, through which he succeeds in his self-appointed task of messenger, where the dominee fails. The 'thorn in his flesh' must be removed before he can bury his doubt with Thomas and continue without fear.

The 'thorn in his flesh' is the birthmark on his face, which represents the load of sin with which every man is born, which he inherits from his father, and only when he acknowledges its presence and lifts it to the sun, to God, does he overcome his fear and doubt.

## 5.8 ELSA JOUBERT (1922- )

With *Die Wahlerbrug* (1969) Elsa Joubert focuses her attention, this time, on the problem of identity (Nienaber,1982:638). The main character stays behind in a strange city while her husband proceeds to another destination. She visits a museum where she is followed, led through a panel in a wall, and kidnapped. Her identity documents, clothes and handbag are taken to provide an identity for a strange woman, and she is stranded in the city, unable to communicate because she cannot speak the language, a perfect example of the 'outsider' (Nienaber:638).

The novel moves progressively away from the realistic into the realm of fantasy and allegory. Stripped of her external identity, she is simultaneously stripped of her psychic identity, until there is nothing left of her individuality and she comes to represent universal woman, attracted to the man who is also her

captor. Only when she has lost him as well is she stripped of everything that is transitory, and is she ready to be led across the Wahler Bridge (Nienaber:639), which may be taken to represent a bridge to eternity for the chosen.

In true Kafkaesque style the same characters appear and reappear. The woman who sells her the museum ticket is also the one who helps her when she nearly faints, and provides her with a ticket to the Wahler Bridge, and the same one who receives her at the empty hotel.

Another Kafkaesque touch is added by her experiences at the police station where, in an office, she fills in a form for stateless persons. She writes and writes until she is tired, then the papers are collected with trolleys and taken to the cellars, where they will await their turn to be attended to.

Kannemeyer points out that the pursuit through endless chambers and halls in the museum and the woman's terror have suggestive links with both the stereotyped modern thriller, and the hallucinatory dream-world evoked by Kafka. This novel has a relatedness to the allegorical-symbolic mode of Leroux's novels. The woman's purposeless peregrination through the city becomes a journey through life in search of her own identity, although the mixture of real and surreal is not quite satisfactory. There are too many scenes which do not function on the second level (1983: 317).

## 5.9 ANNA M. LOUW (1913- )

Elize Botha identifies **Kroniek van Perdepoort** (1975) as having roots not only in the "traditional" Afrikaans novel with its farm, family and religious background, but also in Western allegory and the moralities (1978:7). These links are forged through a tradition of allegory and of the portrayal of the powers of



evil in man, originating in Lion-Cachet's *Sewe duiwels en wat hulle gedoen het*. The family in its totality reveals the seven deadly sins, but although these sins are symbolically-allegorically revealed, also by the nicknames of the characters, all the characters are fully-dimensional, and not the archetypes we find in *Sewe dae by die Silbersteins* (Kannemeyer, 1983:313). Snyman draws attention to the theme of man's dissatisfaction at the centre of the novel; the dramatization of the battle between good and evil (1975:94).

This novel reveals the psychological reactions of various members of the family to a certain event, the reburial of the father and mother, and by means of flashbacks they recall incidents from the past which then serve to explain the present.

The sin of pride exhibited by the father, Koos Nek, is the source of the other deadly sins revealed by the family (Botha, 1978:344). Each one of the sons has inherited not only a portion of *Perdepoort*, but also some quality from their father, but they fight a losing battle against their own weakness. Doubt and lust are revealed by the youngest brother, the theology student. The fact that he is physically attracted to his niece reveals something of the solipsistic nature of this family, centering again and again upon itself. The family is caught up in a treadmill of sin from which it is impossible to escape (Cloete, 1976:18).

The disinterment of the bodies of the patriarch, Koos Nek and his wife, suggests what is illustrated in the novel, that man's failings and sins cannot be buried, that they re-emerge and proliferate from generation to generation (Cloete, 1976:18).

The problem of the struggle between good and evil is that they are so closely interwoven that it is not always possible to distinguish between them. For the patriarch himself they are linked, and a source of trouble and tension: "Hulle is maar net twee kante van die stok waarmee ons onself hel gee" (6). The two

poles are recognisable in himself: he donates freely to the church, but never attends services. He is both demon and saint.

The farm Perdepoort is the isolated, special allegorical world, where the powers of evil proliferate. The farm is not only physically isolated, but the characters too are isolated because of their father's pride which separated them from the people of the vicinity. As an ironic counterfoil to the chronicle of Perdepoort, there is the chronicle of the coloured people of Erdmanstasie. The pathetic parody of the reburial of Koos Nek in the funeral of his grandson, Fielies, focuses on social injustice and discrimination as experienced in South Africa, suggesting a further level of meaning.

**Kroniek van Perdepoort** demonstrates the universally destructive power of sin. Every one of Koos Nek's sons experiences the alienation brought about by their father's pride. For Klaas life is a choice between the devil and death. If you get rid of sin/the devil, all that remains is death. His conversation with his brother, the theologian, is a demonstration of this belief. Each of the characters demonstrates a gradual degeneration into the mud of the marsh of life, but at the same time longs for the light, this being the universal predicament of man. Attie tries desperately to acquire the last teaspoon that will complete the set from Klaas's wife; Kobus tries to stop drinking.

The alienation of modern man from the secure belief in certain norms is clearly illustrated in this novel, which explores allegorically the relationship between father and child, in this case being extended to include oppressor and oppressed. The relationship between master and servant, in the particular South African situation in which the white man is automatically master and the coloured man is servant, without considering personal qualities, is realistically and sympathetically treated, while the author does not sacrifice any of the forceful impact of the essential theme and her attitude towards it.

## 5.10 SHEILA FUGARD ( ? )

Sheila Fugard's first novel, *The Castaways* (1972) has the correlated second order of events that typifies modern allegory. It is an indictment of a politico-militarist society whose institutional foundations are as schizophrenic (Christie et al., 1980: 161) as the inhabitants of the P.B.M.H. The mental hospital itself becomes a microcosmos, linked with the cave inhabited by the deranged terrorist/freedom fighter. The reader is compelled to take note of these underlying meanings.

The full horror of the condition of modern man is illustrated by the shock treatment given to Jordan to 'cure' him of his malady, and the futility of Choma's solitary campaign of projected violence to change the conditions in the country. The shock treatment suggests the treatment meted out to those who attempt to change the system. It is a violation of basic humanity. Choma's death points to the fact that violence is no solution.

Jordan's mental peregrination is in the present, to the past and to the future, each of the three temporal phases shedding light on the other. The paucity of description of his surroundings illustrates to what measure his attention is narrowed and turned inwards - perhaps by inclination, as a type of defence mechanism against the 'torture' of the shock treatment, but also as a result of his treatment. Christie et al. point out the striking parallel between the ship wrecked in 1770, and the mental hospital bearing the same name, as "... the mental hospital is the reef where civilization has foundered" (167). They express the opinion that the novel is not a naturalistic presentation of the inner violence of civilization, but a Buddhist allegory for the final revelation of *satori*, or human goodness (167).

The abandonment of realism in favour of imaginative projection is unstrained in the context of the schizophrenic patient and the deranged terrorist, so that the narrative ranges freely in the time-

less area of the mind.

The final despair of man is illustrated in the fact that Jordan's trip ends, not in beautiful transcendence, but in yet another E.C.T. (170).

#### 5.11 KAREL SCHOEMAN (1939- )

Karel Schoeman's novel, **Na die geliefde land** (1972) and translated as **Promised land**, can be regarded as an allegory mainly because of its multi-level nature. The narrative relates the return of an exile, on a sentimental journey to see the family farm inherited from his mother before disposing of it, and finds a South Africa not even remotely resembling the South Africa dreamt and reminisced about by his mother and her contemporaries. To a present South African the novel, placed in an all too foreseeable future, reads like a negative - a complete reversal of familiar conditions. Although colour is never mentioned, the complete absence of any labourers, and the owners of the farm having to do even the most menial tasks suggests a situation in which the ruling classes are black. To anyone familiar with recent South African history, the total lack of security, the destruction by explosion of arms caches, the arbitrary arrests, detention without trial, are recognisable, but this time applicable to the "other" side.

George's journey, however, is also a pilgrimage on another level, a pilgrimage to a shrine which proves to have been an illusion, a romanticized fallacy, suggesting the purposelessness of man's search for meaning which returns him to his origins, with the implication that things will never be the same again because the "promised land" has turned out to be a mirage, a deception, entirely divorced of reality. This is emphasised by the difference between the generations, and the discrepancy pointed out by Paul between the avowed ideals and the practical morality of the people

involved. Then there is the brandy-inspired perspicuity which enables George to realize that Gerhard would have been equally capable of kicking a witness to death, as his Oom Kosie was - it is a question of power. The rot is within, not imposed from without. The description of the people's idealism is ironic - they themselves (the older generation) are unable to perceive the anomalies in their preoccupation with what they have lost.

The relationship between those in power and the oppressed in any situation, in any part of the world, is exposed in this novel, and given added force because of the familiarity of the reflection. It involves social and political dissent, condemning oppression by revealing its brutalizing effect on the human psyche. The themes are universal, and they reflect man's alienation and his futile search for meaning. George, the exile, is alienated from the land of his birth, but the youth revealed in this novel are equally alienated from the ideals of their parents who have made a virtue of nostalgia.

#### 5.12 NADINE GORDIMER (1923- )

Although Nadine Gordimer is not usually regarded as an allegorist, **July's people** (1981) with its oblique style, can be regarded as having allegorical qualities. This novel represents a projection into the future, a bleak future, with its equally bleak allegorical undertones. Although the novel does not deal with specific violence, the author succeeds in conveying an atmosphere of menace and catastrophe, the more effective for being underplayed. With this novel Nadine Gordimer joins the ranks of modern fabulators.

Saved by July and smuggled to his kraal for safety, the Smales family find themselves entirely disoriented, isolated in a setting completely alien to them. The social comment is there, as they discover that these people have nothing, nothing at all.

As displaced persons the adults are incapable of adjusting, whereas the unprejudiced children soon settle down.

There is a subtle exploration of the master/slave dichotomy, July now being in the position of power once occupied by his master, who has lost his power for having to depend on July for his very life. This transfer of power is symbolized by July's appropriation of the keys of their vehicle.

The woman's attempted escape to the helicopter is essentially an act of betrayal; a betrayal of her marriage, of those who supported them, and of the liberal ideals with which she grew up. It suggests a frenzied bid for security and certainty, but a quest that is instinctively felt to be futile. The inconclusive ending is typical of modern allegory.

#### 5.13 WILMA STOCKENSTRÖM (1933- )

*Die Kremetartekspedisie* (1981), translated by J.M. Coetzee as *The Expedition to the Baobab Tree* in 1984, is a remarkable work which is an allegory of bondage and rebellion.

The themes are those of modern allegory: the relationship between master and slave, oppressor and oppressed. It is a novel of social dissent, evoking "in lyrical prose the helpless outrage of the oppressed against the oppressor" (De Groot, 1984:12). The heroine is unnamed, her country unidentified, although the Bushmen and the baobab tree give away her ultimate destination. Her tale is an echo of every woman's struggle, "the search for an existence that is not reckoned in terms of its potential for the appeasement of male lust, for an identity that transcends the appraisal of the spirit in terms of the flesh" (De Groot:12).

The expedition of the title becomes an allegorical journey towards freedom, but freedom attained at an immense price. The

journey is both inward and outward, the life journey of a sensitive human being under subjection, who finally achieves an independent identity for herself.

The line between fantasy and reality is finely drawn, and this adds to its allegorical significance. The land is presented as mystically protective. The hollow baobab tree offers protection while the diminutive inhabitants of the region provide food, and eventually also the poison which she willingly takes, the mission having been accomplished.

#### 5.14 CONCLUSION

From its traditional, naïvely didactic beginnings in South African literature, allegory has developed into a powerful mode of expression, capable of expressing the crisis in which modern man finds himself. In Afrikaans literature Etienne Leroux stands out as the most prolific and constant user of the mode, although this does not imply that a gem like **The expedition to the baobab tree** is of less importance.

English writers have not made comparable use of the mode, its use being largely incidental. It needed the stark, innovatory talent of J.M. Coetzee to recognise and exploit this mode to its full potential, following in this the example of the European writers of the twentieth century, some of whom have been discussed in the previous chapter.