Christian weapons at the forge of romance: a study of some aspects of the expression of religious experience in selected works of George MacDonald, Charles Kingsley, Charles Dickens and George Eliot with special reference to early nineteenth century evangelical tracts

Thesis

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CHRISTIAN WEAPONS AT THE FORGE OF ROMANCE. A STUDY OF SOME ASPECTS OF THE EXPRESSION OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE IN SELECTED WORKS OF GEORGE MACDONALD, CHARLES KINGSLEY, CHARLES DICKENS AND GEORGE ELIOT WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY EVANGELICAL TRACTS.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis looks at some ways of describing religious experience in the works of selected Victorian novelists and in early nineteenth century evangelical tracts. I show that the novelists used formulae in their descriptions similar to those used didactically in the tracts to convey specific points of Christian doctrine.

I argue that these formulae, used in the different context of the novels, with a different purpose and emphasis, hampered the development of an analysis of religious experience more appropriate to the novels' freer context. I have accordingly selected novelists whose work reflects a spectrum of attitudes towards orthodox Christianity, but maintains an interest in it - novelists who might be expected to want to analyse religious experience freshly.

The comparison between tracts and novels is made via the formulae. I have also suggested a comparison based on method - the tracts describe religious experience in terms of universally applicable doctrine, a method I have called tract, while the novelists move towards a fantasy mode in which the individual's inner experience of God can be accommodated. The distinction between the methods is explored and developed throughout the thesis and is an essential methodological tool.
The thesis is arranged in six chapters with a general introduction and a conclusion. The first five chapters explore formulae common to tracts and novels: the influence of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, conversions, deathbeds, the significance attached to children and to poverty. The sixth chapter examines ways in which an idea of God may be developed in the *tract* and the *fantasy* modes. In each chapter I examine a number of tracts and two or three selected novels.

Through the thesis I demonstrate that the reliance on inappropriate formulae often accounts for major flaws in the novels I examine and that the distinction between *tract* and *fantasy* can open the way for a more complex engagement with the religious content of the novels.
Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the award of a grant from the Open University which made the research on this thesis possible. Members of the faculty of arts have been supportive and helpful, particularly my supervisor, Dr Dennis Walder for whose patience I have been particularly grateful. I would also like to thank my colleague Nick Warren for his criticism and support. Fred Apps has been patient and critical and supportive. All my friends have been long suffering, particularly Pam Glover, Anne Bonger, Sue Radford and Su Box.
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Novels

The editions of the major novels referred to in the thesis are listed below. Where there is no standard critical edition I have used the editions that were most readily available.

**Charles Dickens** I have used the Oxford Illustrated Dickens except where a novel is available in the Clarendon edition. The edition used in each case is indicated by a reference in the footnotes.

**George Eliot** I have used the Penguin English Library edition except in the case of *The Mill on the Floss* where I have used the Oxford edition edited by Gordon S Haight (Oxford, 1980)

**Charles Kingsley** *Alton Locke, Tailor and Poet an autobiography*, edited by Elizabeth A Cripps (Oxford, 1983)

**Madam How and Lady Why** (London 1899)

**Two Years Ago** (London, 1902)

**The Water Babies** (London, 1872)

**Yeast: a Problem** (London, 1851)
George MacDonald  At the Back of the North Wind (London, 1950)
Lilith; a Romance (Tring, 1982)
Phantastes; a faerie romance (London, 1894)
The Princess and Curdie (London, 1978)
The Princess and the Goblin (London, 1978)
Stephen Archer and other Tales (London, 1833)

Editions of tracts are particularly difficult to date accurately. Individual tracts carry no dates and tract tales give no indication of the date of first publication. In addition, tract societies revised the content of tracts for new editions. I have used a number of different collections held in the British Library and, for the sake of convenience, referred to editions in my possession of Legh Richmond's Annals of the Poor and Mrs Sherwood's The History of the Fairchild Family. In the list that follows I give first the publication date of the edition used and then the date of the first edition where this is known.

Collections
The Cheap Repository Tracts, collected in three volumes, longer tracts, shorter tracts, and verse. (London, 1796). The tracts first appeared in 1795
Narrative Tracts Moral and Religious by Mrs Sherwood
Mrs Cameron, Old Humphrey, etc, second series (London c1860) Some of the tracts by Mrs Sherwood date from the 1820's

Religious Tract Society, First Series Tracts (London, 1830?-1863). The first series tracts first began appearing in 1799

Narrative Tracts (London, 1830 - 1853)

Second Series Tracts (London 1825-1830). These tracts were designed for distribution by hawkers. They first began appearing in 1808

Houlstons Series of Tracts (Wellington c.1825 - 1846)

Tract Tales

Legh Richmond, Annals of the Poor (London, 1898)
The three tracts, 'The Negro Servant', 'Jane, the Young Cottager' and 'The Dairyman's Daughter' included in this volume first appeared individually in a periodical

The Christian Guardian between 1809 and 1811

Mrs Sherwood, The History of the Fairchild Family; or the Child's Manual; being a collection of stories calculated to show the importance and effects of a religious education, a facsimile edition of the first volume, published in 1818 (London, nd) The History of the Fairchild Family was first published in 1818 and revised and republished with an additional two volumes in 1847. (The second volume was published in 1842)
ABBREVIATIONS

I have used the initials RTS to refer to the Religious Tract Society.

Throughout the thesis I have used a lower case e for 'evangelical' except where I have wanted to refer specifically to the evangelical wing of the Anglican church.

I have not assumed that the male pronoun necessarily includes the female. To avoid clumsy repetition I have sometimes used one form of the pronoun and sometimes the other.
THE TRACTS

As it seems likely that the tracts on which much of this thesis is based may be unfamiliar I include here a brief explanation of their production, distribution and nature as well as my criteria for choosing those with which I deal.

Tracts became a popular way of spreading Christian teaching in the early nineteenth century. Evangelical groups particularly seized on them as a means of presenting the need for conversion to a society that they feared was composed largely of nominal Christians. Tract societies were set up by interested individuals to co-ordinate the publication and distribution of the tracts. One of these, the Religious Tract Society (RTS), an interdenominational group founded in 1799, had circulated 4,381,000 tracts in the first nine years of its existence and went on extending its operations throughout the century.

The RTS exercised a strict control over the content of their tracts. They were anxious to see that

> Pure, essential and saving gospel truths are ... introduced into every Tract; in connection with a composition intended to be plain, striking and entertaining.

A typical RTS tract was eight pages long and consisted of either a short homily on some aspect of Christian doctrine or a short story designed to bring the same teaching home to the reader more acceptably. It is with the latter, narrative tracts that I am concerned
in the thesis.

The tracts were chiefly distributed as chap books had been through hawkers. Some were Christians who made a feature of selling only tracts, others were ordinary pedlars employed by the tract society. By using these men the tract societies aimed not only at getting their message into the homes of the rural poor, but also at counteracting 'the filth' of the chapbooks. The RTS designed a series of tracts particularly intended to appeal to those who might ordinarily read chapbooks.

Individual evangelicals were also encouraged to distribute tracts as part of their Christian responsibility. One of the early RTS tracts describes such a tract distributor:

He always keeps by him a store of tracts .... He gives them to his poor neighbours and to people who call at his house. When he walks out, he tries to get into conversation with those he meets, and puts a tract in their hands. He gives them to children to read to their parents. When he travels, religious tracts are a necessary part of his baggage .... At every turnpike he hands the gate-keeper one. When he stops at a friend's house, he presents them to the children and servants. Besides these personal distributions, he sends parcels of tracts to ministers of his acquaintance for them to distribute in a similar manner.

The description indicates the audience for whom the tracts were chiefly intended - the rural poor, servants and children of all classes. Another target audience were soldiers and sailors, but the omission of any material for the new urban poor is a noticeable gap.

Although tracts were deliberately distributed to children it was some time before the RTS prepared a
series of narrative tracts addressed particularly to them. As the passage quoted above indicates both children and their elders were expected to read and respond to the same tracts. When the RTS did produce their first children's series they simply used those of their existing tracts that they felt would appeal most readily to children. One or two early tract writers such as Mrs Sherwood and her sister, Mrs Cameron, did however write deliberately for children. Their stories however have all the doctrinal features of more general tracts dealing as they do with death, conversion and the importance of Bible reading all in the context of a well regulated domestic life. I have therefore felt justified in making no distinction in quotation between these tracts and those intended for a wider audience.

There is, unfortunately, little direct evidence of how the tracts were received. RTS circulation figures indicate that vast numbers were produced and distributed, but there is little evidence that they were actually read. However there are some accounts of the effects of tracts on readers. Legh Richmond, the author of Annals of the Poor was informed of thirty instances in which it was acknowledged to have been instrumental to the conversion of its readers, of whom one was a female convict at Botany Bay.

The RTS annual reports include records of individuals' gratitude for the tracts. An indirect piece of evidence
that suggests that the tracts were read can be found in one of Houlston's tracts, 'Our Own Times' in which a tract distributor notes that through reading Christian works without real understanding, people are talking a religious language, but not attempting to lead real Christian lives.\(^7\)

For my thesis I have selected tracts from among the most frequently published and widely circulated because these are the ones most likely to have been read and therefore potentially have helped to establish the familiarity of the characters and situations that make a religious 'structure of feeling' in the novels. ('Structure of feeling' is Raymond Williams' term for recurring narrative devices in the literature of a period which reflect common contemporary patterns for structuring and explaining the experience of the world.)\(^8\) I have drawn on tracts by the RTS which were widely circulated and those published by Houlstons whose tract series included many tracts by the popular writers Mrs Sherwood and Mrs Cameron. I have also looked at the early series, *Cheap Repository Tracts* instituted by Hannah More, which became immediately famous and was constantly reprinted. So great was the impact of one tract, 'The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain', that Wilberforce commented that 'he would rather present himself before Heaven with the Shepherd in his hand than with Peveril of the Peak'.\(^9\) I look, too, at Legh Richmond's *Annals of the Poor* which were
among the most frequently reprinted tracts of the period. His biographer recorded that, 'four millions of copies are said to have been circulated in the nineteen languages into which it has been translated.'

All the tracts that I have looked at are early ones, that is first published before 1840. There are two reasons for this. The first is that by the end of the 1830's the tone of many of the tracts changed, apparently influenced by the growing familiarity and acceptability of the novel form. The stories become less simple and less plainly didactic. The second reason is that, while I cannot prove that the novelists and their readers read and were influenced by the tracts it seems more than likely that they were - and if this is the case, then for the middle class writers and readers tracts would have been mainly encountered in their childhood. It therefore seemed appropriate to concentrate on tracts that would have been in circulation in time to form part of the early reading of novelists and their public.
NOTES

The Tracts

1 Report of the Committee of the Religious Tract Society, May 12, 1808, p7

2 The Original and Progress of the London Religious Tract Society (London, 1803) p8


4 RTS First Series Tracts, no 1, p6

5 A series of reprints for children was first prepared by the RTS in 1809. A specially written series was not published until 1814. William Jones, A Jubilee Memorial of the Religious Tract Society 1799-1850 (London, 1850)

6 T S Grimshawe, A Memoir of the Rev Legh Richmond, AM (London, 1828), pp317, 318

7 Houlston's Series of Tracts, no 30

8 The Long Revolution (London, 1961)

9 Recorded by Charlotte M Yonge in Hannah More (London, 1888) p113

10 A Memoir of the Rev Legh Richmond, p298
INTRODUCTION

Critics of the nineteenth century novel have noted how certain narrative formulae appear across a wide range of contemporary productions. Raymond Williams, for example, pointed out, among other devices, that of the alcoholic or insane husband or wife who first tests the heroine's or hero's fidelity and then dies conveniently to clear the way for a 'marriage of true minds'. More recently, Barry Qualls has drawn attention to the hero or heroine as pilgrim motif, citing novels by Charlotte Bronte, Charles Dickens and George Eliot as well as Carlyle's Sartor Resartus. In this dissertation I examine some narrative formulae and stereotypes which have a wide distribution in nineteenth century fiction and which are particularly associated with religious experience.

I have selected formulae that appear not only in the mid-century novels with which I deal, but also in the narrative tracts and longer tract tales published at the beginning of the nineteenth century by various evangelical organisations and publishing houses. These formulae include model conversions and deaths, plagiarisms of The Pilgrim's Progress and stereotypes of pious children and the deserving poor.

I have no wish to prove that the tracts influenced the novelists because of the presence of similar
formulae in both. Although it seems reasonable to assume that the authors with whom I deal, as well as the majority of their readers, would have become familiar with narrative tracts in their childhood such connections are notoriously difficult to prove. My thesis is rather that, in the mid-century novels the devices had none of the strict doctrinal content that characterised their use in the tracts. In the novels their meaning tends to be vague - the devices make the signal, 'religious feeling here,' rather than conveying specific religious teaching. Nevertheless, the authors with whom I deal were anxious to make statements about the nature and value of religious experience. I want to suggest that they were hampered in their efforts to do so by the use of inadequate devices, which while they lacked doctrinal content in the context of the novel, were still associated by their form with a specific Protestant Christian view point. To refer to my title, I look at what in fact happened when the weapons of Christian warfare were brought to the forge of romance.

I have looked particularly at religious formulae in novels by George Eliot, Charles Dickens, Charles Kingsley and George MacDonald - all writers who were roughly contemporary and who were concerned for different reasons to present a view of religious experience in their novels. All four writers were
active in the mid-century, although Dickens began publishing earlier and MacDonald continued production until the end of the century. I have concentrated on works by all four writers from the 1850's and 1860's in order to make historically meaningful comparisons. In the case of MacDonald I have included some later works, since his approach and his ideas were established by the 1860's and underwent little change.

George Eliot approached the problem of religious experience from a consciously post-Christian position, founded on Feuerbach. Dickens' religious position is less clear. Dennis Walder has suggested that he was a believer, but his novels, in spite of his protest to Macrae, do not manifest any definite doctrinal or philosophical position. Perhaps it is for this reason that it is in his novels that the religious cliches I examine find their most exuberant expression.

Both Kingsley and MacDonald wrote from avowedly Christian positions, but their use of the narrative devices remains very much on the level of feeling rather than doctrine and consequently, as I shall suggest, the general content of their message is affected.

Religious experience, that is the experience of something perceived by the character concerned to affect their spirit, and evoke feelings of awe, tends
in the novels to be focused in descriptions that attempt to open up the character's inner life. MacDonald particularly explores inner psychic landscapes in his novels, often casting them as fantasies in which the protagonist ranges through another world whose geography and inhabitants embody his or her spiritual experience. The emphasis on religious experience as an inner, essentially subjective event connects with the use made of the religious formulae. Their emptiness of specific doctrinal meaning and message of undefined religious feeling invites an exploration of the religious imagination rather than the specific teachings of the Christian faith.

In my discussion I have used the term fantasy to describe this emphasis on the individual imagination as the seat of religious experience. In order to identify the use of the formulae as instruments of such fantasy rather than as instruments for communicating doctrine I have contrasted their use in the novels with their use in the early evangelical tracts where encounter with God is perceived primarily in terms of doctrine. The distinction between fantasy and the mode of the tract writers which I have termed tract is thus of great importance in the development of my argument.

The relation of the religious formulae to the development of an exploration of inner religious
life might suggest that the novelists' use of the devices is more subtle than my argument has claimed. Certainly sometimes the novelists do make an interesting and complex exploration of the nature of religious experience, using the absence of doctrinal definition to leave the reader uncertain whether the experience recorded is entirely the product of the character's psyche or dependent on some external, transcendent intervention. However, the limitations of the formulae in terms of their essentially Christian structure and their determining familiarity remain, ultimately hampering any new expression of religious experience and constricting any serious reappraisal of its nature and value.

Anyone who embarks on a discussion of religious experience should make plain their own religious position which will inevitably affect the way in which they assess the explorations and conclusions of others. I have no wish to lay claim to an impossible neutrality - I have approached the problem from a believer's position, and this affects my judgement both of George Eliot's post-Christian approach and of those Christian writers whose use of formulae, I feel, distorts or narrows their Christian message.
NOTES

Introduction


2 Barry V Qualls, The Secular Pilgrim of Victorian Fiction; the Novel as Book of Life (Cambridge, 1982)

3 Both Dennis Walder in Dickens and Religion (London, 1981) and Samuel J Pickering in The Moral Tradition in English Literature (New England, 1976) have suggested convincingly that The Old Curiosity Shop was influenced by tracts such as Legh Richmond's Annals of the Poor


5 Dickens and Religion (1981)

6 'when I exercise my art, one of my most constant and most earnest endeavours has been to exhibit in all my good people some faint reflections of the teachings of our great Master ...' Dickens to David Macrae, in David Macrae, Amongst the Darkies and other papers (Glasgow, 1876) p127
CHAPTER ONE

The Christian journey - constructing a supernatural dimension

A recurring problem for those novelists who wished to explore religious experience without committing themselves to a definite doctrinal position was the creation of a spiritual setting in which their characters' religious experiences could be displayed. In Dombey and Son (1848) Dickens surmounts the problem over Paul's death by leaving it open to the reader to decide how far Paul's 'heavenly vision' has foundation in a transcendent reality, and how far it is simply the result of his feverish imagination reshaping his experience. Another solution, adopted by both Dickens and George Eliot, was to use the Christian metaphor of life as a journey towards heaven to structure their novels. The metaphor could be adapted so that attention was focused on life as a journey rather than on heaven as a goal. In this way life could be presented as spiritually purposeful, and exploration of the characters' religious experience could take place in the context of seeing their lives' events as part of a spiritual progress. In this chapter I look particularly at the use made of the metaphor in The Mill on the Floss (1860) where George Eliot draws on both The Pilgrim's Progress and the parable of the prodigal son for journey metaphors. I argue that it is the artificiality of the supernatural structure she creates
that is largely responsible for the notable failure of the novel's conclusion.

Before examining *The Mill on the Floss* in detail I wish to consider the general familiarity of the metaphors in the nineteenth century and to consider their use in the tracts. In doing so I shall identify some of the limitations of the metaphors as they were interpreted in evangelical thought in order to provide a contrast with the more sophisticated way in which George Eliot uses them.

*The Pilgrim's Progress* was important to early evangelical writers because it provided a justification for fiction. Sarah Stickney, in her essay, 'An apology for fiction' with which she prefaces an attempt to teach Christian truth through short stories, comments:

> Fiction may be compared to a key, which opens many minds that would be closed against a sermon. Nor is it without authority in the writings of sincere and zealous Christians. The wide range of allegory affords innumerable subjects for instruction and delight, and many a weary wanderer through the valley of the shadow of death, has been cheered by the remembrance of Bunyan's pilgrim.

As Sarah Stickney's comment implies, *The Pilgrim's Progress* was acceptable because its fiction was not lies but allegory, a point made by Bunyan himself:

> 'But it is feigned,' What of that I trow? Some men by feigning words as dark as mine make truth to spangle, and its rays to shine

For the tract writers, *The Pilgrim's Progress* did not provide one useful central metaphor, but a complete allegorical method. That it is an underlying
source of allegory in the tracts is apparent from the number of tracts in which the allegories are directly modelled on The Pilgrim's Progress. Mrs Sherwood for example produced two new versions of The Pilgrim's Progress, The Indian Pilgrim designed for Indian converts, and The Infant's Progress in which the pilgrims are all children. Hannah More included allegories which recall the book in her Cheap Repository Tracts, one is entitled 'The Pilgrims' while the other, 'Bear ye one another's burdens or the Valley of Tears' uses the idea of men and women as pilgrims with burdens which they have to help each other to carry. Most unlikely, perhaps is Mrs Cameron's tract, 'The Railroad' in which the false pilgrims give up walking along the narrow way and take the train instead. Inevitably the train crashes and the passengers are killed.

While these and other writers imitated Bunyan's allegorical method, they unfortunately failed to imitate at the same time what George Eliot recognised as his 'simple, vigorous, rhythmic' style or the imaginative potential of his allegorical world. In Bunyan's book the folk tale characters and motifs are still able to operate to some extent in their own right, unhampered by their allegorical meaning. As a result the reader's interpretation of the meaning can be more extensive. The climb up the Hill Difficulty, for example, expresses the Christian's struggle after holiness and yet remains a classic fairy tale test, and the picture of any human struggle towards some
elusive achievement. Bunyan also maintains a dream-like quality in *The Pilgrim's Progress*. The encounters along the road, for example, appear both significant and random; the sequence of events has all the arbitrariness of dreaming with an underlying sense of a felt but indefinably coherent logic. The countryside on either side of the road is unexplored but potentially swarming with unknown messengers of danger and promise.

If we turn to, for example, *The Infant's Progress*, we can see how crude the tract writers' allegory was by comparison. In Mrs Sherwood's story every element is subordinated to Evangelical doctrine. *The Infant's Progress* is not simply the original retold with children as protagonists, new characters and events are introduced that are designed to improve Bunyan's theology rather than the narrative. 'Inbred-Sin' is introduced as the foster brother of the child pilgrims. He leads them into trouble at every turn, and can only be shaken off when the children finally cross the river. The concept robs the story of the drama of the characters' personal struggles and the sense of their progress and growing moral strength that are features of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. The children's best efforts are doomed to failure before they begin, and any success at subduing 'Inbred-Sin' comes less from their struggle than from the determination of their guardians. From an Evangelical viewpoint however the character improves the story doctrinally, illuminating and defining a point
about human nature according to the evangelical system which Bunyan had left obscure.

The setting of *The Infant's Progress* is broadly the same as Bunyan's - the road from the City of Destruction to the New Jerusalem. However, Mrs Sherwood's story contains a larger number of incidents and encounters which take place in much more circumstantially described surroundings; a tendency to define and control events typical of the tracts is in evidence:

> Now I saw, in my dream, that the children were come to the gate of a garden, in which stood the house of Indulgence; and the gate being open, they entered without hesitation. And as they passed through the garden, although it was nearly dark, they could perceive that it abounded with flowers and fruits. But the fruit of the garden was not of a salutory sort; moreover it grew in the midst of many weeds and wild shrubs: for there was no care taken either to prune the shrubs or to clean the ground. 9.

Every detail is forced to carry a Christian message. While Bunyan managed not to overburden the folk tale topology of his allegorical world with more Christian doctrine than it could bear, Mrs Sherwood forces her characters and incidents to carry all the doctrinal messages she can think of so that they can never be perceived as anything more than a transcription of her theology.

In their insistence on dogma tract writers who used allegory were capable of destroying the rich potential meaning not only of the marvellous worlds they constructed, but also, ironically, of the biblical material that they were trying to present. Mrs Cameron's tract,
'The Two Lambs', manages to destroy by crude handling, the image of Christ the Good Shepherd as a subject for any but the most narrow meditation. The two lambs, Peace and Inexperience are rescued from a lion by the Shepherd who is wounded in the fight. His blood washes the dirt from their fleeces, which is sound evangelical doctrine, but makes no sense on the level of the story. The shepherd is not allowed to function as a real shepherd and so contribute to the reader's understanding of what may be meant by Christ's comparison (John 10.4). Instead he is made to convey doctrine important to the evangelicals, but not part of the image's original function. The good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep, but he does not wash them in his blood.

Although the tract writers went to Bunyan primarily for his allegorical method the central metaphor of the journey was embedded in evangelical cliche and recurs in all the tracts. An older Christian in one tract is referred to as, 'an aged pilgrim' who is waiting for the summons to 'cross the river'. The Pilgrim's Progress appears to have been so familiar that writers could refer to its central image without comment. Wilberforce writes in A Practical View:

He (the Christian) knows also that, to the very end of life, his journey will be through a country in which he has many enemies; that his way is beset with snares; that temptations throng around to seduce him from his course ... that the very air disposes to drowsiness.
While Legh Richmond remarks in *Annals of the Poor*:

> I wish that every Christian pilgrim in the way of grace, as he walks through the Lord's pastures, would try to lead at least one little child by the hand. 13

Although the tract writers accepted the goal of the Christian pilgrim as easily as they accepted the idea of life as a journey towards it, they nevertheless had some difficulty conveying the nature of the goal in their tracts. This was because tract writers were anxious to set their work in everyday surroundings that they hoped their readers would be able to identify with. Stories set in the cottages of the poor or the servants' quarters of wealthier houses did not lend themselves to the inclusion of a description of the New Jerusalem as Bunyan's pilgrims glimpsed it:

> It was builded of pearls and precious stones, also the street thereof was paved with gold, so that by reason of the natural glory of the City, and the reflection of the sunbeams upon it, Christian with desire fell sick. 14

In the tracts the literal representation of the heavenly goal is impossible if the story is to remain tied to life on this earth. The most that can be done is to show the 'pilgrims' prepared and ready for death, but to follow them 'across the river' was as difficult for tract writers as it was for the less committed later novelists.

Occasionally writers, particularly of *The Cheap Repository Tracts*, narrate a Christian life as a progress from disaster to success, but the spiritual
achievement of *The Pilgrim's Progress* is transposed to a steady but limited climb up the social ladder. Betty Brown, the heroine of *'Betty Brown the St Giles Orange Girl'*, starts life as a street urchin, but eventually, 'by industry and piety, rose in the world, till at length she came to keep that handsome sausage-shop near the Seven Dials, and was married to an honest hackney-coachman.' Charles Jones the footman rises by the exercise of similar virtues to the post of bailiff with his own farm and a pious wife to help him run it. By expressing progress in this way the narrative remains on a mundane level, but, however much the protagonists' piety is insisted on, the goal has become worldly - more suited to one of Bunyan's false professors than to a Christian pilgrim. Tract writers' reluctance to engage with a supernatural dimension led them to express the system of reward and punishment inherent in their doctrine in terms of this life rather than the next.

For this reason perhaps tract writers appear to have been more at home structuring their stories round a different Christian journey metaphor, that of the prodigal son. Modelled on the parable (Luke 15. 11-32) this journey is undertaken initially through rebellion rather than a spiritual awakening and its conclusion is the return of the wanderer sadder and wiser to his old home, not the triumphant arrival of the pilgrim at the celestial city.
This pattern accommodated itself much more easily to the tract writers' wish to avoid dwelling on the supernatural. There was no need to paint a glowing celestial city, or compromise with some temporal substitute. Instead the repentant sinner could make his or her way back to the scenes and practice of early piety. The evangelicals were convinced that a pious upbringing was one of the most secure foundations of a stable religious life. A frequently quoted text was Proverbs 22:6, 'Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.' Tracts based on the prodigal son encouraged parents to expect that the religious upbringing they gave their children would be fruitful, even if for a time the child appeared to backslide. In addition, since the prodigal's journey pivots on the change of heart that makes him go home, the narrative pattern allowed the writers to introduce dramatic conversion stories. Such stories were always regarded as valuable in the tracts because it was hoped that they might encourage the unconverted reader to repent.

A representative example of this type of tract is Mrs Sherwood's 'The Hop-picking'. In this tale the prodigal is a woman, Bessy Collins. Bessy selfishly leads the life of an invalid, driving her mother and her pious sister, Annie, to their deaths as they exhaust themselves looking after her. When they die she has
to leave home to look for work, and it is at this point that her journey begins. She takes a job as a servant, but, finding the work too hard, leaves to get married. Her laziness as a wife and mother threatens both her relationship with her husband and the welfare of her baby, named Annie after her sister. The family descends into poverty, and Bessy, like the prodigal forced to keep pigs, is forced by her husband to go hop-picking. She is employed on a farm in the village where she was born, as it were actually carrying out the prodigal son's intention of becoming a hired servant of his father's. Both she and the baby fall sick while she is working, and she is overheard lamenting over the child by her sister's lover who still lives nearby. The lover, William, is a Christian, and like the prodigal son's father, he takes Bessy and the child home. He and his mother care for them, restoring both to health and converting Bessy to Christianity and uniting her with her husband.

As 'The Hop-picking' emphasises, an essential part of the prodigal son narrative is the return home to scenes of childhood happiness. It is here, rather than in 'the far country' that, in Mrs Sherwood's story, the conversion experience takes place. Such a dependence on the power of early scenes for good is usually regarded as Wordsworthian rather than evangelical, but, as this story shows, it has a place in the tract tradition. It is for this reason that when the formula
can be identified in *The Mill on the Floss* a comparison with the tracts seems as justifiable as a comparison with Wordsworth, particularly in the light of George Eliot's familiarity with evangelical fiction, evidenced in her use of it in *Scenes of Clerical Life.* (1858)

In *The Mill on the Floss* a number of overlapping narrative motifs are used to structure the novel. While tract writers could be confident that a narrative pattern chosen from the Bible needed no justification but could be regarded as being an essentially true description of the way human lives are ordered, the author of *The Mill on the Floss* has no such certainty. George Eliot presents her characters struggling to impose order on their lives by constructing individual systems through which to perceive and measure events - the Dodson respectability for example, or Mr Dean's belief in 'business':

>'The world isn't made of pen, ink and paper, and if you've to get on in the world, young man, you must know what the world's made of. Now the best chance for you'ud be to have a place on a wharf or in a warehouse, where you'd learn the smell of things ...' 19

The tract writers wanted to convince their readers that the patterns by which they structured events in their stories had an objective authenticity - the readers too could and should begin to align their lives with the same patterns. In *The Mill on the Floss* the creation of systems to explain experience is seen as subjective and it is frequently mocked. It is mocked
particularly in the character of Mr Glegg who has become absorbed in tracing connections between the animal life in his garden and topical events:

before the burning of York Minster there had been mysterious serpentine marks on the leaves of the rose-trees, together with an unusual prevalence of slugs, which he had been puzzled to know the meaning of, until it flashed upon him with this melancholy conflagration. (p105)

This meditation in which he inflates the insignificant animal life of his garden to the stature of prophetic signs parodies the tendency of all human beings to see the events of their lives fitting into some cosmic, transcendent order. Not only is Mr Glegg mistaken in the significance he attaches to slugs and rose leaves, he has missed the opportunity that his original curiosity offered him of studying these 'zoological phenomena' scientifically; a study which to many educated Victorians would have seemed more rational and fruitful.

Mr Glegg's false position was one that George Eliot was anxious to avoid as she interpreted the lives of her characters. They are to be a subject of scientific observation and study. In the well known chapter, 'A Variation of Protestantism unknown to Bossuet' she makes her stance clear - she is 'observing these people narrowly', they are 'emmet-like' (p 238). 'As 'zoological phenomena' should be, Dodsons and Tillivers are classified according to family characteristics.

In spite of George Eliot's intellectual commitment to the methodology of early social science, the stance
cannot be maintained. The individuals whose history she tells still demand a spiritual context and direction of some kind in order to be established as fully human, and it is, as always, part of George Eliot's purpose that we should recognise the humanity of her characters. She struggles in *The Mill on the Floss* to supply a humanising context for her characters as well as one that places them as zoological phenomena. As a writer she is threatened by the tension between her interest in the scientific study of her characters and her commitment to developing them as individual men and women who, as individuals, can be regarded as purposeful and significant.

In her attempt to suggest a teleological order for her characters without committing herself to a Christian position George Eliot supplies the reader with a number of ordering patterns. The romance conflict between the fair haired and dark haired heroines is hinted at in the physical descriptions and later rivalry of Maggie and Lucy. The point is underlined in Maggie's reading of *Corinne* and the novels of Walter Scott and her comments on them:

I'm determined to read no more books where the blond haired women carry away all the happiness. I should begin to have a prejudice against them - If you could give me some story, now, where the dark woman triumphs, it would restore the balance - I want to avenge Rebecca and Flora Mac-Ivor, and Minna and all the rest of the dark unhappy ones. (p292)

The legend of the Virgin of St Ogg's is also used to provide a pattern which will impose an order and a goal on Maggie's life. The stories of *The Pilgrim's Progress*
and the prodigal son are also offered as keys for interpreting Maggie's history. In the rest of this chapter I shall look particularly at the way George Eliot uses and develops references to these two Christian journeys.

The Pilgrim's Progress is a dominant theme in the novel. It is introduced into the story in the early chapters as part of Maggie's childhood reading; the fourth book is named after one of its events, 'The Valley of Humiliation', and the beginning and end of the novel echo the beginning and end of Bunyan's book. Both books begin with the narrators dreaming their characters, both conclude with the protagonists struggling in a river of death. The attention focused on The Pilgrim's Progress by these references suggests that it is to be viewed as a central structuring device in the novel. However the references are hedged in with reservations which, while they allow the reader to relate the pattern of The Pilgrim's Progress to the events of the novel, prevent her from applying it with any sense that the pattern is more objectively 'true' than any other.

All the patterns that George Eliot offers in The Mill on the Floss are generated by the characters themselves. Initially it is Maggie who sees the Floss as Bunyan's river of death. The patterns have no external validation - they are the myths that the characters themselves develop to make sense of the place they find themselves occupying. The religious patterns
lose their supernatural force for their importance in the novel is not their appeal to a transcendent authority, but their power to structure a character's consciousness of self and others.

The Pilgrim's Progress is further robbed of its religious authority by the place given it as one of Maggie's favourite childhood books. The child Maggie is gripped by the story and the pictures, not by the religious message. Her response is typical of that deplored by the evangelical writer Isaac Watts:

> the book takes a great hold also of children, long before they can enter its spiritual meaning, from the interesting nature of the characters, and the vicissitudes of their journey ...

Watts tried to correct this response by writing a version of the story which he hoped would make the spiritual meaning of the story plain to children too. In The Mill on the Floss Maggie's excited response to the book is not challenged on spiritual grounds. It may be immature, but it shows an imagination functioning and responsive. This is important for it is Maggie's imaginative responsiveness, disciplined by suffering, that will later help her to enter into the sufferings of others and so grow morally. The book is important because it helps to develop and direct Maggie's imagination, not because it teaches her specifically Christian truth.

Although George Eliot ignores the specifically Christian teaching in The Pilgrim's Progress the structure of the novel with its echoes of Bunyan's Book at opening and
conclusion invite the reader to consider Maggie's life as a type of pilgrim's progress. Her death in the river identifies her with Christiana, visualised in her childish imagination crossing the Floss to the Celestial City. Her life can be viewed as a moral progress even if the nature of the Celestial City she attains is left in doubt. Such a view is however baffled by Maggie's failure to progress. She is, as Barbara Hardy has pointed out, essentially a static character. 'Maggie is a character who believes herself to be converted and transformed, but who is incorrigibly herself.' Crises and experience modify her behaviour, but do not fundamentally alter her personality. The history of Maggie's inner life and development can be read more easily in the light of the prodigal son parable than in the light of The Pilgrim's Progress.

The prodigal son is introduced into the text almost as early as The Pilgrim's Progress. Luke, the miller's assistant (named perhaps after the evangelist in whose gospel the original parable appears) invites Maggie to see his wife's prints of 'The Prodigal Son in the costume of Sir Charles Grandison' (p 28). The events of Maggie's life can be fitted easily into the prodigal pattern. As a child her constant experience is of rebellious action followed by repentance. When she cuts her hated hair for example Tom's laughter rouses in her,
that bitter sense of the irrevocable which was almost an everyday experience of her small soul ... for Maggie rushed to her deeds with passionate impulse, and then saw not only their consequences, but what would have happened if they had not been done; with all the detail and exaggerated circumstance of an active imagination.

(p57)

George Eliot employs the journey sequence of the prodigal son to express Maggie's movements from rebellion to repentance. Maggie runs away from home to join the gypsies and must be rescued by her father. She drifts away with Stephen and must make her way back to the Mill and her family to right the situation. Maggie's life can be seen as a recurring cycle of action and repentance expressed in journeys away from the Mill and her family and returns to them. Journeys home, even when they are difficult, are times of moral strength for Maggie. In the light of this reading the lack of a true homecoming after her time as a governess is significant. She is a guest at Lucy's, at leisure, removed both from her brother and from her mother, whose position in Lucy's household is virtually that of a housekeeper. Maggie's failure to re-establish the old ties of home deprives her of moral strength and suggests a reason for her vulnerability to Stephen's advances.

Like *The Pilgrim's Progress*, the prodigal son is seen interpreted in Maggie's imagination as one of her personal directing myths. Her interpretation
is expressed in her dialogue with Luke over the prints.

'I'm very glad his father took him back again aren't you, Luke?' she said. 'For he was very sorry, you know, and wouldn't do wrong again.' 'En, kiss,' said Luke, 'he'd be no great shakes, I doubt, let's say the father do what he would for him.' That was a painful thought to Maggie, and she wished much that the subsequent history of the young man had not been left a blank. (p28)

Maggie identifies herself with the prodigal at this point because she is remorseful over Tom's dead rabbits. She longs for forgiveness and restoration with all the force of her persistent 'hunger for love'. Now, and repeatedly however Tom will turn Luke's judgement of the prodigal on her, denouncing her as incorrigably bad. The prodigal son parable stands for Maggie not as an image of repentance and restored relationships but of her feelings of guilt and pain.

Both in its use as a structure for the narrative and as an image of Maggie's predicament the Christian implications of the parable are minimised. The prodigal son is used to express a human predicament - the need felt by Maggie for forgiveness - rather than to explore the nature of God's forgiveness which is the original purpose of the parable and the use to which the motif is put in the tracts. That Maggie is influenced by Christian narratives is not intended to press the Christian claim on the reader, but to indicate that Maggie lives and interprets her life within a society moulded by the Christian tradition - the references supply the reader with the spiritual dimension in which Maggie operates rather than with a universally applicable spiritual reality.
The reader of *The Mill on the Floss* is invited to interpret the novel according to a number of patterns, but the selection is arbitrary; romance, hagiography, pilgrimage and the return of the prodigal are all offered as ways of reading Maggie's history. The tract insistence on the authority of narrative patterns is absent. It is noticeable that in her references to *The Pilgrim's Progress* George Eliot is not concerned to imitate Bunyan's allegorical style; allegory with its strictness of meaning and interpretation is not relevant to her approach to her characters' situations, they cannot be viewed as operating within a clearly defined codable theological system. However, at the conclusion of the novel the religious patterns become more insistent. Faced with interpreting death as a solution to her heroine's predicament a more far-reaching and potentially transcendent religious framework appears to be demanded. It is in the attempt to supply this that the tension between the religious vocabulary available to George Eliot and the exploration beyond it that she wished to make becomes apparent.

Tom's and Maggie's deaths are presented as a triumphant vindication of Maggie's moral choices and of the system of morality based on the sanctity of human ties and commitments which is the heart of the book's moral statement. The original title page of the novel carried the verse used as their epitaph - a verse which suggests
the element of triumph in the conclusion, 'In their death they were not divided' (2 Samuel 11:23).

However, death viewed from the perspective of the Feuerbachian ideology of the novel is difficult to reconcile with a triumphant conclusion cast in biblical language for it cannot contain the prospect of life after death as an encouragement. The verse George Eliot has selected noticeably avoids mentioning this source of encouragement - it is one of the few she could have chosen that does so. George Eliot is careful to avoid giving specific consolation of a Christian kind for the death of her characters, but as though to compensate the religious references become more insistent. Whereas earlier in the novel the different patterns were offered to the reader as alternative and essentially arbitrary ways of imposing order on the narrative George Eliot suddenly demands that the reader treats them as authoritative. The narrative structures define the way that the novel is to be read. Maggie is Christiana ending her life in the Floss which has become a river of death:

she had suddenly passed away from that life which she had been dreading: it was the transition of death without its agony - and she was alone in the darkness with God.

(p455)

With the prodigal son she achieves reconciliation and an ultimate return to childhood which has echoes of the hop-picker Eessy Collins' return to the meadows of home
brother and sister had gone down in an embrace never to be parted; living through again in one supreme moment, the days when they had clasped their little hands in love, and roamed the daisied fields together.

(p459)

She also becomes the Virgin of St Ogg's sitting triumphantly in her boat bringing hope to those in danger in the flood:

They sat mutely gazing at each other: Maggie with eyes of intense life looking out from a weary, beaten face - Tom pale with a certain awe and humiliation ... he guessed at a story of almost miraculous divinely-protected effort.

(p458)

One reason for the discomfort that most readers experience with the conclusion is that we are asked to take seriously narrative structures whose values have been questioned and undermined in their first presentation - the history of St Ogg for example is introduced with the narrator's aside:

I possess several manuscript versions, I incline to the briefest, since, if it should not be wholly true, it is at least likely to contain the least falsehood

(p102)

With the exception of the history of the Virgin, the narrative structures that dominate the conclusion are those that have been important in Maggie's imaginative life as well as being offered by the narrator as models for the organisation of the novel as a whole. For most of the novel however, Maggie's use of models to structure her life is observed ironically. When she adopts The Imitation of Christ as a model the narrator comments:
From what you know of her, you will not be surprised that she threw some exaggeration and wilfulness, some pride and impetuosity, even into her self-renunciation: her own life was still a drama for her in which she demanded of herself that her part should be played with intensity.

Maggie's various visions of herself are not allowed to become the dominant structure of the book, although they are offered as alternative ways of reading it. At the end of the novel however, Maggie's dream of playing her part with intensity is offered without irony. The world is suddenly remade as she would like it to be, as she used to dream of it being when she was a child. She acts heroically in the flood, rescues Tom and, in a dramatic climax relives an idyllic version of her childhood days with him, an idyll that, as Ulrich Knoepflmacher has pointed out, had more existence in her childish fantasies than in the reality of her history as it is presented in the novel.  

The increased insistence on the possible validity of the religious reference coupled with a refusal to allow Tom and Maggie any immortality beyond that accorded by human memory generates a degree of uncertainty at the end of the novel. We are uncertain because we are asked to accept as valid attitudes that elsewhere in the novel have been questioned, and also because life after death is denied for Tom and Maggie, but is nevertheless implicitly proffered by the insistence on the Pilgrim's Progress pattern.
It is not only Maggie's waking dreams that the reader must suddenly reappraise. Other dreams have been recorded in the novel - Maggie's dream of St Ogg's boat and Phillip's dream of Maggie, 'slipping down a glistening, green, slimy channel of a waterfall, and he was looking on helpless, till he was awakened by a sudden, awful crash.' (p375). The crash is Philip's father coming into the room, setting the dream in a context of waking life. The dream reveals Philip's anxiety over Maggie and, because this is well-founded, offers the reader a dramatic picture of Maggie's predicament. At the end of the novel we see that the dream must also be understood to be prophetic - Maggie drowns in the green, slimy channel. In the same way Maggie's dream of St Ogg's boat, which in its context reflects her complex feelings towards Tom, Philip and Stephen is given a physical reality in the conclusion:

the boatman was Philip - no, not Philip, but her brother, who rowed past without looking at her; and she rose to stretch out her arms and call to him, and their own boat turned over with the movement, and they began to sink, till with one spasm of dread she seemed to awake, and find she was a child again in the parlour at evening twilight, and Tom was not really angry. ' (p413)

A prophetic note is sounded elsewhere in the novel, in Mrs Tulliver's conviction that Maggie will be drowned, for example. Fulfilment of the prophecies forces us to see in the book a predestined pattern of
events, a view which fits uneasily with the range of possible arbitrary patterns that have been offered to the reader as keys to the novel's interpretation.

The ambiguity between dream and reality in the conclusion affects our understanding of the scenery against which it is played out. The flood belongs to the waking world in which sudden dreadful crashes are produced by natural means, but it is also the dream landscape in which such noises are unexplained and portentous.

Within the dream landscape Maggie is placed in the same kind of spiritual landscape as that which surrounds the characteristic nineteenth century doubter:

\[\text{but what am I?} \]
\[\text{An infant crying in the night;}\]
\[\text{An infant crying for the light;}\]
\[\text{And with no language but a cry.}\]

\[\text{falling with my weight of cares} \]
\[\text{Upon the great world's altar-stairs} \]
\[\text{That slope thro' darkness up to God} \]

\[\text{I stretch lame hands of faith} \]

She is in the dark, searching for the way home:

The whole thing had been so rapid - so dreamlike - that the threads of ordinary association were broken ... The first thing that waked her to fuller consciousness, was the cessation of the rain, and a perception that the darkness was divided by the faintest light, which parted the overhanging gloom from the immeasurable watery level below. She was driven out upon the flood: - that awful visitation of God which her father used to talk of - which had made the nightmare of her childish dreams. And with that thought there rushed in the vision of the old home - and Tom - and her mother - they had all listened together. "O God, where am I? Which is the way home?" she cried out in the dim loneliness.
The answer to her prayer will be her effort of heroic self sacrifice and a return to her earliest if idealised tranquil family past. The sequence on the flood is itself apparently a parable of contemporary religious feeling and an opportunity to offer ways out of the predicament of doubt-induced inaction to which such feeling may lead. However, such a parable sits uneasily in the framework of the whole novel. In the novel George Eliot’s concern has been to expose the religious narratives by which her characters live as inadequate - experiences that for them are genuine encounters with the divine have their human, material roots exposed. In the conclusion however George Eliot creates for herself a gloomy, creational landscape in which to contain a religious experience of one of her characters which we are suddenly asked to accept as genuine.

In *The Mill on the Floss* George Eliot is able to use and control structuring patterns drawn from the Christian tradition until her plot forces her to accept or deny their value in a situation in which emotional commitment to the heroine makes it hard to deny the patterns altogether. The result is confusion. Interestingly, the tract writers, as anxious as George Eliot to avoid the supernatural although for different reasons, did not generate the same confusion in their tracts, because from the beginning they were committed to the total truth of the pattern they were using.
NOTES

Chapter one

1 The use of the Christian journey metaphor as a structure for both George Eliot's and Dickens' novels is discussed by Barry Qualls in The Secular Pilgrims of Victorian Fiction: The Novel as Book of Life (Cambridge, 1982)

2 The Pilgrim's Progress, first published in 1678, was popular throughout the nineteenth century. The British Library Catalogue records a number of editions and reprints, and it is frequently referred to by writers of the period as this chapter shows. Its popularity is discussed by Amy Cruse, The Victorians and their Books (London, 1935)

3 Sarah Stickney, 'An Apology for Fiction' in Pictures of Private Life first series (London, 1833) pp vii-xii (pix)

4 John Bunyan, The Pilgrim's Progress from this world to that which is to come, edited by James Blenton Whorey, second edition revised by Roger Sharrock, (Oxford, 1960) pp 3-4

5 The Indian Pilgrim; or the progress of the Pilgrim Nazarenee from the City of the Wrath of God to the City of Mount Zion (Wellington, 1818) The Infant's Progress from the Valley of Destruction to Everlasting Glory (Wellington, 1821)

6 'The Pilgrims', Cheap Repository Longer Tracts (London, 1798) pp 389-406 'Bear ye one another's burdens or the Valley of Tears', Cheap Repository Shorter Tracts (London, 1798), pp 304-312

7 'The Railroad' Houlston's Series of Tracts no 97


9 Mrs Sherwood, The Infant's Progress, p 99

10 Mrs Cameron, The Two Lambs; an allegorical history, fourteenth edition, (Wellington, 1821)
11 For example, Old Gabriel in RTS Narrative Tracts no 819, nd. Old Gabriel 'exchanged his earthly pilgrimage for a crown of glory', p6

12 William Wilberforce, A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians in the Higher and Middle Classes in this Country, Contrasted with Real Christianity (London, 1798), pp 300, 301

13 'The Young Cottager' in Annals of the Poor, pp 123 - 191 (p 126)


15 Cheap Repository Shorter Tracts, pp 112 - 128, (p 128)

16 'The History of Charles Jones the Footman, written by himself', Cheap Repository Shorter Tracts, pp 148 - 167

17 'The History of Mary White', RTS Narrative Tracts no 828, nd. is designed to illustrate this text

18 'The Hop-picking' Houlston's Series of Tracts nos. 61, 62 nd.


20 Isaac Taylor, Bunyan explained to a child; being pictures and poems founded upon 'The Pilgrim's Progress', v i i i


23 Tennyson, In Memoriam in Poems and Plays (London 1968) LIV, LV (p 243). In Memoriam first appeared in 1850
Conversion or 'change of heart' is a recurrent event in many nineteenth century novels. It may or may not have a specifically Christian content, but the same general patterns and tendencies can be discerned in a variety of novels. The definition of religious conversion offered by the psychologist William James at the beginning of this century may be readily applied to the experience outlined in the novels:

a self hitherto divided, and consciously wrong inferior and unhappy, becomes unified and consciously right, superior and happy. 1

This is the experience of such diverse characters as Dombey, Esther Lyon, Alton Locke and Anados.

For much of the nineteenth century Christian conversion was a topical issue. Within the Church of England argument over the place of conversion helped to divide the Evangelical wing of the church from more traditional Anglicans. While the latter felt that regeneration and salvation were effected by baptism Evangelicals insisted that more was required. John Overton, for example, in an early polemical tract on conversion argued that,

a change of mind, of views and disposition must be affected in every person, wherever born, however educated, or of whatever external conduct. It is said, that this change is affected in us at our baptism. We answer; have you indeed kept your baptismal vow? 2
In 1850 the controversy became a national talking point with the Gorham Case. The interest this case occasioned and the theological technicalities assumed to be within the grasp of the lay readers of *The Times* indicate how widespread the awareness of conversion was among the educated middle classes at least.

On a more popular level tracts provided their readers with ample opportunity to become acquainted with the idea of conversion. The tracts were primarily designed to encourage the conversion of those who read them to evangelical Christianity. Writers described model conversions in their narratives to give their readers a pattern to emulate. A definite formula that met the requirements both of theology and the narrative restrictions of the tracts can be identified in large numbers of tracts.

In this chapter I examine the elements of the conversion formula in the tracts and I suggest that a similar formulaic analysis of conversion colours the description of the experience in the novels with which I deal. By comparing the different uses to which the similar formulae are put in the tracts and the novels I shall identify particular ways in which this approach to conversion determined the exploration of the experience in the novels. I shall look particularly at the ways in which the novelists dealt with the problem of providing an environment in which an experience identified as being spiritual could convincingly take place.
I have suggested that even those novelists who wrote about conversion other than conversion to Christianity were nevertheless conscious that the experience they were describing was related to the Christian experience and should be thought of as essentially religious. It is possible to discern so many influences at work in the various descriptions of conversion, however that this cannot simply be assumed. Walter L Reed, for example, commenting on the pattern of conversion in *Sartor Resartus*\(^5\), suggests that Carlyle constructed his own conversion formula, drawing on the ideas of the German Romantics and avoiding the Christian convention altogether. In order to make my comparison between the tract writers' approach and that of the novelists significant I have therefore concentrated on works which call attention to their relationship to the Christian experience of conversion, 'Janet's Repentance' from *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1858) and Dickens' *The Haunted Man* (1848). Before tracing the connections with Christianity in these novels, however, I wish to look in more detail at the conversion formula as it was established in the tracts.

The basic structure of the conversion formula in the tracts appears to have been developed from a modified form of the stages of conversion outlined by Calvinist theology and familiar from *The Pilgrim's Progress*. First came conviction of sin, a state bordering on despair in which the potential convert was obsessed with guilt, fears of God's judgement and
the insufficiency of personal attempts at good behaviour. This stage was relieved by a dawning hope of the promise of salvation through Jesus and a call to conversion. Finally the convert arrived at an assurance that she or he was forgiven and accepted by God. The conversion was authenticated by a developing holiness of life in the new believer. The RTS tract, 'The History of William Black the Chimney Sweeper' is typical of a tract constructed along these lines. William is first convicted of sin in hospital where he is recovering from an accident:

'Oh! if I had died,' said I to myself, 'where should I now have been?' (p6)

His groans for mercy are overheard by the pious shoemaker in the next bed, who preaches the gospel to him and teaches him to read the Bible. William is quickly brought to a saving belief in the atonement. The proof of his conversion is the transformed conduct of his domestic life - the cellar where he lives with his family becomes a hive of industry and Bible reading and it is also kept spotlessly clean in spite of his trade.

Although evangelicals acknowledged that conversion could be a long process with the different stages lasting over many years as had been the case with John Bunyan, the limited space available in the tracts meant that in narratives conversion had to be treated as a crisis. With only eight or twelve pages available
the necessary stages could not be covered unless they were compressed into one narrative event. In an RTS tract, 'The Hackney Coachman' the coachman is converted speedily by an encounter with an evangelical customer, who asks him if he is prepared to die, a question which turns him, 'all of a heap' (p3).

The conversion crisis is often precipitated by more dramatic events, sickness, accident and the death of friends and relatives. In Mrs Cameron's History of Marten and his two little scholars at Sunday School John Wilde is converted after an accident in the room he is sharing with his father's corpse. For the evangelical writers the introduction of death into a conversion narrative added force to their message. Fear of death and the prospect of divine judgement were the primary weapons evangelicals used in their fight to press the need of conversion on the worldly. The presence of a corpse at the scene of conversion acted as a reminder of the reader's own impending end and the need to prepare for it.

Death as it is represented in the conversion narratives is not distanced or 'spiritualised' as I have argued Maggie's death is in The Mill on the Floss. Death is uncompromisingly physical - writers stress both the pain of dying and the corruption that follows. Charles Trueman in The History of the Fairchild Family, is converted after a visit to the Noble family's vault, where, he tells Henry Fairchild, there were a great many coffins:
'and some of them so old that they were tumbling to pieces. Old Samuel ... showed us the coffins of Sir Charles's father and mother, and of Sir Charles's sister, who was, he said, the finest young lady in all the country round. He took us to one part of the vault where the parsons and their wives lay, and showed us ... several of the coffins belonging to persons whose names I forget. So we came out of the vault; and I was very glad, for it was the most dismal place I was ever in ...'

Conversion is urged on the reader by the physical horror of death. Throughout the narratives conversion itself is charted by the physical response of the convert. Inevitably the crisis through which he or she goes produces strong emotions, but these are always indicated by the writer by their physical manifestations: no attempt is made to explore the inner thoughts and conflict of the convert, or to unravel the mental and emotional processes that lead him to conversion. Characters simply tremble with fear as they face the possibility of God's judgement, and praise God enthusiastically, sometimes with tears, when they feel themselves forgiven. In the RTS tract, 'The Sabbath Stroller Reclaimed', for example, David, who has been spending his Sundays wandering idly in the fields is convicted of sin. As a result he weeps in secret (p1) and trembles at his guilt (p2). Mrs Fairchild tells her children that after she was converted she used to take

great delight in my Bible, and used to read and pray, and sing Psalms, in my little closet (p31)

The emotional responses are as much prescribed by convention as the doctrinal stages of conversion.
The reliance on a formula of stock responses suggests that for the evangelicals conversion was essentially straightforward. For those who have learned the system the process of the new birth is without mystery or variety. It was not necessary, even had space allowed for the writers to explore and define it, for it was not a mystery of individual spiritual development but a process that needed to be taught.

The settings in which conversions take place in tract narratives are appropriately unmysterious. The background of the event does not have to be sublime or shadowy to authenticate it as a spiritual experience. In fact, the more familiar the setting might be assumed to be to the readers the more hope the writers entertained of readers following the character through the experience themselves. Conversions therefore take place in cottages, walking along country lanes, in inns, in hospital beds and at Sunday School, all scenes which were felt to be familiar to the rural poor to whom the tracts were most frequently addressed.

For the tract writers a self that is 'consciously wrong, inferior and unhappy' can only become 'consciously right, superior and happy' in one way; through a saving belief in the atoning work of Christ. The process through which this occurs is well charted, and is essentially the same for everybody. Circumstances may differ, but the principle stages must be
followed. While conversion is represented in the tracts as a crisis with dramatic excitements introduced into the narrative to precipitate it, it remains a recognisable event that can be firmly rooted in the daily life and experience of the convert. There is little emphasis on individual experience of inner harmony as a result of conversion, there is a good deal on the development of model Christian conduct, quantifiable in external behaviour; Bible reading, church attendance and careful attention to responsibilities at home and at work.

In both Janet's Repentance and The Haunted Man the conversion experience is presented differently. Interest is centred in the individual's struggle towards a conscious wholeness rather than the demonstration of a general theological principle. In neither story is the outcome of conversion eternal salvation through Jesus either. Janet feels that she has become a Christian, but the importance of her experience for George Eliot is essentially humanist: Janet is restored to her community to lead a life of 'purity and helpful labour' rather than to heaven to praise God.

In spite of these differences an awareness of Christian conversion and even the manner of its narrative presentation can be traced in both 'Janet's Repentance' and The Haunted Man. 'Janet's Repentance' is particularly close to evangelical narrative.
Elisabeth Jay has pointed out how closely Janet's experience follows evangelical expectations, beginning with Janet's reliance on legalistic righteousness and ending with her realisation that she needs strength beyond her own in order to be genuinely good. Attention is drawn to evangelical conversion narratives in the course of the short story in the scene where Tryan's supporters are covering books which include the Life of Legh Richmond, the author of some of the most popular conversion stories of the period (chapter 3).

In The Haunted Man references to the evangelical concept of conversion are less explicit, but a framework that relies on traditional Christian thought is still apparent. The stages of Redlaw's conversion, in spite of the ghostly mechanism that surrounds them are very similar to those of the typical tract convert. At the end of chapter two, for example, aware of the damage his gift has caused, Redlaw cries out for mercy like an evangelical convert under conviction of sin:

'Look upon me! From the darkness of my mind, let the glimmering of contrition that I know is there, shine up, and show my misery! ... Pity me! Relieve me!' 13

Throughout chapter 3, Redlaw moves towards assurance. In this stage Milly stands to him in the dual role of Christian guide and Christ himself. The phantom instructs him to seek Milly out just as the convert was instructed to go to Jesus for relief. It is by
talking to Milly and by watching the effect of her life of love that Redlaw eventually obtains his salvation. In his case this is not the assurance of forgiveness for himself, but the power to remember and so to forgive others. Nevertheless his enlightenment is marked by a prayer which invokes Christ:

'O Thou,' he said, 'who through the teaching of pure love, has graciously restored to me the memory which was the memory of Christ upon the cross, and of all the good who perished in His cause, receive my thanks, and bless her!'

(p396)

Redlaw's case and language can be paralleled by a number of tracts, for example that of 'The Afflicted Mason' in which the mason, who has broken his back in a fall, is oppressed by a sense of guilt and personal sinfulness. Four days of conversation with a minister begin to help him, but it is not until the fourth day that the mason, like Redlaw, reaches enlightenment:

'O, Sir, now I understand all you have been saying to me: when I was thinking over it this morning, it came into my mind at once - if Jesus has died for us, if he has paid the whole of our debt, then we have not to pay it ourselves - we may depend on him and rejoice.'

(p3)

Neither Redlaw's nor Janet's conversion is primarily Christian, but both are related to a Christian understanding of the phenomenon. Because of this, the crisis of inner change and development which is at the centre of both stories is viewed by the reader as essentially a religious experience even though theological details are both not Christian and not
clear. The inner development that results in a conscious peace for Janet and Redlaw is presented, in spite of the writers' concentration on the individuals' struggles, as a structured one, the structure being broadly the same as that used in evangelical conversion narratives based on a Calvinist understanding of conversion.

The presentation of an experience as religious while denying or limiting the original theological framework within which the experience can be defined creates problems for the writer. In this chapter I wish to focus particularly on one problem, that of providing the necessary spiritual background against which the experience can be placed. The problem is similar to that raised by the conclusion of The Mill on the Floss and discussed in the last chapter, where George Eliot presents the flooding river as a dream-like, spiritual landscape in order to accommodate Maggie's final conflict within a consoling but vague religious context.

In 'Janet's Repentance' the supernatural is denied in Janet's experience. Her conversion is the result not of the Holy Spirit's intervention in her life, but that of another human being, Tryan:

Blessed influence of one true loving human soul on another! ... mysterious, effectual, mighty as the hidden process by which the tiny seed is
In this story conversion is presented as an experience of the human spirit alone, at each stage of the process, while the Christian tradition is followed the ultimate truth of the Christian position is denied. Finally, when Tryan dies, he earns not a reward in heaven, but a far less enduring, if more humanistically acceptable memorial on earth:

But there is another memorial of Edgar Tryan, which bears a fuller record: it is Janet Dempster rescued from self-despair, strengthened with divine hopes, and now looking back on years of purity and helpful labour. The man who has left such a memorial behind him, must have been one whose heart beat with true compassion, and whose lips were moved by fervent faith. (p412)

Although conversion has been stripped of its supernatural dimension the experience is still presented as a powerful and significant one that belongs to a dimension of human experience beyond the merely sensual. The simple domestic settings that the evangelical writers used for their conversion narratives are too mundane to press home the significance of the experience when God has been removed. The backgrounds against which Janet's crises take place are noticeably developed to help create the sense of a spiritual dimension.

At the beginning of the process Janet is turned out of doors by her husband into a landscape that aptly symbolises her inner desolation:
Thick clouds covered the sky; every door was closed; every window was dark. No ray of light fell on the tall white figure that stood in lonely misery on the doorstep; no eye rested on Janet as she sank down on the cold stone, and looked into the dismal night. She seemed to be looking into her own blank future. (p343)

The description of the silent street and the darkness is repeated as Janet's situation is explored. Initially the description is detailed and apparently mimetic; we learn, for example, that the servants sleep at the back of the Dempster house, and the wind sends a specifically March dust swirling over the pavement. Even at this point, however the landscape is perceived as an extension of Janet's experience; the wind is harsh and the darkness itself is directed at her, 'No ray of light fell on the tall white figure that stood in lonely misery on the doorstep'.

Chapter 15 opens with a reiteration of the essentials of the landscape, all of which operate as a commentary on Janet's position:

The stony street, the bitter north-east wind and darkness - and in the midst of them a tender woman thrust from her husband's home in her thin night-dress, the harsh wind cutting her naked feet, and driving her long hair away from her half-clad bosom, where the poor heart is crushed with anguish and despair. (p343)

The realism of Dutch painting has been lost for the sake of a Romantic tableau in which empty street, cold wind and darkness are the familiar signifiers of a scene of desolation while Janet herself poses as the archetypal suffering woman.
The landscape determines the direction of Janet's thoughts - she sits, 'with the door shut on her past life, and the future black and unshapen before her as the night,' (p343) longing for 'some ray of hope, of pity, of consolation,' to 'pierce through the horrible gloom' (p344). Orchard Street has become a psychic landscape.

This is the same procedure as that noted in the flood sequence in The Mill on the Floss. In 'Janet's Repentance,' however, in spite of the tendency to pity Janet indiscriminately, 'the poor bruised woman, seeking through weary years the one refuge of despair, oblivion ...' (p344), George Eliot does not allow the landscape to remain fused with the heroine's inner life, and the indulgence of Maggie's experience on the flood is avoided. Through everything Janet retains a consciousness of her separation from the landscape, she is aware of the shock of the cold stone under her, and she is finally restored to an everyday relationship with her surroundings by Mrs Pettifer's hot tea and warm flannel.

Janet's physical surroundings are used again to chart her progress through conversion. The morning after her conversation with Tryan, for example,

The fresh sky, left clear and calm after the long vexation of wind and rain, mingled its mild influence with Janet's new thoughts and prospects. (p365)

We are promised, 'a lovely April day'; the March dust
of Janet's night in Orchard Street has been laid. However the fusion of inner and outer experience that characterised that scene does not recur - the weather now has only a 'mild influence'. A different background is offered for the central scene in Janet's conversion, her first conversation with Tryan.

In this scene the physical background of the room in which the conversation takes place is entirely lost sight of, except in two references to light. Janet is seated, 'wrapped up in a large white shawl which threw her dark face into startling relief' (p355) and Tryan, at the beginning of his confession, turns his face from Janet towards the fire. We already know that it is dusk and the candles have been lit. It is as if the physical presence of Mrs Pettifer's parlour has dropped away into shadow, leaving only the faces of the speakers illuminated. It is the faces, and particularly the eyes, that provide the physical anchorage for the exchange of 'blessed influence'. We are constantly returned to their faces which chart the progress of their feelings and their spiritual transaction:

In this artificial life of ours, it is not often we see a human face with all a heart's agony in it, uncontrolled by self-consciousness; when we do see it, it startles us as if we had suddenly waked into the real world of which this everyday one is but a puppet-show copy. (p357)

The faces of both Janet and Tryan function like the description of Orchard Street as both physical back-
ground and psychic landscape. This strategy is appropriate and effective - human faces can express a heart's agony, eyes are traditionally the 'windows of the soul. The face can act as a realisation of the inner life without being turned to symbol as a physical landscape must be. Additionally, the use of the face emphasises the human encounter that George Eliot insists is the basis of Janet's experience. 'Janet's Repentance' moves away from the conversion narratives of the tracts in a number of ways, but particularly by focusing on an individual's struggles towards inner harmony, nevertheless, the individual's experiences are, in this instance, expressed through the physical responses and expressions of the characters anchoring them to the everyday, material world. There is a contrast here with Dickens' approach in The Haunted Man. In this story the experience of conversion is marked as spiritually significant by a conscious invocation of the supernaturally marvellous in the backgrounds.

The setting of The Haunted Man is one of shadows and darkness. Even at the festivities which end the book:

the shadows once more stole out of their hiding places, and danced about the room, showing the children marvellous shapes and faces on the walls and gradually changing what was real and familiar there, to what was wild and magical. (p398)
In 'Janet's Repentance' the shadowy background to Janet's and Tryan's conversation is designed to throw their faces into relief, in The Haunted Man the shadows provide the appropriate setting for the phantom.

Shadows and darkness are not only a traditional ghostly background, they emphasise, by their power to change the 'real and familiar' to the 'wild and magical' the ambiguity at the heart of the story over the phantom's nature. The story begins by declaring the uncertainty directly:

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Everybody said he looked like a haunted man. The extent of my present claim for everybody is, that they were so far right. He did. (p317)
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We are never sure as readers whether we are to believe that Redlaw is haunted or whether we are to understand that, 'the Ghost was but the representation of his gloomy thoughts' (p398).

Doubt is raised over the cause of conversion because of our uncertainty over the phantom, but there is no doubt that the conversion itself is to be regarded as an effective experience. However the supernatural agents in the story are evaluated by the reader they are used by Dickens to uncover the way in which the divided individual experiences the difficult process of unification. Redlaw's inner struggles are made visible through his dealings with the phantom. They are thus invested with the authority of a transcendent dimension apart from the Christian world view implied
by Redlaw's prayers. The ghostly scenes create the necessary setting of mystery and ambiguity, remaining acceptable to the reader as the appropriate and expected background for a story of this genre.

The study of both 'Janet's Repentance' and *The Haunted Man* would seem to indicate that the Christian description of conversion has been appropriated and transformed by the novelists as a convenient framework for exploring the interior development of a personality. The Christian tradition provides the process with distinct narrative stages, and marks it as an essentially religious experience, but any commitment to a Christian view is avoided by both writers. Instead a more general spiritual setting is provided, allowing conversion to be read as an experience of the human spirit alone and apart from God. There are however ways in which the close reliance on the Christian tradition may be felt to hamper and control the exploration of the characters' crisis.

In the first place it is the Christian narrative that provides the essential map of the experience in both stories, but most obviously in 'Janet's Repentance'. Here conversion which is presented insistently as a human experience, the result of the influence of one human soul on another, is nevertheless represented tied to the patterns and definitions of Christianity.
The insistence on a humanist interpretation of the traditional stages can seem forced. What happens for example when the other memorial to Edgar Tryan which 'bears a fuller record' (p412) than his tombstone, Janet herself, dies? The reader demands a new map to make full sense of human experience outside a Christian cosmology. There is a similar sense of being 'at sea' in The Haunted Man. Here ambiguity and fantasy appear to be opening the way to a redefinition and redescription of human spiritual experience, but in fact the recorded experience is tied to a Christian chart. Without such a chart there would be no experience for the story to explore. The ghost story genre is used to transpose the existing patterns of the Christian narratives rather than to redefine the experience of conversion or question its existence as a definable experience.

The hampering effects of the Christian conversion narrative can be seen in George Eliot's later novels. The power of evangelical thought as a controlling influence on characters' lives is never far away. Esther Lyon's adoptive father longs for her to be truly converted to Christianity, even Romola in fifteenth century Florence is swayed by the power of a Christianity that in its narrowness and intensity as well as in its capacity to change lives and produce good works has much in common emotionally with the
Protestant evangelicalism George Eliot describes elsewhere. The struggle into inner harmony which characters such as Esther and Romola undergo is always a challenge to traditional Christianity, to be viewed as a counter conversion experience. Esther's conversion for example begins traditionally enough with conviction of sin, but it is Felix's criticism that has roused her conscience, not the Holy Spirit.

The novelist's comment makes both the connection and the challenge to orthodox Christian thinking plain:

Very slight words and deeds may have a sacramental efficacy, if we can cast our self-love behind us, in order to say or do them. And it has been well believed through many ages that the beginning of compunction is the beginning of a new life; that the mind which sees itself blameless may be called dead in trespasses ...

But Esther persisted in assuring herself that she was not bending to any criticism from Felix.

In spite of the challenge the process that the characters undergo is modelled on the Christian narrative analysis of conversion, and the experience continues to be presented as a religious one, with the attendant need to mark it as somehow transcendent in its own right. Characters such as Esther and Romola cannot be converted without conviction of sin or spiritual trauma, identified as being religious however far away God may be. Christ is absent, but Christian thinking still controls the pattern of the experience being explored.
The association with Christian conversion not only weakens analysis and exploration of the 'change of heart' experience, but may also create an uncomfortable hiatus in the narrative. Romola's conversion experience is marked as significantly religious by the drifting boat sequence which floats her passively into a new life where she can discover a genuine motive for good actions. At once the novel seems to shift from history to romance, demanding an adjustment from the reader which it is hard to make even with the various demystifications of the experience that are offered to make us feel that we are remaining within the realm of the materially possible:

Many legends were afterwards told in that valley about the blessed Lady who came over the sea, but they were legends by which all who heard might know that in times gone by a woman had done beautiful loving deeds there, rescuing those who were ready to perish. 16

In Dickens' novels romance and fairy story themes are more evident and more integrated with the plots as Harry Stone has shown. 17 The problem the Christian narrative connection presents in The Haunted Man is however repeated in other novels, where it is difficult to discern the exact nature of spirituality being offered in the compound of romance and romantically viewed Christianity. In addition the tendency noted in The Haunted Man in the character of Milly to combine human and divine roles in one human character tends to make the human agent difficult to place. Under the pressure of being both human heroine and divine
messenger, prompting and aiding conversion, a character becomes distorted. Little Dorrit, for example, comes to be more than either daughter figure or potential lover to Clennam when he is in prison. She is the source and focus of a religious consolation that consoles him:

her compassionate eyes were often raised to his face, and, when they drooped again had tears in them - to be so consoled and comforted, and to believe that all the devotion of this great nature was turned to him in his adversity to pour out its inexhaustible wealth of goodness upon him ... inspired him with an inward fortitude

Like Milly, Little Dorrit has become a Christ figure offering consolation and salvation to the hero.

The distorting, limiting effects of association with the Christian conversion narrative tradition in the novels of both Dickens and George Eliot arise primarily from the attempt to synthesise the theological model of conversion to God with a world view in which God is absent or uncertain. New life in Christ as the outcome of salvation must be replaced by a life renewed in sympathy and understanding for fellow human beings. In novels by Dickens renewed sympathy is often the result of a regenerated imagination, capable of seeing love and mystery in the universe. The restored Dombey chooses to spend his time playing with his grandchildren, by implication learning from them to see the world afresh
and hear the voices in the waves.

To attach such a value to the imagination would, theoretically at least, have been impossible to the tract writers for whom even tract narratives might be sometimes unhelpful because untrue; one later, successful writer went so far as to give up her writing because she was afraid that she was telling lies with her fictions and thus distorting the truth of the Bible. However, the Christian novelists, George MacDonald and Charles Kingsley were not so inhibited and it is noticeable that their accounts of conversion, far from returning to the original formulations of the tracts with their emphasis on teaching a process, incorporate an emphasis on the value of the restored imagination as a means of grace.

George MacDonald is particularly noted for 'works of fancy and imagination', the title of one of the collections of his writings. His two adult novels still in print, Phantastes and Lilith are generally classified as fantasies. In both of them the inner drama of conversion is externalised in fantasy worlds and sequences that MacDonald unlike George Eliot, makes no attempt to demystify. The value that MacDonald placed on the imagination as a tool in conversion can, however, be clearly seen, too, in a short story, Stephen Archer which spells out MacDonald's position in its plot.
Stephen Archer is a bookseller who is also an active elder in a local dissenting chapel. His evangelical principles, including distrust of fiction, forbid him selling anything but serious newspapers, religious books and tracts. As part of his missionary endeavours he befriends a poor girl, Sara, and attempts to convert her by taking her along to the chapel. However the pastor's teaching, based on what MacDonald saw as selfish evangelicalism, 'the supposed paramount duty of saving (one's) own soul' (p17) does not touch her. It is only as Stephen finds time to teach her to read that her conversion takes place, a conversion in which the 'blessed influence of one true loving human soul on another' plays its part.

The lesson book was of course the New Testament; and Stephen soon discovered that Sara's questions, moving his pity at first because of the ignorance they displayed, always left him thinking about some point that had never occurred to him before; so that at length he regarded Sara as a being of superior intelligence waylaid and obstructed by unfriendly powers upon her path towards the threshold of the kingdom, while she looked up to him as one supreme in knowledge as in goodness. But she never could understand the pastor. (p23)

Not only is Sara converted to Christianity, but Stephen has his eyes opened to the possibilities of imaginative wonder and human love. He marries Sara and starts stocking his bookshop with Punch and 'tenpenny Shakespeares'.

Stephen, although he was already a Christian has had to be freed from a false system of belief which
presses doctrine at the expense of love either of
God or people. Spiritually he was in fact in much
the same position as Dombey, trapped by the similarly
hard teachings of his mercantile world. The association
of Stephen's change of heart with a renewed imagination
is made plain by the new stock of books he takes into
his shop. Sara's conversion complements the growth
of Stephen's imaginative capacity. She is a natural
child of God, her spontaneous loving responses
untrammelled by false teaching:

Sara Coulter passed through all that had been
decreed for her without losing her simplicity
and purity ... That which was the care of her
life - namely, the care of her brother - was
her salvation. (p 9)

Imagination and human sympathy, the values of the
essentially secular writers George Eliot and Charles
Dickens, are incorporated in this story of Christian
conversion and growth in grace.

Charles Kingsley also presents grace at work in
the development of the imagination. In Two Years Ago
(1857), a cynical doctor, Tom Thurnall is brought to
his knees by love and the development of a nervous
imagination during a term of imprisonment in Turkey.
He falls in love with the appropriately named Grace,
who embodies the principles Thurnall lacks. She has
a real if too fervent faith, and she is possessed of
an almost morbid sympathy towards the sufferings of
of others. She works as a school teacher and,
significantly she first appears in the novel telling
a fairy story to her pupils. Throughout the novel
she is associated with story telling. Tom first acknowledges her influence over him after watching her telling a dying girl the story of Saint Dorothea. She herself has the reputation of a local saint round whom 'a whole world of strange tales, half false, half true' have already gathered. It is a long time however before Thurnall can bring himself to accept his need of her imaginative and religious view of the world.

The final blow to his self sufficiency comes as a result of his imprisonment. The experience shakes him badly so that he admits to Grace:

'I dare hardly stir about now, lest some harm should come to me. I fancy at every turn, what if that chimney fell? what if that horse kicked out?' (p468)

At the mercy of his newly awakened imagination he needs Grace to direct it into positive channels and finally in her arms:

the old heart passed away from Thomas Thurnall: and instead of it grew up a heart like his father's; even the heart of a little child. (p469)

Like Dombey, Thurnall makes the return to childhood an aspect of his growth in grace after his conversion.

In order to accommodate their emphasis on the imagination as a concomitant of Christian conversion, MacDonald and Kingsley were driven towards symbolic and mysterious settings through which inner, spiritual transactions could be exposed, just as the secular
writers were. George MacDonald frequently set his works in alternative worlds in which spiritual laws could be shown operating clearly as the guiding principles of existence. In Stephen Archer although the setting is London a consciousness of heavenly realities colours its presentation:

But God is in the back slums as certainly as - perhaps to some eyes more evidently than - in Belgravia. (p9)

The unseen world and its values are always more real for MacDonald than the mundane settings of his stories and novels.

In Charles Kingsley's novels the setting of conversions and the exploration of individual response is less straightforward. In Two Years Ago a strong mistrust of the imagination is expressed, particularly through the character of the poet John Briggs whose sel-indulgent, over-sensitive responses prove to be destructive to life itself. Tom Thurnall's conversion is conveyed by a description of physical signs of inner distress - the method chosen by the tract writers. The psychological and spiritual effect of imprisonment is implicit in the description of physical frustration Tom gives to Grace:

'To rage up and down for hours like a wild beast; long to fly at one's gaoler and tear his heart out; beat one's head against the wall in the hope of knocking one's brains out; anything to get rid of that horrid notion, night and day over one - I can't get out!' (p468)

Although Tom's imprisonment is potentially symbolic
he remains separated from his physical surroundings, the prison is an emblem rather than a transposition of Tom's inner state. The reader feels that the Turkish prison will remain in use after Tom has left it - Orchard Street at night without Janet Dempster would not however remain a scene of desolation.

The growth of Tom's inner life is expressed not through mysterious settings but through the character of Grace whose faith and love supply what is lacking in Tom's practical, cynical nature. However, even Grace, whom Tom must come to accept and love in order to achieve salvation is represented in the novel as over imaginative to the point of hysteria. It is one of the novel's flaws that Kingsley criticises - Grace's sensibility and yet uses it unquestioningly as the means of Tom's salvation.

Two Years Ago appears to express Kingsley's own confusion about the value of the imagination. In a letter to a friend written in 1857 just after Two Years Ago was completed he commented:

What is a poor wretch to do, who, disbelieving the existence of matter far more firmly than Bishop Berkeley, is accessible to no hints from anything but matter? A mystic in theory, and an ultra-materialist in practice - who if I saw a ghost tomorrow, should chat quietly with it, and take out pen, ink, and paper to get an exact description of the phenomenon on the spot, what shall I do? 24

It is consistent with this position that in two other
novels with contemporary settings, Yeast and Alton Locke. Kingsley employs more mysterious settings to help convey the spiritual dimension of his characters' conversions. In Yeast Kingsley explicitly defends the mysticism of the conclusion in which the hero is converted in the shadows of St Paul's cathedral by a mysterious stranger whom he then follows round the world. In Alton Locke, Alton's inner experience is mediated through a dream in which he evolves through the scale of being until he emerges as a man who has learnt to work sacrificially for his fellows.

Kingsley's confusion points to the development of the 'change of heart' as a narrative device whose emphasis was on the exploration of the inner struggles of an individual to reach personal harmony rather than on a theologically conditioned transaction with God. Christian writers such as MacDonald and Kingsley found themselves engaged in this exploration as well as preaching Christian conversion. Later tract tales and novels published by the RTS show a similar development. Through a Needle's Eye (1878) by the evangelical writer Hesba Stretton provides an example. The hero, Justin, goes through a crisis of repentance which lays bare his inner soul through abstract statements rather than the standard physical descriptions of the early tract writers. In addition Justin is represented as a man apart - his experience is not one that will or should be common to all.
Then there came to him one of those strange and mysterious crises in the history of the soul, which none know save those who are called to pass through them. A deep awe overwhelmed him, and he hid his face even from the dying light of the day. The earthy husk of life was stripped off and shrivelled up in the presence of the mighty influence that swept over him. (p211,212)

Just as the secular writers were caught in the theological implications of conversion as an experience the Christian writers were influenced by the presentation of the individual's inner life as a matter that needed a specific spiritual setting to give it reality. Novels or stories whether secular or Christian came to reflect in their treatment of conversion a compound feeling about the experience—that it was particularly religious and essentially individual—rather than a definite theological statement. In this way both Christian and secular writers were hampered in their exploration and interpretation of inner change.
Chapter two

1 William James, Varieties of Religious Experience sixteenth edition, revised (London,1908) p189

2 John Overton, The True Churchman Ascertained: or an apology for those of the regular clergy of the establishment who are sometimes called Evangelical ministers: occasioned by several modern publications (York,1801),p160

3 The controversy flared up in 1850 over the Bishop of Exeter's refusal to induct an evangelical curate, Gorham to a living because of his views on baptism. See Chadwick, The Victorian Church, 2 volumes, second edition (London,1970),volume 1,pp250 - 271

4 The Times, Saturday March 9, 1850, p5


6 RTS Second Series Tracts, no 508, nd

7 RTS Second Series Tracts, no 563, nd

8 The History of Marten and his two little scholars at Sunday School , thirteenth edition, (London,1830)

9 The History of the Fairchild Family; or the child's manual;being a collection of stories calculated to show the importance and effects of a religious education, (Wellington,1818). Reference is to a facsimile copy of the 1818 edition (London nd),p199

10 RTS Narrative Tracts, no 831, nd


14 RTS Narrative Tracts no 845, nd

15 Felix Holt the Radical, edited by Peter Coveney, (Harmondsworth, 1972) p246

16 Romola, edited by Andrew Sanders, (Harmondsworth, 1980) p649


18 Little Dorrit edited by Clarendon Edition (Oxford, 1979) p737. The thought of this extract is reminiscent of the Bible, for example Ephesians 3:16-21 which speaks of the love of Christ strengthening believers.

19 Charlotte Elizabeth, Personal Recollections, third edition continued to the end of her life (London, 1847). In his concluding remarks her husband, Mr Tonna, comments: 'To describe the operation of God the Holy Spirit, and the mighty work of regeneration as taking place in beings who existed only in her own imagination ... to indite prayers which had never been uttered, and reveal their answers - seemed to her now, something like profanation' (p393)

20 Works of Fancy and Imagination, ten volumes (London, 1871)


22 Stephen Archer and other Tales (London, 1833)

23 Two Years Ago, (London, 1902) p42

24 Letter to John Buller, February 8, 1857 in Frances Kingsley, Charles Kingsley, his letters and memories of his life, 2 volumes (London, 1877) volume 2, p19

25 Yeast: A Problem (London, 1851); Alton Locke, Tailor and Poet. An Autobiography (London, 1850)

26 Through a Needle's Eye (London, 1878)
CHAPTER THREE

Deathbeds - tract and fantasy

The need to come to terms with the physical reality of death tests any religious or philosophical position. In the last chapter I discussed some of the ways in which an originally Christian concept of the experience of conversion was developed in some novels to cover an exploration of the growth of human personality apart from a specifically Christian framework. In this chapter I look at the ways writers accommodated the representation of death to their wider beliefs. By doing so I shall develop my argument that narrative formulae that had a strong Christian association were current in the novels with which I deal, emptied of a specific Christian meaning and thus posing particular problems for the fresh exploration of traditionally religious themes. In the introduction I suggested that the emptiness of the religious formulae with respect to specific doctrinal meaning, and their use to signal 'religious feeling here' invited an exploration of the responses of the religious imagination rather than a deliberate statement of beliefs. In this chapter I shall look more closely at this emphasis and develop the distinctions between this approach, which I have defined as 'fantasy', and that of the
the tract writers, defined simply as 'tract'.

I shall look first at a number of different tracts in order to establish the particular tract mode of dealing with death and then consider the different approach of fantasy by looking at the death of Richard Carstone in Dickens' *Bleak House* (1853). I have chosen to look at a deathbed scene from one of Dickens' novels because in a period where every novelist seems to have included one such scene, Dickens was still particularly noted for his. He may therefore be regarded as being a major contributor to this field, both influential and representative. Since his more famous deathbeds such as Paul Dombey's or Little Nell's have been discussed in detail by the majority of Dickens' critics it seemed more interesting to look at the deathbed of a comparatively minor character. That of Richard Carstone is particularly suitable for my purposes because its structure closely parallels that of tract deathbeds making a comparison between the novel and the tracts more informative.

In conclusion I look at *Lilith* (1895) by George MacDonald, a fantasy novel whose central theme is the narrator hero's encounter with death. In this novel fantasy is used consciously to explore the problem of death. It is possible therefore to highlight by a comparison between the two novels, the degree to which Carstone's death relies on a fantasy
mode for its expression. In addition, since MacDonald writes from a Christian perspective, his commitment to an after life is as strong as that of the tract writers although his treatment of the theme is so different. Comparison between *Lilith* and the tracts serves to distinguish some of the differences between tract and fantasy as modes of describing religious experience. *Lilith* thus makes a convenient point of comparison for drawing together the different treatments of death discussed in the chapter.

The description of death is used in the tracts as a tool for evangelism. Tract writers play on the readers consciousness that she must at some point face her own death. She is invited to look at the dying character's pain and imminent prospect of meeting God and consider how she herself would be able to cope with the same situation. The comparative calm with which Christian characters face death is offered to the reader if she will embrace Christianity:

> Reader, did Thomas Mitchell obtain mercy through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and why should not you seek the same blessing? ... Seek his mercy while it is called today ... 2

Tract writers are at pains to point out that there is no other hope. Another characteristic deathbed scene is that of the infidel dying in pain and despair who suddenly acquires a belief in the hell he or she had previously scorned. In *The
Death of Altamont or the Power of Conscience for example the dying Altamont complains:

'Didst thou feel half the mountain that is on me, thou wouldst struggle with the martyr for his stake, and bless heaven for the flames. That is not an everlasting flame. That is not an unquenchable fire'...

His terrified imagination uttered horrors not to be repeated, or ever to be forgot; and ere the sun arose, the gay, the young, noble, ingenious, accomplished and most wretched Altamont expired.

Stories of sudden deaths warn the reader that her own death may be imminent and unlooked for with no time to repent on the day. Mocking infidels and sinners who have refused the proffered chance to repent are represented struck down by sudden disease or accident. In the RTS tract, The History and Adventures of Ben the Soldier a soldier who has mocked Christianity ('"Religion," exclaimed a profane wretch with a sneer, "it's all my eye" ') is immediately shot down in battle:

God, whom he had despised, now despised him; at the next volley another ball went through his head, carrying away his foreteeth and the back part of his skull; (it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God)

Here apologetics takes on a violent tone; not only is God revenged but the writer can relish a violent end in store for his religious opponents.

The deathbed was also used to plead the evangelical cause more gently through the farewell discourses of dying Christians. Readers who envied the peace and readiness with which Christian characters faced death, could, through these discourses learn the
faith they needed to adopt to achieve the same state themselves. In *The History of the Fairchild Family* the local clergyman, Mr Somers questions Charles Trueman on his deathbed to elicit answers which will help others to, '"Lay fast hold of the same hope, which is able to make a dying bed so easy."' (p207)

This primary motive of the deathbed sequence in the tracts, to evangelise and teach, is the typical motive of the tract approach. Tract writers dealing with any religious experience such as conversion or death are determined that their rendering of the experience will set correct Christian doctrine before the reader, 'pure, essential and saving gospel truths are ... introduced into every Tract.'

In Legh Richmond's accounts of the deaths of the Dairyman's Daughter and little Jane, the clergyman, Richmond himself, puts the dying Christians through the catechism that will establish their faith for the reader. Similar questions together with the appropriate answers are part of the service of 'Visitation of the Sick' in the *Book of Common Prayer*.

In the service the minister comments:

I require you to examine yourself and your estate, both toward God and man; so that accusing and condemning yourself for your own faults, you may find mercy at our heavenly father's hand for Christ's sake, and not be accused and condemned in that fearful judgement. Therefore I shall rehearse to you the Articles of our Faith, that you may know whether you do believe as a Christian man should or no.
In 'The Young Cottager', Richmond rehearses Jane in the articles of her faith:

'Do you believe in your heart that Christ is able and willing to save the chief of sinners?'
'I do.'
'And what are you?'
'A young, but a great sinner.' (p149)

It seems likely that in The Annals of the Poor, written by an Anglican clergyman and dealing with his ministry such a dialogue is a direct reflection of the instruction of the prayer book. Certainly, the effect of the catechising episodes in the tracts is liturgical. The dying person by engaging in the dialogue transforms his or her individual death into a general religious event. Charles Trueman knows exactly what to say to Mr Somer's question. He responds with a quotation from the Bible that was part of the evangelicals' armoury of key texts:

'I know that my Redeemer liveth; and though after my skin worms shall destroy this body, yet in my flesh I shall see God.' (Job xix. 25, 26) (p207)

Charles is no longer a dying child but a pattern Christian pursuing a model religious death.

The element of liturgy is an aspect of the evangelical contention that Christian experience is essentially the same for all believers - a feature of the tract mode which deals with Everyman figures rather than with individuals. Religious experience is prescribed in the tracts. The individual must align any personal experience of God's dealing
with the general orthodox Christian consensus of what the nature of the experience should be.

Another feature of deathbed accounts in tracts which may be regarded as typically tract like is an emphasis on physical decay and suffering. In Mrs Cameron's tract tale, The History of Margaret Whyte, for example, Margaret is sustained spiritually and emotionally by her faith, but it does not prevent her feeling pain. She suffers from fainting fits and cold sweats, which are all described. In The History of the Fairchild Family we are told explicitly that, 'death, even the death of those whose souls are redeemed is a dreadful sight; for the sinful body struggles hard with it.' (p208) The emphasis on physical pain and deterioration, as well as helping to alarm the reader illustrates the evangelical doctrine of the sinfulness of human nature. The decay of the body is a visible reminder of the corruption of original sin.

The emphasis on the body's decay may be regarded as typically 'tract' because the tract writers liked to manifest religious experience through material events rather than through examining mystical or supernatural ones. Faced with describing the soul's transition from the temporal world to encounter God in a spiritual realm the tract writers still tended to cling to descriptions of the physical world.
However, it was central to their evangelism that the reader should be made vividly aware that life continued after death in order to make the terrors of hell and the consolations of heaven a reality. Without some indication that there was an after life the promises and threats that surround the death bed narratives in tracts could be dismissed. Writers needed to inject an explicitly supernatural element into their accounts of death.

The problem was solved by most writers by suggesting that the dying person saw a heavenly vision that could be seen by no one else. No attempt is made in the narratives to describe the nature of the vision or to enter into the character's experience of it. As in the accounts of conversion spiritual experience is implied by stereotyped physical action; when Mr Adams the pastor leaves Margaret Whyte after his catechising visit,

Margaret, looking attentively at him as he walked towards the door, and raising her joined hands, smiled sweetly upon him. (p64)

Margaret falls into the characteristic pose of a saint blessing a disciple. The attentive glance and the sweetness of her smile suggest that she is responding not simply to Mr Adams, but to a particular vision of his Christian virtues. Her dying state privileges her to see and share his adult devotion to God. Little Jane makes a similar response to
Legh Richmond, going so far as to fling her arms round him as she asks God to bless him. 8

In The History of the Fairchild Family Mrs Sherwood extends the supernatural element of the vision by suggesting that Charles Trueman actually sees the heaven to which he is bound:

Suddenly looking upwards, and fixing his eyes on one corner of the room, the appearance of his countenance changed to a kind of heavenly and glorious expression, the like of which no one present ever before had seen; and everybody looked towards the place on which his eyes were fixed, but they could see nothing extraordinary. 9

All that Mrs Sherwood has done is to intensify the language with which she describes what is still a conventional pose familiar from popular iconography. Instead of Margaret's attentive look at Mr Adams and her accompanying sweet smile, Charles fixes his eyes on an empty corner and his face is suffused with 'a kind of heavenly and glorious expression'. The writer still avoids exploring what Charles sees or the nature of the transition he is undergoing.

The mode of describing religious experience which I have called 'tract' is one in which the primary emphasis is doctrinal. Characters and events are intended to illustrate and teach religious principles. Actions and reactions are not explored or regarded as interesting in themselves. Characters must speak 'by the book' as mouthpieces of orthodoxy interpreting their own situations to the reader. In
addition, the tract writers preferred to show spiritual transactions manifested in the material world, a world as ordinary and everyday as they could make it appear. There was no room for mysticism in the tracts, or for any complex exploration of the spiritual world and its rules.

In spite of the confident authoritarianism of the tracts and the writers' subordination of narrative to doctrine the theme of death allowed other, less strictly tract like elements into the tracts. The emphasis on death appealed to children's taste for horror, one adult remembered The History of the Fairchild Family having some good funerals in it as its attraction for him as a child.\textsuperscript{10} Frances Hodgson Burnett makes one of her child characters comment on a book from the Sunday School library:

'It's a noice book, an' theer's lots more like it in th' skoo' library - aw about Sunday skoo' scholars as has consumption an' the loike an' reads th' bible to foak an' dees 11

Presumably the Gothic element of scenes such as Charles Trueman's visit to the vaults appealed to adults, too, rather more than the message it was intended to convey.

The evangelistic emphasis of the tracts did not prevent some writers attempting to arouse other responses than conviction of sin in their readers. The possibility that the reader may shed tears of
sentiment as well as repentance is explicitly stated by Legh Richmond in *The Annals of the Poor*:

> Religion, reason and experience, ... bid us indulge, in due place and season, those tender emotions, which keep the heart alive to its most valuable sensibilities (...p187 'The Young Cottager')

Mrs Sherwood, in spite of the sternness of tone with which she presents Charles Trueman's death was also capable of inviting her readers to 'indulge ... tender emotions' at deathbed scenes. In her popular missionary story, *The History of Little Henry and his Bearer* she develops the descriptions of Henry's childish beauty and infant piety to the point where the reader must be expected to find his death poignant as well as spiritually uplifting. Just before his death Henry's friend, Mrs Baron goes to cut off his hair to give to friends:

> When she took off his cap, and his beautiful hair fell about his face; when she considered how soon the time would be when the eye that had seen him should see him no more; she could not restrain her feelings; but throwing down the scissors, and putting her arm round him, 'O my child! my dear, dear child!' she said, 'I cannot bear it! I cannot part with you yet!' The poor little boy was affected: but he gently reproved her, saying, 'If you love me, you will rejoice, because I go to my Father' (John xiv.28) (...p128, 129)

Tears of sentiment are checked by Henry's reproof in which the language and sterner tone of evangelism reasserts itself through the biblical quotation.

When we turn to the death of Richard Carstone in *Bleak House* we find the appeal to sentiment is unchecked.
However, although the strict evangelical framework is lacking, the sequence of events that make up the deathbed narrative is very similar to that used in the tracts. An awareness of this similarity makes comparison between the scenes easier and more fruitful. Other critics, for example Dennis Walder in *Dickens and Religion*¹³ have compared the similar sentimental tone in Dickens' deathbeds and Legh Richmond's tracts. By drawing attention to the similarity of narrative structure I wish to show that the tone and the thought behind the tract approach and that of Dickens is very different and illustrates the difference I have postulated between the tract and fantasy modes used to describe religious experience.

Richard, who has been in failing health for some time succumbs to a consumptive type of illness. In tracts 'good' evangelical deaths are nearly always the result of consumption. Margaret Whyte, little Jane and Charles Trueman all die from it. This may simply reflect the prevalence of the disease in the period - Legh Richmond's son, Wilberforce, died from it.¹⁴ However, a characteristic of 'bad' deaths is that they are sudden, giving the dying person no chance to repent. It seems likely, therefore, that consumption was deliberately chosen for the death of believers to give the writer the opportunity of showing the dying person actively
preparing for death and exhorting the friends and relations he or she was about to leave behind to lead Christian lives.

Richard, like such a tract figure, engages in farewell discourses with the family and friends who gather round his couch. Mr Jarndyce, Richard's guardian, takes the role of the tract clergyman and talks to Richard about forgiveness, repentance and the promise of heaven. Finally Richard dies, again like a tract character, with a beatific smile on his face.

The narrative sequence of Richard's death is broadly the same as that of a tract character's death, but there are differences in the mood and interpretation of each element of the sequence which highlight the difference between the tract and fantasy modes. A crucial difference is that overriding Christian control has gone from the narrative, both in the absence of the clergyman and in the tendency of the conversations. The direction of Richard's death is shared by Jarndyce, who takes on the role of catechist, and Woodcourt, who controls and comments on Richard's progress. Woodcourt is a doctor of bodies rather than souls, but his attendance at deathbeds as a rival to non-attendant clergyman is well-developed in the novel. The implication of his presence is that his primary
compassion for physical suffering gives him authority in religious affairs more genuine than that of official pastors who have no time to spare for human suffering. This authority is emphasised by his role at Jo's deathbed, where as well as caring for the boy physically he teaches him the Lord's Prayer.

Richard, although he engages in ambiguously pious conversation with Jarndyce, does not pray, and Woodcourt makes no attempt to suggest that he should, a state of affairs that would be unthinkable in a tract. It is only Ada who looks to heaven for support:

She looked upon us, and looked up to Heaven, and moved her lips

Even Ada's prayers do not carry a strong Christian message. A tract writer, engaged in teaching, would make sure that her prayers were orthodox and given in full as a lesson to the reader. Ada's faith in heaven is simply touching, completing the picture of vulnerable but noble Victorian womanhood which she exemplifies, pregnant, but pure and devoted to her dying husband. The reader is not challenged to embrace her faith, but to contemplate it as part of the tear inducing tableau. In the tracts the Christian content checked sentiment, here it is used to increase it.

The mention of heaven indicates 'religious feeling'
to the reader without challenging her. In this respect it is significant that it should be Ada not Richard who must pray. Ada is not facing death, so the faith she represents does not have to face that ultimate test, neither is the writer forced to consider the threat of judgement which accompanies an orthodox Christian view of death. Ada's faith needs only to comfort her in her bereavement, not settle her eternal destiny. It provides an opportunity to offer the reader the consolations of faith without its challenge.

Ada not only maintains a sentimentalised Christian presence in the deathbed sequence she also becomes a focus for the religious feelings of the other participants in the scene. As she has taken on the exercises of faith which would be performed by the dying person in the tracts Richard turns to her rather than to Christ for consolation. His faith is not in Christ but in Ada and her love. He dies in her arms, and it is contemplating her rather than the life to come that brings the final smile to his face.

Through Ada, Dickens maintains a suggestion of religious consolation for death and a sense that religious encounter is taking place at the deathbed, while offering us nothing more certain as a ground for faith than human love. Ada's role here
encapsulates the uneasiness which I have suggested hampers both Dickens and George Eliot in their handling of religious themes, for she stands for a faith that is acknowledged but cannot be fully embraced.

The tension that is created in this scene by an essentially agnostic position being expressed through a narrative sequence that is closely allied to a Christian narrative sequence is marked in other areas, particularly in Richard's conversation with Jarndyce about the future life, and in the description of his final dissolution. Richard's conversation with Jarndyce may be regarded as parallel to the conversations held by dying Christians in which they express their hope in heaven, but the future state that Richard expects is rather different.

Initially Jarndyce and Richard discuss the possibility of his removal to the new Bleak House to convalesce. The conversation is poignant because Jarndyce and the reader know that Richard will not recover. As the discussion progresses, however, the nature of Bleak House as a place becomes increasingly ambiguous. It is not simply the Woodcourts' country house but a place of moral recovery and regeneration where Jarndyce will guide Richard into better ways. Ultimately it becomes for Richard:

that pleasant country where the old times are, where I shall have strength to tell what Ada
has been to me, where I shall be able to recall my many faults and blindesses, where I shall prepare myself to be a guide to my unborn child (p870)

That the Bleak House of the conversation is to be identified with some future state is underlined by Esther's comment when Richard finally dies. 'He, with one parting sob, began the world. Not this world, 0 not this! The world that sets this right!' (p871). This suggests the Christian heaven, but the picture presented by Richard and Jarndyce is very different from the orthodox Protestant vision. Richard is not anticipating the joyful meeting with God that consoled tract Christians but a return to a time of lost innocence where earthly rather than heavenly relationships can be restored and enjoyed. His heaven is the same nostalgic return to a lost, happy world of secure relationships that characterises the only paradise George Eliot could offer Tom and Maggie at the end of The Mill on the Floss.

By associating the 'world that sets this right' with a desire for an earthly paradise of ideal human relationships, Dickens, like George Eliot, avoids an open statement of belief or disbelief in the Christian position. In addition: the very act of restating the conventional deathbed conversation about heaven suggests an uncertainty over the Christian view. Ultimately, too, the solution of offering earthly, domestic happiness
as a substitute for a supernatural, spiritual heaven is a weak one. There are impossible contradictions inherent in reconciling a longing for ideal domesticity with a longing for heavenly bliss.

The main problem with the invitation to see the new Bleak House as an alternative heaven is that we know that the dead Richard cannot actually go there, and we have no guarantee that he does in any other sense 'begin life' at his death. Andrew Sanders has suggested that we are offered a humanist resurrection for Richard through the absorption of his son in the new Bleak House where he himself wished to go. However, it is also possible to see this process as an additional defeat and emotional death for Ada. Her place as the heroine who marries and lives happily ever after has been usurped by Esther. She must take on Esther's old role of Jarndyce's companion and housekeeper while Esther takes over even her relationship with her child. There is a hint of triumph in the way Esther dwells on Ada's widowhood

Sometimes, when I raise my eyes and see her, in the black dress that she still wears, teaching my Richard, I feel — it is difficult to express — as if it were so good to know that she remembers her dear Esther in her prayers

I call him my Richard! But he says that he has two mamas, and I am one. (p879)

The idea of a humanist resurrection through the child is in any case made markedly unsatisfactory by being
placed in a context which draws attention to the more positive promises of a personal survival made by Christianity. Ultimately the survival of the child does not solve the problem of Richard's own separation from life and those he loves. The conventional, popular deathbed sequence which Dickens appears to adapt here demands the consolation of an afterlife. Dickens is pushed by the convention to provide religious consolation, but forced by his own beliefs to limit the consolation he offers simply to human certainties. The narrative structure he follows prevents his expressing an alternative to orthodox beliefs about heaven in completely appropriate language and narrative context.

As it is, the contradictions and uncertainty attached to Richard's view of heaven push the writing towards a breakdown of sense. Bleak House cannot be both heavenly and earthly home for the characters in a novel where they still call on God without being explicitly contradicted. The insistence on 'the world that puts this right' coupled with an absence of Christian analysis and urgency generates uneasiness in the reader. She is forced to hold both messages in tension, accepting the agnosticism that underlies the sequence as well as the more orthodox tendency of the sequence itself.

The description of Richard's final dissolution also
emphasises the tension created by an agnostic position being expressed by a sequence more appropriate to the delivery of definite, orthodox Christian teaching. A certain amount of evasive action underlies those parts of the narrative that deal with Richard's sickness and death. Richard's suffering and death are not dwelt on in the way that suffering and death are in the tracts. Apart from the mouthful of blood that drives him from court the only signs of Richard's impending end are his pallor and weakness. He in fact looks more handsome than he has done for a long time and he smiles more. Charles Trueman dies in agony:

After several convulsive pangs, little Charles stretched himself: he breathed slower and slower; then, fetching a deep sigh, his features became fixed in death. Nurse, who had come into the room some time before, perceiving that the soul of the dear child was departed, came up to the bedside, and gently closed the eyes, and bound up with an handkerchief the mouth of the corpse (p208)

Richard dies with 'one parting sob' and his body, unlike Charles' immediately disappears from the text.

Forster, writing about the death of Paul Dombey, commented approvingly of Dickens' treatment of death:

It took the death itself out of the region of pathetic commonplaces, and gave it the proper relation to the sorrow that survives it. It is a fairy vision to a piece of actual
suffering; a sorrow with heaven's hues upon it, to a sorrow with all the bitterness of earth. 17

Dickens creates a 'fairy vision' of Carstone's death. Richard's face is translucent rather than ghastly, and the reader is encouraged actually to enjoy the picture he presents rather than to recoil in terror. Death is beautiful, painless and moving. It is the pursuit of this 'fairy vision' as a substitute for more orthodox forms of consolation, together with the tension between the Christian sequence of the narrative and the agnostic thought that pushes the description of Richard's death towards fantasy.

Characteristically fantasy introduces the reader to situations outside the temporal, mundane world which is the subject of mimetic description. Rosemary Jackson has suggested that fantasy occupies a middle ground between mimetic writing and marvellous writing, that of the fairy tale proper in which fairy land and its inhabitants are as substantial and definable as the events and inhabitants of the everyday world. 18 Events and characters described in a fantasy mode are characteristically insubstantial, vague and ambiguous. They are essentially dreamlike, often suggesting to the reader that like the events of dreams they are pregnant with a meaning that always remains just beyond comprehension. Fantasy as a mode for describing religious experience can be clearly distinguished from the tract form in which
events and their meanings are clearly and dogmatically stated and belong to the recognisable, everyday world of sense experience.

A vocabulary of insubstantiality dominates the exchange between Richard and Jarndyce. Richard describes his past experience as 'a troubled dream' (p870) and begs that Jarndyce will forgive the dreamer when he wakes, while Jarndyce reassures him, 'What am I but another dreamer, Rick?' (p870) In the context of the dream world Richard's vision of heaven as Bleak House becomes less unsatisfactory. It becomes another dissolving picture in his dream. Since Jarndyce implies that all men are dreamers the possibility of a more certain hope is illusory. We can only dream and guess, constructing pictures of heaven from our human experience. In the fantasy mode precise, logical meaning is not offered and it should not be required.

The use of fantasy both results from and excuses the emptiness of the Christian framework in which Carstone's death takes place. It appears to be the almost inevitable result of the tension between the framework and Dickens' agnostic thought, self-generated by the constraints of the writer's material. It is also used more deliberately and sensitively to explore death as a transition from
one state to another, an area the tract writers found so hard to deal with.

In *Bleak House* we see the characters' experience of death through their eyes as well as from the point of view of an observer. Each character perceives his or her approaching death differently. For Richard it is the thought of a new family home, for Jo, the crossing sweeper, the approach of a rattling cart and horse, for Lady Dedlock a flight into darkness. As the senses falter the imagination dreams physical surroundings, past experience and present hopes and fears into an idiosyncratic experience of death. The dreams have their own validity - they are true to the characters' experience but they have no authority beyond this. The reader must make a continual adjustment between commitment to the dying person's point of view and an outsider's awareness of death as a conclusion after which nothing is known. Fantasy constructs the imaginative appreciation of death from the character's experiences of the physical world and accommodates our doubts about the extent of its meaning. Richard's vision of the new *Bleak House* has validity as Richard's vision, but can we press it further and assume that Richard does after death arrive at a place where he can begin the world again?
The fantasy approach differs from that used in the tracts primarily because fantasy encourages the reader to view death as an unknown, mysterious area rather than a well charted one. In doing so it looks at individual experiences of the crisis and differentiates between them; there is no general liturgy. However, both tract and fantasy writers only follow the dying characters to the point of death; life after death remains unexplored in each case. Once in a distinctly other world fantasy would lose its necessary tie to the sensual world and enter the realm of the marvellous. Ambiguity would be lost. For the tract writers life after death is certain, but indescribable. It is legitimate matter for sermons, but not for tracts or fiction.

For Dickens writing about death raised the issue of the possibility of life after death, one of the central issues in prevailing contemporary doubts over the value of Christianity. With death as his theme it was harder for Dickens to make the manoeuvre that Barry Qualls attributes to him in matters of religion:

But what strikes us increasingly about Dickens is his determination to have it both ways: to invoke God and yet celebrate man as man's only knowable aid, to appeal to the God of tradition and to the human love of felt experience.

The erosion of Christian certainties made death
an area potentially devoid of meaning. This is a threat to the value systems of the novels which rely on the possibility of supernatural power coupled with certainty over the power of human love. Death highlights agnosticism with regard to the first and separates human lovers. In dealing with death Dickens has to cover the threatening negation, at least where death strikes those characters who are 'good' that is who manifest the positive values of the novel. The restored Richard is such a character, and Dickens minimises the threat of his death by avoiding describing the effects of decay and by allowing Richard and those characters who surround him to weave their own comforting myth of an after life centred round a house present in the physical world of the novel. In addition Ada stands as a figure whose devotion is unchanged by death.

In George MacDonald's treatment of death a similar process takes place. The physical details of death are avoided and the individual characters' interpretations of the experience are offered as descriptions of what actually takes place. However, MacDonald's valuation of death is quite different and this affects the way his fantasy is developed. In Lilith, the novel which I discuss here, MacDonald uses fantasy to explore death positively rather than to evade the issues it poses. An examination of MacDonald's
approach extends the concept of fantasy as a mode for describing religious experience.

According to Tolkein, 'Death is the theme that most inspired George MacDonald'. The quest for a good, that is a, holy, death forms the plot of Lilith, and of MacDonald's earlier adult fantasy, Phantastes (1858). For MacDonald death provided the transition from a limited material world to a world of spiritual realities. It was to be desired as the gateway to a fuller communion with God, free from the hampering constraints of sensory life. The view expressed in MacDonald's novels opposes that of Dickens' novels where death is seen as a transition from a substantial world into a world of shadows or complete negation. Dickens' is the view more commonly held, and much of MacDonald's treatment of death is designed to re-educate the reader to see the physical world as the place of shadows and death. To do so MacDonald often uses the tract method of presenting the basics of faith through characters' conversations. However, while tract discussions abound in certainties and set answers MacDonald's are slippery with metaphysics. In Lilith the narrator, Vane, discusses the nature of death with Mr Raven who is at once librarian, sexton, ghost, guide and Adam, the first man who tasted death:
'You knew I was not a raven!' he said with a smile.

'I knew you were Mr Raven,' I replied, but somehow I thought you were a bird, too!'

'What made you think me a bird?'

'You look like a raven, and I saw you dig worms out of the earth with your beak.'

'And then?'

'They grew butterflies, and flew away.'

'Did you ever see a raven do that? I told you I was a sexton!'

'Does a sexton toss worms in the air, and turn them into butterflies?'

'Yes.'

'I never saw one do it!'

'You never saw me do it! - But I am still librarian in your house, for I never was dismissed, and never gave up the office. Now I am librarian here as well.'

'But you have just told me you were sexton here!'

'So I am. It is much the same profession. Except you are a true sexton, books are nothing but dead bodies to you, and a library nothing but a catacomb!'

'You bewilder me!'

'That's all right!' 22

Death at once becomes an abstraction, a spiritual transaction rather than a physical event and it remains on this plane throughout the novel. Death as it is portrayed in Lilith belongs to the fantasy world rather than to the real world. Indeed death generates the fantasy world of Seven Dimensions that
is the setting of much of Lilith. Its centre is Adam's cottage where the dead lie, waiting for resurrection. Outside is an indeterminate landscape, haunted by the demon Lilith, a vampire life-in-death. In her and in the barren landscape are embodied the negative and destructive forces associated with death, including the horror of physical decay. Even the children that Vane encounters in his travels represent not life, but a failure to grow up and embrace the transition of death.

The fantasy mode of Lilith is characterised by the use of metonymy - Mr Raven for example slides from ghostly librarian, to bird, to Adam. Nothing is substantial or easy to grasp, either as an object or an idea, and yet there is a constant sense that objects and events are pregnant with meaning, the state familiar from dreams. The assessment made by Richard Carstone in Bleak House that life is a troubled dream is amplified in MacDonald's fantasy where the dream world is the setting through which most of the novel is mediated to the reader.

In Lilith the narrator's death takes place in the fantasy world rather than in the world of the senses. MacDonald thus avoids dealing with the physical facts of death. Instead death can be described completely symbolically. Those who die do not suffer and their bodies do not decay, instead they grow younger and
morally better as they sleep. As with Richard's death physical horror is avoided, but not because it cannot be contained in the novel's vision. It simply does not count; physical decay is not part of a death that is transition to a higher state. It is displaced from the home of 'true' death in Adam's cottage to the nightmare world where Lilith rules. This world holds no power or terror for the spiritually obedient who embrace death.

It is noticeable that in *Bleak House* although the horror of death is displaced it is not defeated. Richard's corpse disappears from the text by convenient authorial magic, but the physical necessities of death still lurk behind the phrase, 'at a late hour when all was still' (p.871) - the reader knows the nature of the activity of the intervening hours. The horror of death is displaced to the graveyard where Nemo is buried, but the bars that enclose it cannot ultimately prevent the decay it contains from spilling out.

MacDonald uses fantasy to create a world in which the nature of death can be explored and interrogated while Dickens moves into fantasy to cover up the nature of death. Dickens stops his treatment of death at the moment of transition. This is striking in *Dombey and Son* where Paul Dombey's vision which includes a sight of Jesus waiting to welcome him
ends abruptly with Paul's death. When he can no longer tell what he sees, he can no longer see it. Beyond the moment of death there is silence, a silence which points to the evasion inherent in Dickens' use of fantasy. Such evasion is perhaps ultimately as hampering to Dickens' exploration of death as the reliance on an eroded Christian tradition.

MacDonald's exploration is by contrast impelled beyond death although by using the device of the narrator dreaming his death he avoids the loss of contact with the everyday world that would turn his fantasy into a piece of marvellous writing. There is no silence after the experience of death. The narrator dies and continues with his narration. The nature of life after death is expressed through the perceptions of an individual, Vane, not because it is regarded as having no reality beyond the subjective, but because the reality on which it opens is too great for one general impression to convey it. It can only be revealed in fragments - one individual's experience gives an aspect of a whole truth that is greater than the sum of all individual understandings. Lilith ends with a triple layer of dream worlds. The sensory world has, in Platonic tradition, become the most shadowy. The world of Seven Dimensions has itself become a transitional one
from which the narrator awakens into a vision of the ultimate reality of God. This world, too, however, dissolves into a dream and the narrator is returned to the shadows of the physical world. His vision however disintegrates under the pressure of too much reality, not too little. Fantasy is used in Lilith to express meaning beyond human understanding rather than lack of meaning.

MacDonald's approach to death is comparable to that of the tract writers in that both stress the reality of life after death, founding their conviction on a belief in the Christian God. However there is a great difference between the modes MacDonald and the tract writers use to express their belief. In the tracts belief in an after life does not call for a description of this world as shadowy and inferior. Experience of God is always mediated through everyday sensory experience; it remains rooted in the physical life of this world. In death God is experienced as a source of strength enabling the Christian to cope with the physical and psychological trauma of dying. Tract writing concentrates on the visible and tangible rather than trying to open up the inner life.

Tract writers do not follow the dying beyond death. Only the corpse remains to be written about. The eternal fate of the dead is construed from the Bible
not from direct description of Heaven and encounter with God. Summing up Charles Trueman's life at his funeral, Mr Somers comments that

there were two things that had been most remarkable in him, and which gave great assurance of his now being blessed: the first was his great humility and low thoughts of himself ... and secondly, his firm trust and joyful confidence in his Redeemer.  (p211,212)

Where MacDonald uses death as an opportunity to attempt to express truths that cannot be expressed the tract writers deal only in ideas that can be easily expressed through the Bible and the liturgy.

The differences in expression between MacDonald and the tract writers which is the difference between fantasy and tract as modes is encapsulated in their different attitudes to the body. Where MacDonald attempts to describe the treasure of faith and the spiritual life the tract writers prefer to concentrate on the vessels of clay that surround it.
Chapter three

1 Charlotte M Yonge in *The Heir of Redclyffe* (1853) makes Dickens' deathbed scenes a subject of family jokes: "'I found Amy ... crying in the green-house, and I was very glad to find it was nothing worse than little Paul.'" *The Heir of Redclyffe* (London, 1920) p17

2 'The History of Thomas Mitchell', RTS *Narrative Tracts*, no 815, nd, p8

3 RTS *First Series Tracts*, no 58, nd p6

4 RTS *Second Series Tracts*, no 522, nd p5

5 The Origin and Progress of the London Religious Tract Society (London, 1803) p8

6 'The order for the visitation of the sick, and the communion of the sick' in The Book of Common Prayer and administration of the sacraments and other rites and ceremonies of the church according to the use of the Church of England

7 The History of Margaret Whyte; or the Life and Death of a Good Child (London, 1837). The tract tale first appeared early in the nineteenth century: it was reviewed in *The Guardian of Education*, a magazine with evangelical leanings, volume 1, no 6, October 1802 (pp392 -393)

8 'The Young Cottager' in The Annals of the Poor pp123 - 191 (p186)

9 The illustration overleaf for Mrs Sherwood's The Little Woodman and his Dog Caesar although later (c.1864) is typical of the style. It is taken from a reprint in M Nancy Cutt, *Mrs Sherwood and her Books for Children* (London, 1974), p47

10 According to M Nancy Cutt: 'Lord Frederic Hamilton, a child of the mid-century recalled that: there was plenty about eating and drinking; one could always skip the prayers, and there were three or four very brightly written accounts of funerals in it.'

Mrs Sherwood and her Books for Children, pp66, 67
Little William Joining his Dying Father in Prayer.

Woodcut by J. Knight from The Little Woodman and his Dog Carter (Parlour edition), London 1864.

12 *The History of Little Henry and his Bearer* (Wellington, 1814)


14 Details of Legh Richmond's family life are given in Thomas Fry, *Domestic Portraiture or the Successful Application of Religious Principle to the Education of a Family*, exemplified in the memoirs of three of the deceased children of the Rev Legh Richmond (London, 1833)

15 *Bleak House*, the Oxford Illustrated Dickens (Oxford, 1948) p869


19 It is one of the issues that troubles the hero of J A Froude's *The Nemesis of Faith* (London 1848)

20 Barry V Qualls, *The Secular Pilgrims of Victorian Fiction; the Novel as Book of Life* (Cambridge, 1982) p 96


22 *Lilith; a Romance* (Tring, 1982), pp29, 30
CHAPTER FOUR

Children: vehicles for religious thought

Evangelicals are generally regarded as the enemies of the Romantic view of children as 'little innocents', who insisted instead that children are full of original sin and need to be coerced into a religious frame of mind. Although evangelicals certainly saw children as sinners their attitude to children and their expression of it in the tracts was rather more complex than this view suggests. Child characters, like adult characters were generally used to act out particular aspects of evangelical doctrine; examination of their roles in the tracts highlights the evangelical attitude that is being expressed and contributes to an understanding of the tract mode which the writers used.

Descriptions of children in the novels do not draw so obviously on a Christian tradition as descriptions of conversions or deathbeds do. However, child characters are generally used to express and develop broadly religious ideas, it is their symbolic role rather than their psychology that is explored. This is particularly true of children in Dickens' novels. Little Nell for example is essentially an angelic guide, leading
grandfather away from the City of Destruction and pointing the way through death.

Children in Dickens' novels are particularly associated with the qualities Dickens looks for in the renewed imaginations of older characters who undergo a 'change of heart'. Good child characters like Nell embody the active sympathy, trust and wonder at the universe that Dickens sees flowing from a healthy imagination. For Dickens the imagination often appears to be the primary organ of religious sensibility and response. Such a view would have been alien to the evangelicals, but it is one expressed by the later Christian writer, George MacDonald, both in his novels and stories, and in his essays. Exploring a religious response for MacDonald and Dickens must entail some exploration of the imagination and this extends the use of fantasy as a mode in their writing.

In this chapter I have used a study of child characters and their uses in tracts and in novels by Dickens and MacDonald to extend the concept of the two modes of tract and fantasy. Extending these key ideas contributes to my central thesis that religious analysis was hampered in the novels by reliance on an eroded Christian tradition, because it was partly the erosion of Christian belief that drove the writers towards fantasy. In the cases
of conversion and deathbeds I have suggested that a traditional Christian approach was present, but drained of its original meaning. In the case of child characters a traditional Christian analysis is lacking, but the ideas expressed through the children indicate some of the alternatives that have replaced Christian analysis elsewhere. Study of them thus helps to clarify the changes in meaning that seem to have taken place when a traditional Christian narrative formula is present in a novel.

I have looked particularly at *Hard Times* (1854), which deals with the importance of cultivating the natural imagination of children, and at MacDonald's *At the Back of the North Wind* (1871). This is a story for children in which a boy, Diamond, is presented as spiritually strong because of his refined imagination. In conclusion I look at *Silas Marner* (1861) because in this novel George Eliot deliberately probes the way adults understand childhood and the book therefore acts as a commentary on the works of the other writers I consider, including the tract writers.

The idea that evangelicals were hostile and repressive in their attitudes is expressed explicitly by Dickens in *Little Dorrit* (1857) when he describes the young Arthur Clennam's bewilderment
faced with a tract that:

commenced business with the poor child by asking him in its title, why he was going to Perdition? a piece of curiosity that he really, in a frock and drawers, was not in a condition to satisfy. 3

Tract writers certainly made few concessions to childish understanding over points of doctrine. Readers of The History of the Fairchild Family for example are taught to pray:

O Lord God, Almighty Father, hear the prayer of a poor, wicked, proud child! I know that my heart is full of sin, and that my body is corrupt and filthy, and that I must soon die and go down into the dust ... (pp75,76)

However most tract writers show that the evangelical response to children was more complex and potentially more sympathetic towards children than Dickens and other writers, such as Charlotte Bronte, would allow.

Children are popular protagonists in the tracts whether or not the material was designed for child readers. Leigh Richmond's, 'The Young Cottager', for example was addressed to adults, but deals with the conversion of a little girl of about nine. The use of children as central characters appears to reflect both a growing awareness of children and the state of childhood as one that should be recognised and provided for by adults and also an awareness of children as readers with specific needs and interests. The Religious Tract Society began to consider the possibility of a series of tracts aimed at children.
in 1803. In 1809 and 1810 selections of tracts from existing series were published as a new series for children, and in 1814 tracts written specially for children were published. 4

The growing awareness of children reflects a contemporary cultural development wider than evangelicalism. The phenomenon of childhood appears to have been a late eighteenth century discovery and is reflected in other writing of the period. 5 For evangelicals, in addition to the changing cultural climate, were their beliefs which encouraged an interest in children and child development. Of paramount importance was the doctrine that all unconverted humanity, regardless of age, were destined for hell if they remained unconverted. In a period of high child mortality the conversion of children was felt to be urgent, and this led to tracts and tract tales designed to encourage children to prepare for death. Child characters in these narratives were intended as examples to the young reader of the way of faith and as solemn reminders that no one is too young to die:

Go to the cold churchyard and there
The graves of infants view
The next the digger's hands prepare
Perhaps may be for you 6

Evangelicals inherited a tradition of obituary tracts
addressed to children by earlier Puritan writers—Janeway's *A Token for Children* (1671) was republished by the RTS. Their emphasis on death and judgement was one of the aspects of evangelical attitudes to childhood that others found distasteful. While Dickens parodied it in Arthur Clennam's tract, the tract writers' contemporaries also commented unfavourably on it. A review of *The History of Margaret Whyte* in *The Guardian of Education*, a magazine run by the serious Anglican Mrs Trimmer comments:

Much excellent instruction is conveyed by the present Book; and it is very right to draw the thoughts of the young towards the closing scenes of life; yet we cannot help wishing to see some Tales from the same able hands, in which merit meets with a reward in this world.

Evangelicals were not, however, only interested in children as potential converts to be saved from hell. An original feature of some evangelical tract tales dealing with children is an emphasis on domesticity. One of the social reforms that evangelicals particularly in the Anglican church desired was the development of the home as a focus for social life rather than other morally dangerous haunts of pleasure - theatres, assemblies, dances and the village inn. The *Evangelical Diary* for December 1815 notes

It is within doors, however, chiefly that we look for comfort during the severity of winter; nor is it necessary to seek for happiness
either in the tavern or places of public dissipation. The domestic fireside, with an amiable partner and a circle of well-regulated children forms the highest enjoyments of a temporal nature... 10

A number of tracts deal with the domestic scene, holding up cosy pictures of well regulated, affectionate families and making suggestions about the way domestic harmony may be achieved. Family life was a particular concern of Mrs Cameron's tracts and a number deal with family relationships and their conduct. Her long tract tale, The Two Mothers11 is intended as a guide to the best way to bring up children. The story is therefore addressed to adults, but it takes the form of the biography of a child, Mary Anne, and deals specifically with the problems she faces. It shows an awareness of childhood as a state and also an inherent confidence that children are and should be interesting subjects for adult attention.

A major part of an evangelical child's upbringing was its religious education. This is the subject of several tracts in which a child character is led step by step to an understanding of evangelical orthodoxy.12 In these tracts the unconverted child is simply an excuse for setting out the evangelical credo which is the true subject of the tract. In addition the tract child is shown responding positively to religious education that has been
presented in the approved manner. A fictional child can be made to respond more readily to the author's theories of education than a live child and a tract child not only accept religious instruction but grow in grace under the discipline of their parent or guardian. Mrs Cameron's Mary Anne, for example, changes under her aunt's care from a spoilt, bad tempered infant to a responsible teenager.

Child characters designed as educational models are ideal children in evangelical terms. They are humble and obedient with a proper sense of respect for the parents and teachers on whom they depend. A contemporary commentary for children on the visit of the child Jesus to the Temple (Luke 2.46) indicates the qualities that evangelicals hoped to see in a child:

Some young people, when reading this passage, have supposed that Jesus disputed with the doctors. But, if they read it carefully, they will see that this is not the case ... he did not sit on the same seat that the doctors sat on ... he sat at their feet ... to teach us to be humble, Jesus sat and listened, and asked questions, not as one disputing, but as one who was meek and lowly in heart. Too many children of his age think only of play.

Children were placed at the bottom of the evangelical hierarchy of family relationships. Nevertheless, it is significant that they had a place assigned to them. This suggests both that the evangelicals recognised childhood as a state, and also, that
typically they felt able to understand it, define it, and prescribe for it within the terms of evangelical doctrine.

Children in the tracts are never spiritually privileged because they are children as they are represented as being in the Romantic tradition. Even the Christian children of unconverted parents must take their low place in the family hierarchy. It is the word of God rather than the word of a spiritually gifted child that will effect conversion:

If your parents are wicked, you are nevertheless under obligations to honour them ... Perhaps when they hear you read what is written in God's word against swearing, drunkenness, sabbath-breaking and such wicked things, they may be led to think of their way, and to lead a better life ... 14

Children were important to evangelicals, but evangelicalism remained an adults' religion to which children had to adapt themselves. The tracts suggest that religious experience takes place in a fixed doctrinal framework - only those with access to the doctrine and some basic understanding of it can hope to meet with God. This precludes children from full participation in religious life - inevitably they know less than adults, and they must be instructed before they can begin to grasp the doctrine. Children were also handicapped in the religious life because, evangelicals felt, they lacked the discipline and moral judgement that came with maturity:
...if the Scriptures have failed to convince us of the doctrine of original sin, an attentive observer could not have looked abroad into the world without being persuaded that children, even in their most tender years, display the power of that evil heart of unbelief which departs from the living God ... 15

Even Christian children are going to be unusually sinful as The History of the Fairchild Family makes plain.

Children in tracts are only shown participating fully in religious experience through death. Indeed when the dying believer is a child the tracts are if anything more triumphant than when he or she is an adult. A good death drew on the characteristic childhood virtue of submission, and represented a triumph over the characteristic childhood faults of ignorance, folly and lack of discipline. Legh Richmond comments of the dying little Jane, for example that, 'she spoke with all the simplicity of a child and yet the seriousness of a Christian.' 16

For the child who had absorbed the lessons of evangelicalism and was struggling to lead a holy life adulthood was an irrelevance. As Charles Trueman comments:

'I know myself to be a grievous sinner, and one that cannot live a day without doing that which is evil; therefore why should I grieve, because God is pleased to take me so soon from this state of sin and sorrow?' (p204)

Dying children taught that the value of life was its heavenly goal with the implication that the sooner it was reached the better.
The introduction of a child character was not a method through which tract writers explored religious experience directly - children were not seen to have any privileged access to God, in fact rather the reverse. They depended on adult instruction for their knowledge of saving faith. However the treatment of child characters is closely related to evangelical thought and it delineates the theological framework in which religious experience was perceived and defined. The treatment of children indicates that for the evangelicals religious experience was as much an affair of the head as the heart. Knowing God meant knowing the correct way to think about him. The urgency with which tract writers addressed themselves to preparing children for death, and the sudden religious maturity that they allowed dying children to achieve implies that experience of God centred for them on the certainty of salvation for heaven. It was not mediated through the individual's spontaneous feelings of religious awe, but through meditation on things to come. This again increased the reliance on doctrine as a means to religious experience. The believer needed a correct understanding of heaven, hell and judgement as food for meditation.

As well as being used as pattern examples for evangelical educational theories children were deliberately used as types of fallen humanity to
illustrate evangelical doctrine. Children were regarded as being more prone to attacks of original sin and the child characters in The History of the Fairchild Family amazed nineteenth century readers by their spectacular naughtiness. However the naughtiness is not simply intended to be mimetic, it is a type of the depravity of mankind as a whole, used to teach the doctrine of original sin. In one incident in The History of the Fairchild Family, for example, Henry re-enacts the Fall by stealing an apple from his father's tree and then lying about it.

Where the children stand for fallen humanity their parents, particularly the father are quickly cast in the role of God. The punishment and forgiveness extended by Mr Fairchild to his children are intended to illustrate God's dealings with a fallen mankind. Mr Fairchild states this explicitly to Henry:

'when wicked men obstinately defy and oppose the power of God, He gives them up to their own bad hearts; He suffers them to live, perhaps, and partake of the light of the sun and of the fruits of the earth, but he shows them no marks of His fatherly love or favour ... I stand in the place of God to you, whilst you are a child ... therefore if you cast aside my authority and will not obey my commands, I shall not treat you as I do my other children. From this time forward, Henry, I have nothing to do with you. ' (p. 189)

Mr Fairchild's treatment of Henry is intended to bring home to the reader the misery of being an unforgiven sinner, cut off from God. However, it also illustrates another point of evangelical
doctrine. Parents were believed to stand in the place of God to their children and they expected a corresponding obedience.

Family roles were viewed as strongly typological. This suits the tract mode in which encounter with God is manifested in everyday material life rather than in supernatural, or inner worlds. The domestic scene was one in which major doctrines of the Fall and God's judgement could be played out. As a result in the domestic world portrayed in the tracts there appears to be little room for spontaneity either in religious life or in daily living. Everything is controlled and prescribed by doctrine.

In spite of the seriousness with which domestic life and relationships are viewed in the tracts there is often a rather surprising tendency to see children as essentially charming; an appraisal that seems closer to the traditional Romantic view of childhood than that normally associated with evangelicalism. In 'The angry child subdued by love', an anonymous article in The Teacher's Offering or the Sunday School Monthly Visitor, a magazine with evangelical leanings, the aftermath of a child's tantrum is described in terms that still emphasise essential attractiveness:
Henry's mamma then sat down, and taking her boy upon her knee she kissed him many times ... she talked to him very sweetly: told him that he had offended ... God ... and he promised never to be so passionate again ...

Henry then knelt down by my side, and repeated a prayer to the most holy God, after first clasping his dear little tear-wetted hands ...

Like the element of sentiment in deathbed scenes in tracts the appeal of attractive children is always limited by doctrine. The most attractive children are, like Henry, liable to fits of anger and other offences. Mrs Sherwood, whose writing frequently suggests a sentimental response to childish charms insists nevertheless that the physical sweetness of children is a work of grace rather than nature. In The History of Emily and her Mother, for example, the narrator sees a pretty little girl and comments:

This little girl wants only ... to be clothed in white, with a straw hat, a wreath of flowers and a crook, to become as elegant a shepherdess as any described by Sir Philip Sydney. She is also struck by the child's self possession and dignity. Before long she discovers that the child, Emily, is a Christian, and her winning ways and looks are the outworkings of Christian grace. Mrs Sherwood makes the point explicitly in the main narrative of The Governess, the book in which The History of Emily originally appeared. The pupils at the school have their childish good looks spoilt by sulky mouths and bad-tempered glances. As their behaviour improves
under the influence of Christianity, so do their looks.

The treatment of children in the tracts illustrates major features of the tract mode, in particular that characters and events are represented as defined and controlled by doctrine. In spite of this the treatment of children both as characters and readers is not nearly so repressive as has often been suggested. In fact it is arguable that the evangelicals' interest in children and the family led them to a sympathetic observation of childhood that encouraged them to describe and explore childish ways as much for their own sake as for doctrinal interpretation. When Henry refuses to learn his Latin in The History of the Fairchild Family we are given details of his distractions - a pet hare eating parsley, and a piece of packthread which he twists round his fingers while 'the new grammar lay at his feet' (p188). In addition there is Henry's devastatingly logical reason for his refusal to learn:

'I could learn this first lesson if that were all ... but if I learn this, I shall be made to try to learn the next, and so on through the book; and I am sure I cannot learn all the hard words in this book, and so I won't begin.' (p188)

The child is however soon swallowed up by doctrine; it is this act of disobedience that calls out Mr Fairchild's decision to banish Henry from his presence, as God banishes sinful humanity.
Tract writers are occasionally beguiled into demonstrating an interest in children as people. Dickens and George MacDonald consistently fail to present such an interest. Their child characters are used almost entirely to express values within the novel, often of a religious nature. In *Hard Times*, for example, the character of Cissy is important as a collection of qualities which oppose the Gradgrind philosophy, rather than as a struggling personality. As a child she is spontaneous, affectionate and loyal, possessed of a sympathetic imagination. These childlike qualities are never outgrown. Cissy remains a focus of qualities that other, more psychologically complex characters such as Louisa must struggle to achieve. Louisa's future at the end of the novel is to have,  

happy Sissy's happy children loving her; all children loving her, she grown learned in childish lore; thinking no innocent and pretty fancy ever to be despised... 21

It is noticeable that Sissy's qualities are associated particularly with the childish lore of the fairy story. Not only does Sissy read fairy stories to her father to encourage him, she originates in the tawdry but nevertheless magical world of the circus. Her situation in the Gradgrind household is potentially that of the fairy tale or romance heroine. She is the lost daughter, the abandoned princess forced
to take a lowly position. Readers taught by the pattern of fairy stories will expect the end of the novel to see her restored, her true nature revealed and vindicated. In effect this is what happens; the Gradgrinds are forced to acknowledge that Sissy's response to life is superior to theirs and Sissy, true to type, marries and lives happily ever after.

Dickens saw the fairy story as a moral influence. In an article of 1853 he comments:

> It would be hard to estimate the amount of gentleness and mercy that has made its way among us through these slight channels...

> In an utilitarian age, of all other times, it is a matter of grave importance that Fairy tales should be respected. 22

The fairy tale teaches an imaginative sympathy for others and shows good rewarded and evil punished. For Dickens fairy stories can encourage moral sensibility in the young as surely as the Bible, but without the Bible's solemnity or the demands of orthodox Christian faith. Human sympathies such as Sissy's, conditioned by fairy stories rather than Bible reading, offer an alternative to the harsh world of the Gradgrinds which is unthreatening in its generality, posing no problems over the existence of an authenticating deity. The development of the sympathetic imagination allows feelings of awe and a sense of mystery, but contains them in the
human world as the imagination is contained within the human individual.

The values focused in Sissy may be regarded as the values of an alternative religion, a religion of humanity opposed both to the materialism of the Gradgrinds and the supernaturalism and dogma of orthodox Christianity. Sissy is presented in terms that suggest the Christian without the insistence on doctrine that we find in the tracts. She is submissive with a command of herself that Louisa, like a potential convert, envies:

'You are more useful to my mother, and more pleasant with her than I can ever be,' Louisa resumed. 'You are pleasanter to yourself, than I am to myself.' (p56)

When Louisa does finally undergo her 'change of heart' Sissy's role is described in terms that suggest a religious foundation without being specific:

In the innocence of her brave affection, and the brimming up of her old devoted spirit, the once deserted girl shone like a beautiful light upon the darkness of the other. (p225)

Even Sissy's appearance reflects the values that cluster round her. She is vitally alive, 'so dark-eyed and dark-haired, that she seemed to receive a deeper and more lustrous colour from the sun when it shone upon her'. Her appearance is conceived in contrast to the pale, bleached Bitzer, whose nature is correspondingly cold and inhuman. (pp4,5)

In spite of the way that Sissy is constructed as
a character whose role is simply to carry values, she remains finally more associated with a fantasy mode of describing religious experience than with a tract mode. This is because the values that she is designed to convey remain so shadowy in their foundation. Ultimately Sissy stands not for the certainties of doctrine but for the uncertainties of agnosticism. We are called to see the values she represents both as self authenticating because of their human roots and somehow transcendent because of the vocabulary drawn from fairy tale, romance and Christian narrative, with which they are described. In order to oppose the materialism of the Gradgrind system successfully Sissy must represent a system that permits and includes religious feelings of awe and wonder at the universe. However, if the loose system of fairy tale and Christian vocabulary is pressed to authenticate its claim to transcendence it collapses. Sissy is not possessed of the powers of a fairy tale princess, which would in any case be out of place in Coketown, and neither is she able to offer a specific Christian view. The foundation of her system is caught between a reliance on the marvellous and a refusal to claim anything beyond self-authenticating human experience. Such a position is typical of the area explored and expressed by
fantasy. The alternative religion Sissy represents belongs to the shadows, and ultimately she herself must be viewed as a messenger from and of the shadowy world of fantasy.

In *At the Back of the North Wind* the values focused in the child, Diamond, are presented as having an ultimate divine source and they are not required to be self authenticating. MacDonald uses fantasy consciously to explore the spiritual world in which he conceives religious encounter taking place, rather than inevitably as an expression of religious uncertainty.

Like Sissy, Diamond's good qualities spring from a refined imagination. He is holy because he is imaginative. His encounters with North Wind are on one level imaginative - when he thinks he is with her others perceive him as asleep or unconscious in sickness. The encounters are, nevertheless, morally refining, the doubt cast on their reality - even Diamond comes to fear that he may only have dreamed them - only serves to point to their true point of authentication, God. His reality is not called into question, and the narrator reassures Diamond:

'...there is one thing you may be sure of, that there is a still better love than that of the wonderful being you call North Wind. Even if she be a dream, the dream of such a beautiful creature could not come to you by chance.' 22

For MacDonald dreams provide a space in which God
may be encountered more authentically than through head learned doctrine. The criticism in *At the Back of the North Wind* of the visiting Bible reader who finds fault with Diamond's name is typical. The man presumably finds Diamond's name simply unorthodox; his reading of the Bible has left him unable to see the true value of meaning behind Diamond's name, which is in fact spiritual. The name is in the Bible if he only had eyes to see, the sixth stone in the high priest's breast plate. MacDonald wanted his fairy stories to break through the doctrinally conceived religion in which his readers are trapped (either by accepting or rejecting it if with the rejection they have rejected Christianity as a whole.) The stories are to 'move by suggestion, to cause to imagine', and to 'assail the soul as the wind assails an aeolian harp'.

Teaching about Christian behaviour and holiness which in a tract would be expressed through example related to doctrine is expressed rather clumsily and coyly in *At the Back of the North Wind* by relating Diamond's good behaviour outside his dream life to extended romantic metaphors and to Diamond's imaginative life. In one sequence Diamond sets out to restore harmony to the home of a drunken cab driver. That he does so indicates his willingness to serve others and his imaginative
sympathy for others' suffering. Like a tract child, he is ready to be humble and helpful, but he is presented not as a human child, but as a sword bearing angel:

The little boy was just as much one of God's messengers as if he had been an angel with a flaming sword, going out to fight the devil. The devil he had to fight just then was Misery. And the way he fought him was the very best. Like a wise soldier, he attacked him first in his weakest point - that was the baby; for Misery can never get such a hold of a baby as of a grown person.

For Dickens fairy stories helped to extend moral sympathy, but for MacDonald the vocabulary of fairy stories and the marvellous expressed the spiritual realities that gave supernatural authority to human loving actions.

Unlike a tract child, Diamond enters into religious experience in his own right, privileged by his imaginative capacity to have a greater spiritual insight than many of the adults around him. He is even able to exhort his mother to have faith when she confides in him about her financial worries. He believes that food will be provided from some 'big cupboard ... out of which the little cupboards are filled' (p112), and, having enough food now, he refuses to worry about next week. His attitude reminds his mother of something she has
heard at church. The Bible reference, presumably Luke 12.22-31, is not given. For MacDonald, unlike a tract writer, the lesson is given more effectively through Diamond's 'innocent and pretty fancy'.

Although the religious foundations of *Hard Times* and *At the Back of the North Wind* are different, both novelists place emphasis on children developing imaginations as a key to moral responsiveness and the development of religious feeling, however loosely defined. The imaginative faculty, present but vulnerable in children is one that, the novels argue, many adults have lost, becoming spiritually impoverished as a result. In *At the Back of the North Wind* Diamond has to walk through North Wind to enter the country at her back. She is her own front gate. In the same way both novels present adult readers with their need to return through a lost childlike capacity for wonder to a world where loving, sympathetic relationships, and in MacDonald's case, encounter with God, can take place.

In *Silas Marner*, Eppie provides the gateway for Silas's return to full humanity. However, in this novel the author insists that it is not spiritual capacity or imaginative insight in Eppie that produces Silas's conversion. It is imaginative capacity in Silas, revitalised by contact with
Eppie that produces his conversion. The novel exposes the tendency of adults to project their own religious experience on to children and define childhood as a symbol in an adult religious system. For this reason it acts as a critical commentary on the approaches taken by the novels and tracts considered in this chapter.

Throughout the novel a distinction is made between what Eppie actually is and what Silas perceives her to be, between her actions and Silas's interpretation of them and consequent response. A fictionalised child carrying a religious message is seen under construction in Silas's thought as he considers Eppie.

When Eppie first arrives at the cottage Silas thinks that she is his lost gold, misled by a short sighted glimpse of her hair. When he finds a sleeping child instead, he is carried further back in the history of his affections, remembering the times when he loved human beings rather than money. Eppie's unconscious presence affects Silas deeply, so that:

he had a dreamy feeling that this child was somehow a message come to him from that far-off life; it stirred fibres that had never been moved in Raveloe - old quiverings of tenderness - old impressions of awe at the presentiment of some power presiding over his life; for his imagination had not yet extricated itself from the sense of mystery in the child's sudden presence, and had formed no conjectures of ordinary natural means by which the event could have been brought about.
When Eppie wakes her needs and demands draw Silas away from the 'far-off' life into the present. We understand that the child is only a messenger from the past because of the experience and emotional need that Silas brings to his perception of her.

It is not only Silas who is shown reading into childhood the presence of a messenger from another world. When the child's natural father, Godfrey Cass is watching the child with Silas the author describes her effect on both of them, commenting on:

> that wide gazing calm which makes us older human beings, with our inward turmoil, feel a certain awe in the presence of a little child, such as we feel before some quiet majesty or beauty in the earth or sky - before a steady glowing planet, or a full-flowered eglantaine, or the bending trees over a silent pathway. (p175)

This Romantic concept of childhood is a key one for Dickens and George MacDonald who suggest that the religious feeling evoked by the child is grounded in a genuine spiritual power in the child's nature. The text of *Silas Marner* however challenges the belief that the child is genuinely in possession of spiritual insight. We are told that Eppie's calm comes from the soothing effect of sweet porridge and warmth rather than from 'clouds of glory'. The author also insists on the baby's lack of full human loving responsiveness. The 'wide-open blue eyes' are empty of feeling as they
gaze at Godfrey, even the affection she can show. Silas is limited, coming as it does from a 'little heart'. All she can do is 'pull Marner's withered cheek with loving disfiguration'. (p175)

As Eppie grows up she takes the place of Silas's gold, giving him a new object of delight and fulfilling the meaning of her name which is taken from the Bible; 'thou shalt be called Hephzibah ... for the Lord delighteth in thee ...' (Isaiah 63.4). Unlike Diamond, however, Eppie fails to live up to the spiritual and moral demands of having a name from the Bible in her behaviour for she has 'a fine capacity for mischief' (p185). Since Silas cannot bear to punish her, her misbehaviour becomes a further element in his spiritual and moral growth, for he must learn to practise patience and love towards her.

By charting Silas's spiritual and moral recovery through the development of his relationship with Eppie the author suggests that a religious response is founded in ties of human affection, but that in addition adults construct their own mysteries to describe the religious feelings generated by simple human love and self-sacrifice. Silas's restored faith in God centres round his interpretation of Eppie's arrival at his cottage:

'the child was sent to me; there's dealings with us - there's dealings.' (p205)
What is represented as important in the novel, however, is not that Silas has rediscovered faith in God— which would have been the grounds of rejoicing in a tract—but that his relationships with his community have been restored through the development of his relationship with Eppie.

Silas's interpretation of events is carefully considered and explored in this novel whose theme is Marner's spiritual restoration. The novelist shows us Silas's perceptions of events, and she also allows the possibility of supernatural interpretation of the plot in the reader's consciousness as well as Silas's. Silas, for example is presented initially as a folk-tale character, the mysterious figure with its load, the miser who lives by himself. The village people see Silas as possessed of supernatural powers, he is a dead man come to life again, and probably in league with the devil. However the marvellous elements in the text are constantly denied by a rationalising strand that explains the most mysterious event in human terms. We as readers know Silas's past history, we understand the psychological and emotional reasons for his isolation and love of money. We cannot, as the villagers can, interpret him as a magical figure. George Eliot's approach shows how easily a supernatural interpretation of events may be constructed and also points to
the human, non-supernatural interpretation as the most accurate. The interpretation of events George Eliot offers here is thus directly opposite to that presented by George MacDonald, for whom the supernatural and marvellous were more real.

The vocabulary of the marvellous that George Eliot employs in *Silas Marner* also helps to create the necessary backgrounds for encounters and events that are spiritually significant — a process that was considered in chapter two.

The circumstances of Eppie's arrival, for example, have a magical quality. It is around Christmas, traditionally the time for magical adventure, and Silas is enchanted:

> he was arrested, as he had been already since his loss, by the invisible wand of catelepsy, and stood like a graven image, with wide but sightless eyes, holding open his door, powerless to resist the good or evil that might enter there. (p 167)

In spite of the rationalising strand that tells us that Silas's fits are natural rather than supernatural the images and metaphors used here operate powerfully to create a spiritual space in which the external events of Silas's life can be seen becoming primarily events in the history of his soul rather than his circumstances.

In *Silas Marner* the problem of authentication of religious experience does not occur as it does in *Hard Times*. Human love and ties of duty are presented
as self-authenticating - it is these that create religious feeling, not the other way round. The Raveloe theology Silas adopts as a frame for his restored religious feelings is vague in point of doctrine, but his religious questioning is satisfied in the absence of doctrine by his love for Eppie:

'Since the time the child was sent to me and I've come to love her as myself, I've had light enough to trusten by; and now she says she'll never leave me, I think I shall trusten till I die.' (p241)

Fantasy is used in Silas Marner to create a space in which inner transactions and experiences can be explored, but it is always controlled by natural interpretations of events. It does not express ambiguity of belief as it does so often in Dickens' novels.

Since in Silas Marner, religious experience is perceived as the experience of human relationships, entry into the experience is through love, rather than through a doctrinal accuracy or a refined imagination. We are told indeed that the imagination of the Raveloe inhabitants is severely limited:

their imagination is almost barren of the images that feed desire and hope, but is all overgrown by recollections that are a perpetual pasture to fear. (p53)

Dolly Winthrop is practical rather than imaginative in her approach to life. Although she becomes Marner's spiritual guide it is love rather than inspiration that makes her tactful.
Although developing positive human relationships is the essential feature of Silas's new religion, his return to full life does depend on the development of a response of awe, which he recaptures through Eppie's imaginative exploration of her universe:

Eppie called him away from his weaving, and made him think all its pauses a holiday, reawakening his senses with her fresh life even to the old winter-flies that came crawling forth in the early spring sunshine, and warming him into joy because she had joy.

(p184)

Eppie acts as a catalyst, unconsciously developing Silas's religious sensibilities. Although her unconsciousness is stressed she is still a character constructed to carry statements about religious ideas rather than a character with a vital life of her own. As with other child characters the qualities attributed to Eppie form a statement about the religious system that controls the novel. Since Eppie has been shown not to be a source of religious awe in herself the representation of these qualities has more in common with the tract mode than with the fantasy through which Sissy and Diamond are perceived.

Eppie is presented as a child rather than as an individual, displaying the qualities and characteristics that belong generally to children in George Eliot's view at least. Even the description of her lively behaviour is not particular but conforms to the pattern
set out by Wordsworth whose influence on the novel George Eliot acknowledged. 26

Loving she is, and tractable, though wild;
And innocence hath privilege in her
To dignify arch looks and laughing eyes;
And feats of cunning; and the pretty round
Of trespasses, affected to provoke
Mock-chastisement and partnership in play ...

... this happy creature of herself
Is all-sufficient; solitude to her
Is blithe society who fills the air
With gladness and involuntary songs 27

One of Eppie's key childlike characteristics is her amorality. As a child she is represented as incapable of deliberate naughtiness although her behaviour may be troublesome. Dolly Winthrop compares her to a puppy:

'They will worry and gnaw - worry and gnaw they will, if it was one's Sunday cap as hung anywhere so as they could drag it. They know no difference, God help 'em; it's the pushing o' the teeth as sets 'em on, that's what it is.' (pp188,189)

Eppie's incapacity to 'know difference' bars her from a full religious life, just as a tract child's doctrinal ignorance does. It is only adults who are able to appreciate human ties who can make moral choices to carry out their responsibilities. Thus Silas, bound to Eppie by adult love, chooses to bear the burden of her faults himself.

The process of Eppie's education into adult responsibility also carries strong messages of
religious theory. Like the model tract child, Eppie responds perfectly to the upbringing that is assigned to her:

Perfect love has a breath of poetry which can exalt the relations of the least-instructed human beings; and this breath of poetry had surrounded Eppie from the time when she followed the bright gleam that beckoned her to Silas's hearth; so it is not surprising if, in other things than delicate prettiness, she was not quite a common village maiden, but had a touch of refinement and fervour which came from no other teaching than that of tenderly-nurtured unvitiated feeling. (p206)

Eppie shows that love alone produces the fruits of grace without natural imagination, doctrine or even parental discipline. It is noticeable that Eppie, loving, and capable now of making moral choices (her decision to stay with Silas rather than go to the Cass's) makes no statement of religious belief, even to show herself orthodox by Raveloe standards. For her the human love of Silas, Aaron and her godmother is enough - debates on theology belong to the older generation. Eppie, free from doctrinal anxiety, is the new Feuerbachian believer whose religion is openly centred in human ties and to whom doctrine is a prop for weaker souls.

Representation of children in all the writing considered in this chapter involved writers compiling in the child characters the various qualities they
perceived as essentially childlike. Such qualities belong inextricably to the religious framework of the tract or novel, because they are based on the view of human nature that is being promulgated. For Dickens and MacDonald the central, positive childlike characteristic was an intact imagination, the key to religious capability, however conceived, in children and adults alike. For George Eliot and the tract writers the key quality was immaturity that had its own particular compensating virtues - humility for the tract writers, and spontaneous joy for George Eliot. Whether they function as Everyman representatives of the Fall and the power of grace, angel messengers from a shadowy world or catalysts of adult awe, the children, except hesitantly in the tracts, are always carriers of religious ideas and exemplars of religious theories rather than characters conceived with an independent life of their own.
NOTES

Chapter four

1 This idea is discussed by, for example, David Grylls in Guardians and Angels; Parents and Children in Nineteenth-Century Literature (London, 1978).

2 The evangelicals' attitude to the imagination in relation to fairy stories is discussed in chapter six.


5 The development of a concept of childhood has been discussed by a number of writers, for example Lawrence Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500 - 1800, (London, 1977).


8 The Guardian of Education, volume 1, no 6, October 1802, pp392 - 393 (p393).


10 The Evangelical Diary: A new religious, historical, and literary Almanack for the Year of Our Lord 1815 adapted for the use of schools and families (London, 1814), p 46.

11 Mrs Cameron, The Two Mothers; or memoirs of the last century (Wellington, 1829).

12 For example, Mrs Sherwood, 'The Young Forester' Houlstons Series of Tracts nos 1, 2, 3, 4 and.
13 Scripture Illustrations for the Young, (London, 1831), pp 75, 76

14 'To a Child', RTS First Series Tracts, no 52 p 3

15 'The Young Cottager' in Annals of the Poor, pp 123 - 191, (p 142)

17 Mrs E M Field commented in The Child and his Book, (London, 1891) 'The very naughty children were personal friends ... our recollection of the terribly well-brought-up children is that each chapter found them in worse mischief than the last.' (p 328)

18 The Teacher's Offering or the Sunday School Monthly Visitor, volume 3, March, 1825, pp 34, 35 (PP 34, 35)

19 The History of Emily and her Mother, third edition (Wellington, 1829), p 21

20 The Governess; or The Little Female Academy (Wellington, 1820)


22 'Frauds on the Fairies' in Miscellane0us Papers, plays and poems, volumes 36 and 37 of the National Edition of Dickens' Works in forty volumes, (London, 1906-1908), vol 36, pp 361 - 368 (p 361)

23 At the Back of the North Wind, (London, 1950) p 324


27 'Characteristics of a Child Three Years Old' in Lyrical Ballads (1805). Reference to The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth in five volumes (Oxford, 1952), volume 1, p 229
CHAPTER FIVE

Poverty: the absence of God

Contemplation of the severe poverty of nineteenth-century Britain was liable to encourage the contemporary tendency to question the exact nature of God's sovereignty in human affairs. If God was in his Heaven, all was plainly not right with the world. Certainly, the writers I consider who dealt with the problems of urban poverty found themselves dealing at the same time with the nature of society's relationship to God and the degree to which he might be said to authorise social order or social change. Faced with the chaotic sufferings of the poor it was easy to feel that the traditional view of a social order derived from God and maintained by him was inadequate. Observation suggested that God was absent from the place traditionally assigned to him at the head of the social order. Interrogating God's Providence left writers with a silence at the heart of the traditional religious framework of orthodox Christianity which they felt obliged to fill.

Descriptions of poverty in the novels which I examine in this chapter show up the absence of God in the features of traditional Christian writing on poverty when they appear in the novels. The descriptions also show the writers struggling for a new
vocabulary with which to express their still essentially religious concerns in connection with poverty - concerns to do with the nature of humanity and the possibility of replacing the absent God. In addition, however, examination of the ways in which poverty is dealt with shows that the Christian cliches and modes of thought still have a tight grip on the expression of religious ideas even when the treatment of the subject reveals them to be inadequate.

I have drawn these conclusions from the examination of two novels in particular - Bleak House (1853) in which the response to poverty is a dominant theme, and Charles Kingsley's Alton Locke (1850) a novel which explores social injustice and attempts a Christian solution rather different from that offered by the tracts. I have also looked at The Haunted Man (1848) where the assessment of poverty is particularly closely tied to the broadly religious concerns of the story. In addition I have analysed a number of tracts, both to provide the contrast of a different religious position and mode of writing and to show the cliches and prejudices which cling to the novels in the context where they were accepted and fully significant.

The tract writers' approach to poverty was, as one might expect, unquestioningly confident and assured.
For the tract writers the social order was divinely ordained and it was a religious duty to preserve the status quo. Hannah More's Cheap Repository Tracts which began appearing in 1795 and were among the earliest evangelical tracts, were started primarily to counter revolutionary feeling among the poor rather than to evangelise. As one of her early biographers put it:

the school of Paine had been labouring to undermine, not only religious establishments, but good government, by the alluring vehicles of novels, stories and songs, she thought it right to encounter them with their own weapons ...

The poor were regarded simply as being, like the wealthy, in the state to which it had pleased God to call them. Poverty was therefore a fact of life. It required no special apology or exploration; all that was needed was a set of rules for Christian living for those who were poor. One tract, for example, admonishes the poor in its title:

This tract of a thousand a year is inscribed to the poor; but especially to those who envy the rich, and are setting their affections on glittering dust, forgetting that riches make to themselves wings and fly away; - to those who waste that time in idle wishes to obtain wealth, that might be employed in promoting their own and others' welfare; and to all who, seeking after happiness where it is not to be found, are ignorant that the best portion of earthly bliss and heavenly expectation is to be obtained in faithfully discharging the duties of their situation in the fear, the faith, and the favour of God.

The primary purpose of representations of poverty
in the tracts was to provide the examples and instructions to show the poor how to answer for themselves Henry Thornton's prayer collected in his *Family Prayers*:

> Give to the poor contentment with their lot, and to the rich a spirit of compassion and benevolence.  

Although poverty was usually pictured as a state in which it was possible to be content some tracts emphasised the hardships of poverty in order to draw attention to the power of the vital Christianity that was able to sustain characters through their troubles. Poverty is used here like death to show the reader the value of eternal rather than temporal securities. In more than one tract cottagers pronounce themselves satisfied with a meagre dinner because they have enjoyed, 'Christ with my crust'. In the *Cheap Repository Tract* 'The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain', the shepherd describes how his wife, bedridden with rheumatism brought on by the condition of their hovel is unable to turn her body, but still manages to do some sewing and contribute to the family budget:

> She was always saying, had it not been for the great goodness of God, she might have had her hands lame as well as her feet, and then she could have done nothing - but nobody had so many mercies as she had ...  

Her suffering is presented as the occasion for a display of faith and is accepted as inevitable - there is no feeling that such situations could or
should be avoided or changed.

The treatment of poverty in the tracts was affected by the characteristic tract mode of dealing with religious experience. The relationship of God with his people for example could be expressed through the relationship of the rich with the poor just as it was through family relationships. Often in the tracts the poor are treated like children in need of the control and help of the wealthy who act towards them both as parents and God. This typological role is not claimed explicitly as it is in the case of parents and children, but it is there implicitly, particularly in the Cheap Repository Tracts. 'The Gamester', for example opens with two workmen playing a quiet game of cards on the roof of a house they are supposed to be mending. They think they are hidden from view, but they are caught by two gentlemen otherwise unrelated to the action of the story. Children of evangelical parents were kept under their parents' eyes, the poor were kept under the eyes of the wealthy - both children and the poor must learn that they are under the all-seeing eye of God.

That the position of the poor in society reflected their position before God was more explicitly stated in their legal position. In the Cheap Repository
Tracts clergymen are shown functioning as magistrates, administering both spiritual and secular law. In 'Black Giles the Poacher' one such character comments from the bench:

'On Sunday I teach you from the pulpit the laws of God, whose minister I am. At present I fill the chair of the magistrate, to enforce and execute the laws of the land. Between those and the others there is more connexion than you are aware.'

Obedience to 'the laws of the land' is an expression of the poor's obedience to God. In addition, by implication secular laws carry divine sanction and there is a threat of eternal punishment as well as imprisonment if they are broken, a connection that was obviously useful for Hannah More's political aims.

The presentation of the social order as a hierarchy ordained by God had other implications for the nature of the religious experience that was expressed through it. It is typical of the tract approach that God should be viewed as functioning and comprehensible within the temporal order - tracts avoid any exploration of the supernatural or mysterious in connection with religious experience. That the social hierarchy should be presented typologically contributes to a presentation of God as a figure who can be known and recognised in the familiar terms of every day experience. God is the generous but exacting boss, a heavenly rich man, a supernatural
magistrate who rewards good behaviour and punishes wickedness. Life in Heaven is an extension of life on earth, subject to the same familiar order rather than a new mysterious encounter with God in an unexplored spiritual dimension.

This unsupernatural approach extends to tracts designed to illustrate the operation of God's Providence, a subject for which a more mysterious treatment of the experience of God might be expected. The poor are usually the main characters in such tracts and the writer illustrates God's Providence by showing how their material wants are relieved. Money and goods never come mysteriously, they are always dispensed deliberately by wealthier characters and accompanied by a pious exhortation. In Mrs Cameron's tract, 'The Sunday School Teachers' the wealthy and evangelical Mr Spencer points out to a poor widow he has provided with clothes so she can continue to go to church:

'If it had not been for your regular attendance at church, my daughters would not have brought you these things. It was God who put it into their hearts to do so. I hope you will always continue to remember where it is said - seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you ...' 10

God is manifested to the poor through the actions of the better off.

Material success is often used as a sign of spiritual progress. As they adhere faithfully to
Christianity poor believers climb the social ladder. In Mrs Sherwood's story 'The Young Forester', the hero Marten rises in the world first through his conversion. The old gentleman who instructed him in Christianity employs him as a servant, removing him from the bad influence of his dissolute family. Marten's steady behaviour and honesty earn him promotion and a helpful Christian wife. He becomes respectable. Finally his good qualities mean that he is employed as forester in the forest where he grew up. The 'divine blessing' is associated with material rather than spiritual prosperity. Such an approach is summed up neatly by Mrs Cameron's comment on the pious Dainty family in her tract, Marten and his two little scholars in Sunday School:

The blessing of God is upon the family of William and Mary Dainty. In the times of sickness, or when work is bad, they have always met with friends - they have never known want; and the peace of God is with them.

William Dainty has sometimes seemed to lose a shilling or half-a-crown by keeping the Sabbath-day holy, and by going to church at times when there was business or errands to be done: but he has often said, 'I never lost a sixpence in the way of pleasing God, but he has repaid it me, sooner or later, with a guinea.'

God is not absent in the tract, but his presence is hardly other worldly. The tract insistence that religious experience is to be expressed externally rather than through an exploration of inner life
clouds the Christianity expressed in these tracts with materialism.

Material prosperity was regarded as a reward for good behaviour. Those who dispensed charity on God's behalf, like Mr Spencer and his daughters, took care to see that their gifts went to those who had deserved them. In Hannah More's 'The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain', the narrator lays down a guide for telling the Christian and deserving poor from the un-Christian and undeserving:

If I meet with a labourer ... with his stockings and shirt tight and whole, however mean and bad his other garments are, I have seldom failed, on visiting his cottage to find that also clean and well ordered, and his wife notable and worthy of encouragement. Whereas a poor woman, who will be lying a bed or gossipping with her neighbours when she ought to be fitting out her husband in a cleanly manner, will seldom be found to be very good in other respects. (p3)

This yardstick, typical of tract stereotyping, appears again and again in tracts and tract tales. In The History of the Fairchild Family the pious Mary Bush, 'had but one room, and a little pantry, but it was a very neat room' (p176). RTS tracts abound with poor but clean Christians. Perhaps the most striking is the chimney sweep who lives in an immaculate cellar. ¹³ This association of cleanliness with Godliness appears to have become so widespread that George Eliot can mock it in Silas Marner (1861). The villagers are unable to furnish an accurate description of the pedlar who is assumed
to have stolen Silas's money. Even the glazier's wife who ought to be a reliable witness as, 'a well-intentioned woman, not given to lying, and whose house was the cleanest in the village' exaggerates her description. Here the inclusion of a clean house in a list of moral virtues shows the convention to be laughable rather than accurate. Nevertheless it does occur in many novels of the mid-century used seriously as an indication of virtue in the poor; one example is Bleak House (1853) with which I deal later in the chapter.

It is noticeable that the tract writers deal with the rural poor rather than the urban poor. For some writers this encouraged a pastoral style in which the life of the poor was softened and idealised. Legh Richmond particularly favoured this approach. In Annals of the Poor he encourages the Christian reader to look for 'that true piety and grace beneath the thatched roof which he has in vain looked for amidst the worldly grandeur of the rich' (p60), and he expands the idea explicitly in a later story in the collection:

Imagination has been accustomed, from our earliest childhood to wander among the fabled retreats of the Arcadian shepherds. We have probably often delighted ourselves in our own native country by witnessing the interesting occupation of the pastoral scene ... The poet and the painter have each lent their aid to cherish our delight in these imaginations. Many a descriptive verse has strengthened our attachment to the pastoral scene ...

'The Young Cottager', (p134)
In The History of the Fairchild Family the countryside and its contented inhabitants are used to illustrate the state of man before the Fall. The family go on an outing through idyllic scenery, replete with sheep, lambs, 'primroses, cowslips, daisies and buttercups; and the songs of the birds' (p 8). They take tea with the children's old nurse and share a cake with some cottage children. At the end of the day Mr Fairchild draws the moral:

'We have had a happy day ... for we have conversed with no persons to-day but those who live in the fear of God. If everybody in this world feared God, the world would again become nearly such as it was before Adam sinned; but by "reason of sin all lands mourn."' (p9)

Life for the rural poor was not of course as idyllic or harmonious as the tract writers liked to suggest. Life in the countryside was romanticised in the tracts as Cobbett noted bitterly:

The hop-picking is now over; and now they are employed by the Parish; that is to say, not absolutely digging holes one day and filling them up the next; but at the expense of half-ruined farmers and tradesmen and landlords, to break stones into very small pieces to make nice smooth roads lest the jolting in going along them, should create bile in the stomachs of the overfed tax-eaters. ... We left these poor fellows, after having given them, not 'religious Tracts,' which would, if they could, make the labourer content with half starvation, but, something to get them some bread and cheese and beer, being firmly convinced, that it is the body that wants filling and not the mind. 15

To record the life of the poor more accurately would presumably have raised doubts about the adequacy of
the evangelical solutions to the problems of the poor. The extent to which the writers were prepared to gloss over the real sufferings of the poor and their responsibility for it is made very clear by Hannah More's tract 'The Lancashire Collier Girl', which was reprinted by the RTS. The conditions under which children had to work in the mines are notorious, but Hannah More comments complacently that Mary, the collier girl of the title, and her brother May sometimes have exerted themselves even beyond their strength, which is now and then the case with little children, through the fault of those who exact the work from them; but since in this case the father had an eye to them during the hours of labour, while they had a prudent and tender mother also, to look after them at home, there is no particular reason to suppose that at the time of which we are now speaking, they were ever much overworked.

The novelists with whom I deal were all aware of the inadequacies of the traditional evangelical response to poverty and criticised it explicitly in their novels. Nevertheless, as I shall show, while the Christian traditions of description and analysis were shown falling apart in the novels under the pressure of the problems, particularly of the urban poor, some fragments of the tradition may remain, hampering the development of a completely new analysis.

I have contrasted the representation of rural poverty in the tracts with representations of urban
deprivation in the novels. This is because I feel that the novelists' perception of urban poverty raised for them the religious issues outlined at the beginning of the chapter and thus provides a contrast with the assumptions made about poverty in the tracts. Novelists challenge the evangelical assumptions specifically in their descriptions of urban poverty, and it can be argued that additionally they use narrative patterns and stereotypes similar to those used in the tracts without challenging them.

The inadequacy of the traditional Christian response to poverty is deliberately exposed by Dickens in *Bleak House* in the account of Mrs Pardiggle's visit to the brickmakers. The brickmaker's speech dams the complacent Christian assumption that, 'though folks may be ever so poor, 'tis nothing but their own laziness need keep them dirty,' by the bare statement of the conditions in which he and his family must live. It also dams the relevance and usefulness of tracts:

'Look at the water. Smell it! That's wot we drinks. How do you like it, and what do you think of gin instead? An't my place dirty? Yes it is dirty - it's nat'rally dirty, and it's nat'rally onwholesome; and we've had five dirty and onwholesome children, as is all dead infants, and so much the better for them, and for us besides. Have I read the little
Evangelical failure to address the real problems of poverty is addressed later in the novel, too, in Mr Chadband's address on Jo.

'I say this brother, present here among us, is devoid of parents, devoid of relations, devoid of flocks and herds, devoid of gold, of silver, and of precious stones, because he is devoid of the light that shines in upon some of us. What is that light? What is it? ...It is ... the ray of rays, the sun of suns, the moon of moons, the star of stars. It is the light of Terewth.' (pp358,359)

Chadband's suggestion that Jo's misery is the result of lacking the 'light of Terewth' shows up the falsity of the evangelical view that material prosperity came as a result of Christian commitment. The novel has shown us society's responsibility for Jo's outcast condition. The vocabulary Chadband uses highlights the inadequacy of his analysis - 'flocks and herds,' 'gold and silver' and 'precious stones' belong to an analysis of wealth in biblical periods; they are irrelevant to the condition of a nineteenth century child. Chadband's address is essentially meaningless, its words chosen to impress with a sense of religiosity rather than with cutting analysis. The florid style is very similar to the style of early evangelical publications, for example that of
The Origin and Progress of the London Religious Tract Society (1803)

The Society esteem the Bible as the fountain of divine and saving knowledge, and they endeavour to spread its living waters clearly and extensively. They also regard the writings, the experience, the devoted lives, and the triumphant deaths, of eminent and exemplary servants of Jesus Christ as emanations of excellence and goodness which flow from that divine source; and they anxiously desire to concentrate and diffuse those streams for the production of general refreshment and fertility.

Having challenged the traditional Christian view of poverty expressed in the tracts the problem remained of what view to put in its place. Not only was the tract view felt to be complacent, patronising and irrelevant, but the pressure and scope of the urban problems made it hard to see God's hand at work in the social structure at all. Nevertheless, Dickens found it hard to abandon a Christian framework altogether in his examination of poverty in Bleak House, although this meant working with a tension between the Christian framework and doubt over its power and relevance. This tension is clearly expressed in the sequence in which Snagsby is taken by Inspector Bucket into Tom-all-Alone's.

The journey is represented as a journey into hell. Snagsby between his two guides, Bucket and the constable, is led into a labyrinth of dark, decaying
streets and faces. He,
sickens in body and mind, and feels as if he were going, every moment deeper down, into the infernal gulf. (p310).

At the heart of the labyrinth however they find, not the devil, but the brickmakers' wives nursing a baby. Not only is this a sign that love and human tenderness may exist even in the depths of degradation, the tableau of the women and the baby has Christian implications as well. It is related explicitly to a nativity scene:

...the women sit by the candle. Lying in the arms of the woman who has spoken, is a very young child.

'Why, what age do you call that little creature?' says Bucket. 'It looks as if it was born yesterday.' He is not at all rough about it; and as he turns his light gently on the infant, Mr Snagsby is reminded of another infant, encircled with light, that he has seen in pictures. (p312)

This Christ in this hell, however, brings only a limited hope. For the mother indeed he threatens despair:

'...if he should be turned bad, 'spite of all I could do, and the time should come when I should sit by him in his sleep, made hard and changed, an't it likely I should think of him as he lies in my lap now, and wish he had died as Jenny's child died!' (p313)

The child is powerless to help or provide solutions to the despair of Tom-all-Alone's. Even the human love and compassion displayed by the women which Dickens often substitutes for formal religious doctrine, is limited and threatened. The reader is offered a sign of religious hope but turned from it
immediately to a world where the only chance of salvation comes from human love which appears too weak to stand against the overwhelming problems of the situation.

Snagsby's journey into Tom-all-Alane's is described partly in a fantasy mode. Lights and shadows emphasise a nightmare quality in the landscape that with its smells, mud and filthy water is otherwise only too real:

the crowd ... hovers round the three visitors like a dream of horrible faces, and fades away up alleys and into ruins, and behind walls ...

The nightmare images not only intensify the horror of the scene in the reader's consciousness, but allow the city to become a picture of hell and to function in the novel as a spiritual symbol. As J Hillis Miller has pointed out:

Life in the city is the way in which many men have experienced most directly what it means to live without God in the world. 21

The association of the haunts of extreme poverty with journeys into hell is not a feature of Bleak House alone. In other novels characters ignorant of the suffering in the city are led deep into the worst streets by a more experienced guide. The journey usually takes place under cover of darkness, a feature which makes the scenes still more dismal and hellish. In Alton Locke, for example, Alton is
introduced to the worst part of St Giles by Mackaye.
In *Helen Fleetwood* (1841) Richard, fresh from the country is led through the horrors of the factories of a northern town by a number of guides. In *Mary Barton* (1848), John Barton and Wilson go to relieve the Davenports, neither of them ignorant of suffering, but acting as guides to the uninitiated reader as they plunge down into scenes of deprivation worse than any the novel has yet touched on.

In order to examine this image of the journey into hell more closely I shall look at another example of it from *Alton Locke* - the sequence in which Alton visits the destitute Jem Downes' lodging which is built over a sewer on Jacob's Island.

The sequence begins with a build up of horror reminiscent of a ghost story. Alton is standing on Waterloo Bridge:

I looked out over the bridge into the desolate night. Below me the dark moaning river-eddies hurried downward. The wild west-wind howled past me, and leapt over the parapet downward. The huge reflection of Saint Paul's, the great tap-roots of light from lamp and window that shone upon the lurid stream, pointed down - down - down. A black wherry shot through the arch beneath me, still and smoothly downward. My brain began to whirl madly ... A man rushed past me, clambered on the parapet, and threw up his arms wildly. 23

The reiterated 'downward' points the way for the descent into the underworld that follows. Even the black wherry is reminiscent of Charon's ferry, ready to transport lost souls further into hell. Watching
reflections until the brain begins to whirl is itself a common way for a character to enter a fantasy dimension which distorts and dissolves the familiarities of every day. Although Alton Locke claims to deal with the 'grim and real' exposing to the reader the truth about the condition of the makers of 'cheap clothes and nasty' the start of this sequence prepares the reader more for a supernatural journey into horror than for a set of factual disclosures.

The nightmare quality persists as Alton accompanies Jem to Jacob's Island. The familiar streets round Waterloo Bridge are haunted by the figments of Jem's delirium tremens:

The rats! - the rats! don't you see 'em coming out of the gully holes, atween the area railings - dozens and dozens?  (p329)

As the familiar streets are left behind the nightmare is no longer restricted to Downes' imagination. Stamford Street, Bridge Street, Tooley Street dissolve into the 'wildernesses of Bermondsey' (p330) and the landscape becomes threatening and demonic for Alton as well.

He stopped at the end of a miserable blind alley, where a dirty gas-lamp just served to make darkness visible, and show the patched windows and rickety doorways of the crazy houses, whose upper storeys were lost in a brooding cloud of fog; and the pools of stagnant water at our feet; and the huge heap of cinders which filled up the waste end of the alley - a dreary, black, formless mound, on which two or three spectral
dogs prowled up and down after the offal, appearing and vanishing like dark imps in and out of the black misty chaos beyond. (p330)

The lurid, 'no light, but rather darkness visible' of Milton's hell\(^\text{25}\) is a recurring feature in descriptions of urban deprivation. In *Bleak House* the brickmakers' wives are discovered in Tom-all-Alone's by a 'gross candle' that burns 'pale and sickly in the polluted air' (p312). In *Marv Barton* the Davenports' cellar is lit only by the 'dusky light' that makes its way through the windows blocked up with rags.\(^\text{26}\) Other features of the landscape recur, too, the stagnant water, clouds of fog, fetid air and mysterious figures coming and going in the shadows are all familiar from *Bleak House*.

When Alton enters the house with Downes the horror increases. Downes' wife and infant children lie naked and dead, already half eaten by rats. Downes attacks Alton, attempting to make him drink the water from the sewer which flows under the window. In the end he himself falls into the sewer and drowns, an event described with explicit reference to hell:

The light of the policeman's lantern glared over the ghastly scene—along the double row of miserable house-backs, which lined the sides of the open tidal ditch—over strange rambling jetties, and balconies, and sleeping sheds, which hung on rotting piles over the black waters, with phosphorescent scraps of rotten fish gleaming and twinkling out of the dark hollows, like devilish grave-lights—over bubbles of poisonous gas, and bloated carcasses of dogs, and lumps of offal, floating on the stagnant olive-green hell-broth—over the slow sullen rows of oily ripple which were
dying away into the darkness far beyond, sending up, as they stirred, hot breaths of miasma - the only sign that a spark of humanity, after years of foul life, had quenched itself at last in that foul death. I almost fancied that I could see the naked face staring up at me through the slimy water; but no - it was as opaque as stone. (p333)

The Jacob's Island sewer had been described more prosaically by Mayhew a few years before:

As we passed along the reeking banks of the sewer the sun shone upon a narrow lip of water. In the bright light it appeared the colour of strong green tea. 27

In Kingsley's account 'strong green tea' has become a 'stagnant olive-green hell broth'. The squalor of urban poverty has become the raw material for a journey into hell in which the themes and motifs of horror are blended with the descriptions of urban realities. The climax of the description is the possibility of a drowned face staring up through the water, a nightmare motif from fictions of horror. 28

The creation of a hellish world appears to arise from the search for a vocabulary to express the new awareness of urban poverty in fiction, an answer to Thackeray's demand for 'some clear-sighted, energetic man' to travel 'into the poor man's country for us' and bring back his 'tale of terror and wonder'. 29 However, it does more than bring home to the reader the horror of urban squalor. The demonic world conjured up by the metaphor of hell provides a semi supernatural setting in which the symbolic,
spiritual significance of certain figures and events can function more openly. In the sequence in Tom-all-Alone's, for example, the sense that Snagsby and Bucket are making a journey into hell prepares the reader to make more on a religious level of the analogy drawn between the brickmaker's baby and the Christ child. The power of the demonic world is emphasised, too, by its ability to pervert and destroy figures that would normally function as symbols of innocence, purity and hope. Jo, for example, is far from being a young messenger of innocence and the hope of a renewed imagination, while in Alton Locke, Jem Downes' wife and children, who should be the bringers of love and hope, are dead and eaten by rats.

Poverty, viewed as a hell hidden in the heart of prosperous cities, offers a powerful symbol of moral malaise, one that was taken up by its creators to express the horror compounded of fear, guilt and moral outrage that they felt in the face of the poverty they saw around them. The hell in which the poor must live is thus not only a reflection of their own suffering but also of the guilt of those who have condemned them to it. The wealthy are threatened by the hell they have created and which they try to ignore.
The hell hidden in the heart of the city reaches out and threatens to engulf and punish the wealthy through the spread of disease from the homes of the poor. Tom-all-Alone's breeds fever that threatens the whole of society:

There is not an atom of Tom's slime, not a cubic inch of any pestilential gas in which he lives, not one obscenity or degradation about him, not an ignorance, not a wickedness, not a brutality of his committing, but shall work its retribution through every order of society, up to ... the highest of the high. Verily, what with tainting, plundering and spoiling, Tom has his revenge. (p627, 628)

The spread of fever is both mimetic and symbolic, it is seen springing not only from the slime and filth of the poor dwellings, but also from the brutality and wickedness that take place there. The idea that sickness comes as a retribution carries some suggestion of an outraged moral force a God who punishes with hell. However, both hell and retribution are in fact tied to the material world and need no supernatural help to function. The narrator stands in prophetic judgement on society here, but the punishment of which he warns is man made, he is not the mouth piece of God. The new description of poverty is still drawn from the Christian cosmology, but God's place in it is uncertain, and likely to be empty.

The model of society as superficially prosperous but inwardly corrupt could also be applied to the individual, exposing the chaos of guilt, fear and
uncertainty hidden beneath a socially acceptable and successful exterior. The nightmare images of poverty which on one level create a semi supernatural world of spiritual exchange could be used to symbolise the workings of a damaged psyche. In *The Haunted Man* (1848) Dickens uses the figure of a child brutalised by poverty in just this way to symbolise the inner state of a man bereft of the memory of his emotional past. Redlaw is haunted not only by the ghost, but also by a street child so damaged by his experiences that he has no softening memories of human love and natural ties to lose. The child personifies what the man has chosen to become.

Redlaw deliberately puts himself outside the community by choosing hardness of heart. His individual guilt epitomises the corporate hardness that, in Dickens' view resulted in the outrage of poverty. The use of the child points the reader to the wider social implications of Redlaw's action, and at the same time provides a powerful image of the individual's destructive bitterness.

*The Haunted Man* makes conscious use of the potential of the fantasy mode for creating a world in which figures and events can be used to express and expose spiritual transactions. In the shadowy setting of the old college the woman Milly becomes an embodiment
of human love and compassion opposed to the violence and despair represented by the child.

I have suggested that God is absent in the descriptions of poverty that I have considered apart from the tracts. In Alton Locke, a novel by a Christian writer, an attempt is made to reintroduce him; the Christian God is represented fighting for justice for the poor by the conversion of the narrator and his friend who have both been Chartist agitators. As Christians they continue their struggle, albeit more peacably. However, their conversion does not touch the previous descriptions of deprivation which draw on images of hell. In addition their struggle against poverty is to be carried on from overseas; after they have been converted they are shipped away to America. Their Christianity does not affect or challenge effectively the poverty with which they have been engaged, and it is thus hard to rediscover God, present and active in society, through it, however strongly Kingsley may have believed that he was. 30

In Dickens' writing the overall tendency is for orthodox belief to be replaced by belief in human compassion and love. In The Haunted Man human compassion is seen to work as a powerful force against spiritual and material poverty. The limited scope of the story allows Milly's love to operate
succefully without raising issues in which merely human love is powerless. God is absent, but he is not missed. In Bleak House the wider social scene that is explored emphasises the inadequacy of human compassion to cope with the problems of poverty. God is absent, but to avoid despair permeating the novel his presence in some form is hinted at and played with. To quote Barry Qualls again:

...what strikes us increasingly about Dickens is his determination to have it both ways: to invoke God and yet celebrate man as man's only aid ... 31

The invocation of the God of Christian tradition sometimes occasions in the novel, not only sequences where the reader must hesitate between belief in God and belief in man, but also the restatement of prejudices and stereotypes familiar from the tracts without any form of challenge. The story of Charley Neckett, contained in Esther's narrative, for example, has many similarities in the treatment and assessment of Charley to the way such a character might be presented in the tracts.

The outline of Charley's history is very like that of a tract story that illustrates growth in grace through growth in respectability. Charley is rescued from extreme poverty by Jarndyce and employed as Esther's maid. She seals a progress very similar to the young forester's by her devotion to Esther and
her final, respectable marriage to a miller.

Although Charley does not actually undergo a religious conversion before she begins her upward path there is no doubt that she belongs to the virtuous and deserving poor. She works hard to support her brother and sister, and she is even engaged in the 'clean' pursuit of washing clothes. Jarndyce, acting like a tract gentleman ascertains that her father was an honest hard working man before he relieves the family.

As Esther's maid Charley is as subservient and as patronised as any servant in a tract, sometimes even more so. She introduces herself to Esther for example as 'a present from Mr Jarndyce', (p335) which effectively reduces her status below that of the child to that of a pet dog. Her attempts to learn to read and write are also occasions for rather patronising laughter. Charley the poor girl will remain illiterate - she 'seemed to have no natural power over a pen' (p427).

When Jo brings smallpox to Bleak House he passes it to Charley, and it is through her that Esther is infected. Jo is never accused of hurting Charley, however although he is accused of hurting Esther. The assessment is confusing; strictly if blame can be apportioned at all in the case of contagious disease, Jo should be blamed for Charley's
suffering and Charley for Esther's. It appears that Charley does not count as a person in the same way that Esther does.

Charley is patronised by those who are represented as good in the novel because their charity springs from human fellow feeling with those they relieve. Their attitude hampers the reader's belief in human compassion in the very area of the book, Esther's narrative, which should be its stronghold. Charley's history shows a poor girl being relieved without being preached at, but it is as though, in an effort to restate a tract-type history from a humanitarian angle, Dickens has been betrayed into giving his narrator a tract-type patronising attitude towards the poor.

The account of Charley's rescue told by Esther is paralleled by the account of Jo which belongs to the other narrator. Jo is a figure who initially appears to be beyond rescue. There is no exploitation of pathos in the account of his poverty and suffering. He is not a picturesque character. Even when he is engaged in the potentially sentimental activity of sweeping the step outside the burial ground where his friend the law writer lies buried he remains a 'slouching figure' who comes with the night (pp151,152).

Charley was implicitly reduced to the status of a
pet dog, Jo is explicitly described as below the level of an animal:

A band of music comes and plays. Jo listens to it. So does a dog .... probably with much the same amount of animal satisfaction; likewise as to awakened association, aspiration or regret, melancholy or joyful reference to things beyond the senses, they are probably upon a par. But, otherwise, how far above the human listener is the brute! (p222)

The comment here does not patronise Jo but challenges and condemns the society that has produced him in a way that no tract figure does. The three tract remedies for poverty: charity, religion and the law all notably fail to solve the problem he represents. He appears to be beyond the help of even Esther's compassion, running away from her help.

In his initial conception Jo is a character outside the range of thinking for the tract writers. His degradation is unlike that even of the undeserving poor, for it is not only not seen as his fault, but he is also capable of showing traces of the human feeling that is the mark of the saved in this novel, something that the normal stereotype of the undeserving poor would not be able to do. When he sweeps the burial ground steps, the narrator comments:

Though a rejected witness, who 'can't exactly say' what will be done to him in greater hands than men's, thou art not quite in outer darkness. There is something like a distant ray of light in thy muttered reason for this: 'He wos wery good to me, he wos!' (p152)
For much of the novel Jo stands as a challenge to society and to the analyses of poverty offered by the complacent. Potentially the character is one through which new statements and a new analysis could be made. However, at the end of his history elements of tract narrative and tract analysis reassert themselves. Jo dies, rescued, washed and cared for, repenting of the trouble he has caused and with a prayer on his lips. While Dickens is at pains to point out how little Jo has been helped by the consciously religious, when he allows the alternative human compassion of Esther and her friends to triumph in his rescue, he is, it appears, forced to return to an orthodox Christian narrative unit to express it. Jo is returned to a familiar, religious narrative conclusion to his story to find a resolution for the problems he has presented. Such a resolution after what has gone before can only be inadequate. It is not surprising that the narrator launches into his own attack on society after Jo's death rather than leaving the death to speak for itself. Inadequacy must be covered up with declamation:

The light is come upon the dark benighted way. Dead! Dead your Majesty. Dead, my lords and gentlemen. Dead, Right Reverends and Wrong Reverends of every order. Dead, men and women, born with Heavenly compassion in your hearts. And dying thus around us every day. (p649)
Jo no longer presents a challenge to the social order, instead his death is an excuse for an appeal for charitable compassion from the rich which would not be out of place in a tract. The disintegration of Jo's role shows how insistent the traditional analysis of poverty present in the tract still was. However, although writers might still invoke some of the traditional attitudes to the poor and offer traditional solutions to their problems the complacent feeling that God was the head of the established social order that is so central to the tract view had been eroded. Even in the Christian novel Alton Locke aspects of the social order are seen to be outside God's will:

I used ... to call it the curse of circumstance that I was a sickly, decrepit Cockney. My mother used to tell me that it was the cross which God had given me to bear. I know now that she was right there. She used to say that my disease was God's will. I do not think, though, that she spoke right there also. I think that it was the will of the world and of the devil, of man's avarice and laziness and ignorance. (p6)

A sense of God's absence from the new vision of poverty explored in the novels considered here is expressed particularly through the metamorphosis of urban landscapes into secular hells. Even without God the suffering induced by poverty gnawed at the consciences of the better off - the vision of hell expressed the sense of God's absence, the
horror of the suffering, and the moral and spiritual
guilt of the wealthy. All these ideas were contained
and could be explored within the semi-supernatural
world created by the metamorphosis. The underworld
created by this new metaphor for poverty became itself
an image through which the darkness of individual
psyches could be explored and expressed. Evangelicals
had used images of darkness to describe the poor
who were outside the Christian fold, lost in 'darkness'
and 'death like apathy', confident that such darkness
could be combatted by religious education. In the
vision of the novels considered here the darkness is
less easily controlled. The secular hell threatens
to engulf the church, society and the individual
citizen in the violence of its chaos.
NOTES

Chapter five

1 See 'Note on the Tracts' at the beginning of this thesis.

2 William Roberts, Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence of Mrs Hannah More, 3 volumes, (London, 1834), volume 2, p425

3 'Dialogue on Riches: or a thousand a year', Houlstons Series of Tracts, no 40, in Narrative Tracts Moral and Religious (London, 1860)

4 Henry Thornton, Family Prayers (London, 1832) p137

5 A phrase used by the cottagers in 'The Happy Cottagers', RTS Second Series Tracts, no 577, p3

6 Cheap Repository Longer Tracts, pp1-37 (p13)

7 Cheap Repository Shorter Tracts, pp241 - 245

8 A point made explicitly in such tracts as Mrs Sherwood's, The Father's Eye (Berwick, 1833)

9 Cheap Repository Shorter Tracts, pp59-94 (p72)

10 Houlstons Series of Tracts, no 6, pp9,10

11 Houlstons Series of Tracts, nos 1 - 4

12 'The History of Marten and his two little scholars in Sunday School, Philadelphia Sunday School edition, (Philadelphia, 1827), p140

13 'William Black The Chimney Sweep', RTS Second Series Tracts, no 508, p3


15 William Cobbett, Rural Rides in the Counties of Surrey, Kent, Sussex, Hampshire, Wiltshire, Gloucestershire, Herefordshire, Worcestershire, Somersershire, Oxfordshire, Berkshire, Essex, Suffolk, Norfolk and Hertfordshire with economical and political observations relative to matters applicable to, and illustrated by the state of those counties respectively, edited by E W Martin from the edition of 1830 (London, 1975)
16 'The Affectionate Daughter', RTS Second Series Tracts, no 514

17 Cheap Repository Shorter Tracts, pp 20 -31 (p21)


19 'Sorrowful Sam; or the two blacksmiths', Cheap Repository Shorter Tracts, pp209 - 230 (p216)

20 The Origin and Progress of the London Religious Tract Society (London, 1803), p7, 8


22 Charlotte Elizabeth, Helen Fleetwood, (London, 1841)


24 Rosemary Jackson discusses this point in Fantasy: the Literature of Subversion, (London, 1981), p45f. It is of course the way that Alice enters the Looking Glass World in Lewis Carroll, Through the Looking Glass and what Alice found there (London, 1872)

25 Paradise Lost, Book 1, lines 62-64

...yet from those flames
No light, but rather darkness visible
Serv'd only to discover sights of woe


28 See Rosemary Jackson, Fantasy the Literature of Subversion

30 Kingsley's position is made clear in Frances Kingsley, *Charles Kingsley his letters and memories of his life*, 2 volumes (London, 1877)


32 *Sunday School Union Report* (London, 1824) p 48. The Sunday School Union was an interdenominational society which co-ordinated the activities of affiliated schools around the country.
CHAPTER SIX

Fairy Tales and the presence of God

Any consideration of experience that is termed religious, however loosely, must include some exploration of the perceived nature and action of God within the experience. In the last chapter I suggested that the experience of God mediated through some accounts of life in the city was one of absence. In this chapter I shall look at ways in which a sense of God's presence in interaction with the human personality is described. There is a very noticeable difference between the methods used to describe God's presence in the tracts and that used by the later writers I deal with. I have looked particularly at descriptions of God's presence by the two Christian novelists MacDonald and Kingsley, and I shall argue that their accounts of God's presence are affected less by the presence of tract stereotypes than from a felt need to refute them. Their descriptions of God are both apologetic and argumentative and as such are tied to the concept of God which they wish to refute.

In the works of Christian writers God is intended to be felt as genuinely present in the attempts to describe religious experience. In the work of less
committed writers the degree to which the presence of a transcendent God can be admitted is uncertain, while in some descriptions it is denied altogether. In this chapter I look briefly again at the drifting boat sequence in *Romola* (1863) in order to examine the description of an essentially religious experience in which the presence of God is ultimately denied. I have chosen this particular sequence because aspects of it form an interesting comparison with a similar sequence in *Phantastes* (1858) the novel by George MacDonald which I examine in this chapter. I also look at *The Water Babies* (1863). I have selected these two works by the Christian writers I deal with because both are written as fairy stories. The mediation of God through the vocabulary and themes of the fairy story is an aspect I particularly wish to consider, because it forms such a complete contrast with the doctrinal, 'daily task' emphasis of the tracts, and with the assertion of the quotation which forms the title of this thesis.

For believers particularly, God is a difficult character to accommodate in a narrative. He must be seen to exist both inside and outside the text, and to impinge on the reader's life as well as on the lives of characters in the story. Even in the context of the fiction, God's role outside the narrative is more important than his role within it.
The metaphysical problems posed by the need to introduce God into a tract or novel are intricate, and they are further complicated by the fact that, for the Protestant believer, God is most usually encountered through the written word in the pages of the Bible. The narrative that includes God only to tell a fictional story about him is still forced to represent him though a medium in which he is truly manifested and known for the believer.

For the evangelical tract writers the problem presented itself simply in the form of fictional accounts being lies and therefore unacceptable.¹ All the writers were concerned to make their narratives as factually convincing as they could in order to avoid presenting God in the context of an obvious lie. Fairy stories were particularly suspect because of their lack of mimetic connection to the material world. Mrs Sherwood commented in her introduction to her new version of Sarah Fielding's *The Governess*:

> Several fairy-tales were incidentally introduced into the original work; and as it is not unlikely that such compositions formed at that period, one of the chief amusements of the infant mind a single tale of this description is admitted into the present edition. But since fanciful productions of this sort can never be rendered generally useful, it has been thought proper to suppress the rest, substituting in their place such appropriate relations as seem more likely to conduce to juvenile edification. ²
The danger of fairy tales is spelled out in the narrative by 'the governess' herself. She points out that no one can do well by themselves, but needs the holy Spirit to help them. Since the Holy Spirit cannot reasonably be introduced into fairy stories, representations of characters' achievements in them must be a distortion of the truth.

In a similar vein, Hannah More, in her *Cheap Repository Tracts* takes pain to show up the 'wise women' consulted by country people as unscrupulous cheats. The supernatural in any form is discredited by the tract writers.

As well as being unwelcome because of their lack of truth to life, fairy stories were also considered by some to be immoral on other grounds. A correspondent to the *Guardian of Education* in July 1803 took particular exception to *Cinderella*:

...this is perhaps one of the most exceptionable books that was ever written for children, I hope you will be rather more severe upon it in a second edition, as I believe this book still finds its way into our Nurseries and Schoolrooms. It paints some of the worst passions that can enter into the human breast, and of which little children should, if possible, be totally ignorant; such as envy, jealousy, a dislike to mothers-in-law and half-sisters, vanity, a love of dress etc.

In spite of their reluctance to engage with a supernatural world and with stories that were used by later writers to provoke a sense of awe and mystery,
the tract writers were still committed to the task of presenting a transcendent, awe-inspiring God to their readers. The key to their approach was their assumption that God was a real presence in the world whose behaviour and attributes could be described unerringly from a study of the Bible. Narrative that dealt with what was perceived as everyday life in the real world was forced to include God since he was regarded as part of that world. No description of everyday life, however trivial could fail to include God, for he not only created the world, but watched over it, weighing up the moral implications of every human action. It is the thought of God's all seeing eye that strikes Emily Fairchild with guilt when she steals plums from her mother's cupboard:

'There is nobody in this room,' she said; and nobody sees me, it is true; but God is in this room; He sees me; His eye is now upon me; I cannot hide what I am going to do from Him; He knows everything, and He has power to cast me into hell.' (p83)

God is represented in a number of ways in the tract accounts of everyday life. He is seen at work in people's lives, providentially through circumstances, and also through the action of his grace that improves the moral quality of the life they lead. God's presence is also insisted upon by direct appeal to the Bible, which both manifests God and declares his
involvement in human affairs. A similar manifestation occurs when characters pray or worship God through the liturgy. Additionally God may be presented through types and allegories. Fathers are often used to display the nature of God and to be his representative in the text.

The effect of all these methods is to distance God both from the reader and from the characters in the tract. God is referred to but he is not there. Tales of providential dispensation for example, do not involve the direct, miraculous intervention of God himself, but are histories of human means carrying out God's purposes. The wealthy relieve the poor. In one of Hannah More's tracts there is even the suggestion that by practising the 'Christian' virtues of submission and hard work the poor can prosper without intervention from either man or God. Mr Stephens the evangelical local land owner reprimands one of his tenants:

'Lazy folks, Sam, are always complaining of the hardness of the times, while industrious ones are trying to mend them.'

Such stories place God's actions in the world on a material rather than a supernatural footing. Human instrumentality keeps God in heaven and saves the writer from having to introduce him directly into the text. The action of God's grace in characters lives is displayed in a similar, temporal way.
Growth in grace is measured by the successful carrying out of work and increased harmony in the home rather than by accounts of developing spiritual insight and communion with God. Mrs Cameron's 'The Novice' in Narrative Tracts Moral and Religious illustrates this. Two brothers, Philip and Thomas Rogers, are both religious. Philip's religion is false however and fills him with pride - he begins to get ideas beyond his station and sets up as a preacher. Thomas's religion is genuine - his life both at work and home is correspondingly steadier and he is able to rescue his brother and pay the debts he has incurred.

That God is involved with the daily lives of characters is enforced in the tracts not by descriptions of his presence but by appeals to Scripture. Bible verses act as a commentary on the story being told, emphasising that the events are arranged in accordance with God's will. In the RTS second series tract, 'The remarkable History of Elizabeth Loveless', there are seventeen direct quotations from the Bible in the space of eight pages, together with a number of indirect references and much use of biblical phrasing. The writer claims:

There is, perhaps, no situation or circumstance in life, to which some text of Scripture is not applicable, for it was all given, we are informed, by the inspiration of God, and is
profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for
correction, and for instruction in righteousness.
(2Tim iii.16) 8

The use of Scripture in the tracts generally
reinforces this message, insisting that readers, too
bring their lives into conformity with selected
texts and submit to the pattern of life and
religious experience that has been laid down for
them. 'The History of Elizabeth Loveless' is an
interesting example of the way a story is forced
into a religious pattern through its association
with Bible texts. Elizabeth's story by itself
is not particularly edifying since its main interest
is the way in which she is enabled to settle herself
comfortably in life by inheriting £300 a year and
marrying a wealthy farmer. The weight of texts
however push the reader to conclude with the author
that Elizabeth is more than a thrifty lady with
material ambitions, and that 'there is much reason
to believe that Elizabeth, her husband, and her
aged parents, are all serious and pious characters.'
(p8)

In addition to reinforcing the sense of God's
overriding control of events Bible references
provide an ideal method for tract writers to invoke
God without having to present him directly. Scripture
speaks of God with authority. It was treated by the
writers as irrefutable evidence of God's nature and
activity. The weight of biblical language, too, impressed a Bible reference with solemnity and authority. Religious experiences such as death or conversion are marked in the tracts not only by direct quotation from the Bible, but by a style that recalls the Authorised Version. The tendency extended to evangelical reports; the Annual Report of the Sunday School Union for 1824 comments:

The dying beds of many youthful disciples have also proclaimed the triumphs of divine grace, and many hopeful children are arising beneath their teachers' care to be the joy and crown of rejoicing. 9

While a dying child in an RTS narrative tract, 'little Nelly', dies quoting the Bible:

... she desired prayer to be offered up to God for her; and when her request had been complied with concluded by saying, 'God be merciful to me a sinner, for Christ's sake.' 10

The encounter with God in these experiences is left unexplored, but he is referred to with religious solemnity and awe. Tract writers select texts that reinforce a sense of distance in the relationship between God and people. God is holy and powerful, people are sinful and weak. The texts of 'Sixteen short sermons' an RTS first series tract for example, deal almost exclusively with judgement and sin. 11 The liturgy also provided a model language in which God was addressed with awe. In the prayers included in The Fairchild Family, for example, God is always addressed at the least as 'most Holy God', a mode of address that recalls the collects.
The use of family relationships to demonstrate the relationship between God and people was discussed in chapter four. Usually the father's role is used in such a way that it emphasises God's judgement and righteous anger against humanity. Tract fathers tend to claim a likeness to God when they are engaged in punishing their children. In Mrs Sherwood's, *The Father's Eve*, the child who disobeys by leaving the safety of his father's watchful care, first suffers by falling into a stream, and is then punished by being denied the pleasure of his father's company, just as disobedient humanity will be cut off from the presence of God.\(^{12}\)

In tract narratives that make use of typology the father 'stands in the place of God' to his children. He thus displays in the tract the attributes and activities of God. The reader is enabled to view God in action without the writer attempting to describe an encounter with God directly. By placing the type of God in the centre of the domestic unit the activity of God is mediated through the incidents of every day life rather than through any dramatic encounters or revelations between the natural and the supernatural worlds.

Although experience of God is placed insistently in a context removed from any suggestion of the supernatural or the mysterious, tract writers
occasionally wish to suggest that certain characters are enjoying a privileged experience of God's presence. These are characters who are undergoing extreme privation, suffering or death and whose inner joy is therefore a witness to the power of their faith and the reality of God, who has transformed their attitude to their situation. Such characters may be represented in a state of near ecstasy, murmuring God's name, and exclaiming over his goodness. However, the writers never attempt to recreate for their readers the exact nature of the joy and peace experienced by the sufferers. Their ecstasy is recorded as if it had been observed by the narrator; we are given no access to their inward emotional and spiritual state beyond what is implied by their words and gestures. Thus the attitude of a poor Indian woman who lives in a state of near starvation is recorded by one of the women who relieves her and who is struck by her pious exclamations:

'So I say, Sarah won't sin to get victuals. I no steal, no eat stole food, though I be hungry ever so long: then God gives me a small look of himself, of his Son, and his glory; and I think in my heart they all will be mine soon; then I not suffer hunger any more.'

God's presence in the tracts is both pervasive and evasive. An assumption of God's reality and a tight doctrinal system prescribing his activity is the reason for the tracts' existence and inevitably
conditions their construction. At the same time a direct presentation of God is not attempted. He is talked about and acknowledged, but he remains untouched by the narrative, appearing only by implication in human action and the words of the Bible.

George MacDonald's approach to presenting God is very different. Where the tract writers insisted that God was known chiefly through the world of material realities MacDonald represents the physical and temporal world as perceptually limiting. For him true reality and the source of true values lay outside the physical universe. MacDonald often expresses this idea in the form of an attack on the materialism and doctrinal legalism of more orthodox Christians of an evangelical or non-Conformist stamp. In Donal Grant (1883) Arctura, the heroine is blinded to spiritual reality by her attachment to a legalistic Scottish Calvinism. At first she considers the hero, Donal Grant, as a heretic because of his easy relationship with God and the unorthodox religious teaching he gives her cousin whose tutor he is. MacDonald symbolises her rescue from legalism by having the hero rescue her from an underground chapel where she has been imprisoned by her wicked uncle.
"Arctura has to learn a new relationship with God, one based on the perception and experience of spiritual reality rather than on doctrinal correctness. Imprisoned in the vault, Arctura is terrified, but, 'such a sense of absolute helplessness overwhelmed Arctura that she felt awake in her an endless claim upon the protection of her original, the source of her being.' (volume 3, p 215). God responds by giving her a sense of safety. This is expressed, not through an appropriate Bible verse, but by a feeling that, 'it was a night of June, with roses, roses, roses, everywhere!' (vol 3, p 216).

Donal Grant is not intended to be a fantasy in the same way that some of MacDonald's works are. It is set in the material world, but MacDonald's concern is still to show the values and transactions of the 'real' spiritual world. Events are to be judged by their manifestation of God's transactions rather than by their bearing on the material and temporal biographies of the characters. Tract writers, too define and interpret the events of their narratives in the light of their understanding of God's dispensation, but they never cast doubt on the status of life in this world. Transactions with God are firmly rooted in the material and temporal experiences of their characters; experience of heaven will come later after death. For MacDonald only
his vision of heaven and God's love mattered, the material world was shadowy and its values and transactions conditioned by sensual perception were artificial.

MacDonald's programme of literary evangelisation thus involved educating his readers in the perception and values of the spiritual world. In his efforts to make the reader look beyond the material, MacDonald shares Dickens' preoccupation with the imagination as the seat of religious response. Like Dickens, he uses fairy stories and the themes of romance to lead the reader out of materialism into a state of awe and an awareness of values unconditioned by market prices or social custom. However, where Dickens represents the physical universe as a sufficient stimulus to wonder, MacDonald places the source of awe firmly in a spiritual dimension. Dickens hesitates to proclaim God fully as the focus of religious feeling, preferring to present characters interpreting their own sources of wonder derived from viewing the world imaginatively. Ultimately, as we have seen, fantasy in Dickens' novels is used to cover uncertainty about the nature of the spiritual world rather than to declare God.

MacDonald's fantasies and fairy stories embody his spiritual ideas - the worlds he creates are conditioned
by his perception of the spiritual dimension. He commented in his essay 'The Fantastic Imagination':

In the moral world ... a man may clothe in new forms, and for this employ his imagination freely, but he must invent nothing. He may not for any purpose turn its laws upside down. He must not meddle with the relations of live souls. The laws of the spirit of man must hold, alike in this world and in any world he may invent. (p315, 316)

Phantastes, the first of MacDonald's prose works, subtitled 'a faerie Romance' does not refer to God specifically. Nevertheless, it functions like all MacDonald's novels to educate the reader to appreciate God's presence. MacDonald's son, Greville, commented rather fulsomely on the novel in his biography of his father:

Phantastes, in a word is a spiritual pilgrimage out of this world of impoverishing possessions into the fairy Kingdom of Heaven ... so does Phantastes bring home to us in allusive burgeoning the celestial purpose of our daily existence. Its very religion is fairyland - and how much more George MacDonald would have us set out and discover. 17

Phantastes begins the reader's education by placing the hero's adventures in fairy land to which he is admitted by the mysterious figure of his great grandmother on the day after his twenty-first birthday. The reader is involved from the outset in a world that is other and unpredictable. Anados, the hero, enters fairy land from his bedroom:

I saw that a large green marble basin, in which I was wont to wash ... was overflowing like a spring; and that a stream of clear water was
running over the carpet, all the length of the room, finding its outlet I knew not where. And, stranger still, where this carpet, which I had designed myself to imitate a field of grass and daisies, bordered the course of the little stream the grass blades and daisies seemed to wave in a tiny breeze ...

Fairyland is unpredictable and strange not only in the way it appears. Anados is subject to random encounters with characters whose identity and nature remain uncertain. Appearances are deceptive. A coarse-featured country woman nevertheless has fairy blood in her. A beech tree offers Anados devoted human love. Pursuing a beautiful 'white lady' he believes he has encountered her only to find instead an evil enchantress who seduces him and betrays him to the ogre-like ash tree. Although physical appearances shift and are deceptive, however, clues to the characters' true identity exist if Anados can only learn to read them. The country woman for example has something unusual about her:

I could not call it grace, and yet it was an expression that strangely contrasted with the form of her features. (p18)

Anados is warned to walk round those he meets, something he omits to do with the enchantress. When he does see her back it is:

a strange horrible object. It looked like an open coffin set up on one end ... a rough representation of the human frame, only hollow, as if made of decaying bark torn from a tree (p72, 73)

Anados and the reader must learn that the true
nature of a person is his or her moral nature, and that those who judge only by superficial appearances may be mistaken. As he journeys through fairy land Anados' capacity for making a true valuation of those he meets increases, until finally he is able to see through a false religious cult whose ritual has deceived even the good knight whose service he has entered.

When Anados returns from fairy land he has been away for twenty one days - one day for each year of his life. The coincidence of the numbers suggests that his adventures are connected to his life's experiences, restating them or supplying the education in moral perception that his years and experience have not given him. Many of his adventures in fact parallel an outline of individual growth that MacDonald set out in a later essay on individual development. In this essay he traces the development of the inner life from the infant's security in its mother's love to a conversion to Christianity late in life. The individual goes through a number of stages. He discovers conscience by opposing his will to his mother's, he longs to be a hero and fails, introduction to science robs him of his sense of poetry in creation. He falls in love and his life is transformed with purpose which disappears under the pressures of daily existence. Immediately
before his conversion his own sense of moral poverty makes him long for death as the only honest action he can take.

All these stages have counterparts in *Phantastes*. Anados encounters the security of mother love in the embrace of an old woman. On entering fairy land he deliberately chooses to follow a path different from the one apparently marked out for him. He attempts heroic action and fails, defeated and imprisoned by a knight who is his double. He wanders for days oppressed by a shadow that removes his sense of wonder in the universe. He falls in love with a white lady a quest for whom forms the purpose of the first part of his journey. While love stirs his powers of creativity and endurance he fails persistently to maintain the ideal of reverent love that the lady inspires in him, and after a last encounter in the palace of fairy land he is returned to the desolate world of his shadow. At this point, and again towards the end of his time in fairy land he chooses death rather than the life he feels he is unworthy to lead:

'I will not be tortured to death,' I cried; 'I will meet it half way. The life within me is yet enough to bear me up to the face of Death and then I die unconquered.' (p190)

Only a specific conversion to Christianity is lacking. *Phantastes* appears to offer an account of individual
development embodied in a marvellous world. The reader is encouraged to see that growth must be moral and spiritual as well as physical and social. Anados has come of age in the 'real' world, but his inner development is still incomplete. The events of his journey in fairy land allow him to relive and reinterpret on a spiritual plane the events of his past life. This experience helps him to grow up spiritually.

Although God is never mentioned the idea of him haunts the book. Once Anados has returned to his home he knows that to recapture the love he experienced in his relationship with the old woman he must die - the normal entry to heaven for a believer. The source of the book's values all come from the other side of death, and therefore by association from heaven:

I often think of the wise woman in the cottage, and of her solemn assurance that she knew something too good to be told ...I...console myself by saying: 'I have come through the door of Dismay; and the way back from the world into which that has led me, is through my tomb ... I shall find it one day and be glad.' (p279)

At the centre of the book are the powers of love, self-sacrifice and forgiveness, the attributes of the Christian God, embodied in the character of the old woman.

Throughout the novel love and forgiveness are the forces that restore Anados and contribute to his
moral growth. Early in the novel he is rescued from danger by the sacrificial love of the beech tree. Later a girl whom he has injured forgives him and rescues him from prison. After he has been betrayed by the enchantress he is restored by the motherly kindness of a farmer's wife who takes him in and gives him sympathy, food and rest. His own love for the white lady is a source of moral development in his life. Love and forgiveness are embodied in the old woman at whose cottage Anados arrives after he first decides to embrace death. She rescues Anados at great cost to herself from his insistence that he will explore the Timeless, and sends him on his way refreshed. Now, for the first time since he has entered fairy land, Anados is able to take part in an adventure in which he works with and serves others. The old woman offers Anados an ideal maternal love, but she also represents the love of God towards the individual soul.

MacDonald frequently uses an idealised maternal love to embody divine love in his fantasy tales. In *The Princess and Curdie* (1883) for example, the mysterious figure of the princess's great-great-grandmother is referred to as the 'Mother of Lights' a female version of the title given to God in James 1.17. MacDonald's decision to represent God as
mother rather than father suggests an immediate contrast with the conventional tract type of God as the punishing father. MacDonald, a follower of F D Maurice, wished to move Christianity away from doctrines of everlasting punishment and damnation. *Lilith* (1895) carries the suggestion in its climactic vision that even the devil may be forgiven by God. To suggest, as MacDonald does, that God's love is like that of the ideal nurturing mother appears to be a deliberate challenge to the tract way of thinking about God which MacDonald found abhorrent.

MacDonald does not evangelise by warning his readers of death and judgement to come as the tract writers did. Instead, through his use of the fairy story, which is in itself a challenge to the tract mistrust of such tales, he attempts, not only to manifest a new vision of God, but also to reawaken the readers' capacity for spiritual perception. He commented in his essay 'The Fantastic Imagination' that nature is mood-engendering, thought-provoking: such ought the sonata, such ought the fairytale to be.

Through his fantasies he attempts to feed the imagination of the reader with images that will ultimately lead her to God.
MacDonald's images, which as Robert Lee Woolf has demonstrated, are largely drawn from the *marchen* of the German Romantics, are used by him in such a way that their capacity to engender mood and meditation is retained. He avoids the use of allegory in which each image would be tied to a definite theological meaning. The avoidance is deliberate, MacDonald felt that:

> he must be an artist indeed who can, in any mode, produce a strict allegory that is not a weariness to the spirit.  

Instead he tends to use the freer form of parable in which only one element of the image or sequence has a specific meaning. In *The Princess and the Goblin*, (1872) for example, the princess's grandmother gives her a ring to which a ball of specially woven thread is attached. The grandmother keeps hold of the other end of the thread, and when Irene, the princess, is in danger all she has to do is follow the thread, bearing in mind her grandmother's warning:

> 'remember it may seem to you a very roundabout way indeed, and you must not doubt the thread. Of one thing you may be sure, that while you hold it, I hold it too'  

The grandmother's instructions suggest that the ring and the thread present a parable of the life of faith and the sometimes obscure dealings of providence, but the incident also fits naturally into the fairy story, and none of the associations and magic possibilities
to do with fairy rings are denied by the particular theological meaning that MacDonald has given it.

The marchen on which MacDonald draws are characterised by their non-causative, dream-like flow of images. In his fantasies MacDonald follows this approach; Anados' journey through fairy land appears to be a succession of random encounters without a logical, chronological connection. His experiences may symbolise those of the individual's inner growth, but they are not presented in the order in which individual development is set out in MacDonald's essay. Such an approach allowed MacDonald, as it did the marchen writers, to build a secondary world which displayed a psychic landscape, following the rules and logic of dreams rather than of the waking world. In such a landscape MacDonald could explore the inner search for God and subsequent encounters with him. However, the dreamlike logic and suggestiveness of the images that MacDonald uses pose problems for the presentation of his particular theological message. The psychic landscape constructed by romantic fairy tales is one in which other transactions and encounters apart from the soul's with God may take place. Horror, terror, guilt and desire all belong to dreams and are suggested and evoked by images such as those MacDonald uses, but such basic
emotions may have nothing to do with the spiritual transactions that MacDonald wished to explore and display. In his exploration of the 'fairy land of the soul,' as he termed it in Phantastes, MacDonald ran the danger of having his meanings dictated by the images he used rather than by his intention. His personal response to the marchen imagery made this confusion more likely. MacDonald seized on the fairy tale as a form through which he could create a landscape in which the spiritual realities he was convinced by could be displayed, but he accommodates God in a landscape in which he himself liked to play, and occasionally God is lost sight of in the game of shifting symbols, self-disclosure and self-revelation.

A rather obvious example of this danger occurs in Donal Grant in the sequence where Arctura is imprisoned in the underground chapel by her uncle. The sequence symbolises Arctura's imprisonment in the dead Calvinism she has embraced and from which she needs to be rescued. It also includes elements of horror which suggest sexual fantasy rather than encounter with dead religion. Arctura is chained to a bed in the chapel on which she and Donal have already found the crumbled remains of a woman, once similarly manacled, together with the skeleton of her child.

MacDonald was not unaware of the dangers he was in
in his use of the fantasy mode, commenting:

If the dark portion of our own being were the origin of our imaginations we might well fear the apparition of such monsters as would be generated in the sickness of a decay which could never feel - only declare - a slow return towards primeval chaos. 27

However, he relied, perhaps sometimes rather naively, on God's ultimate control of the subconscious, 'the chamber of our being in which the candle of our consciousness goes out in darkness' 28 In addition he attempted to control the way his writings were read by didactic authorial comment, an approach that makes his work as dogmatic and legalistic in its own way as the tracts. We are never allowed to forget that the books are written for our moral and spiritual improvement or to escape from MacDonald's particular viewpoint. In many of his fantasies and fairy stories one of the holy characters becomes the mouthpiece of authorial comment. The old lady in the cottage instructs Anados, for example, and in Lilith, Mr Raven instructs Vane.

In religious fiction generally there is a tendency for the writer to try to make God comprehensible by limiting his presence to his or her own particular dogmatic prescription. MacDonald, seeing his novels as pulpits 29, was as liable to do this as any tract writer. However, MacDonald in his creation of secondary worlds that open up a psychic landscape is able to insist more effectively than the tract writers that God, in Auerbach's phrase, 'extends into the
depths, that he is larger than the confines of the story and the understanding of either writer or reader.

MacDonald constantly implies that the meanings of his secondary dream worlds have an authenticating reality outside the dream. The vision of God with which Lilith closes is revealed to be the narrator's dream, but it is insisted that,

such a dream must have yet lovelier truth at the heart of its dreaming.

It is this insistence that allows the fairy tale and romance imagery he uses to function as vehicles for revealing God. In other hands similar images can be used to explore individual development in which God is denied. The sequence in Romola in which Romola drifts in an empty boat towards the plague-stricken village is an example of this different use of the imagery of romance. The degree of difference can be indicated by comparison with MacDonald's use of the same motif of the drifting boat in Phantastes to take Anados to the old woman's cottage.

Romola enters the boat as a solution to her moral despair. Robbed of her belief in Savanorola and his religious certainties she must ask the question that underlies the moral exploration of all George Eliot's novels:
What force was there to create for her that supremely hallowed motive which men call duty, but which can have no inward constraining existence save through some form of believing love?

The drifting boat carries Romola to the village where she will find both the outward duty and the inward constraining motive of service and compassion. The romance motif marks the voyage she makes as an inner one as well as an outer one; the life she wakes to in the village replaces the 'hallowed motive' that she lost with her faith, and comes on her with the force of a new religious conversion.

I have discussed in chapter two how the symbolic passive surrender to fate which marks the sequence as 'spiritual' disturbs the narrative flow of the novel which up to that point has insisted upon the causative connections between the events it describes.

As well as marking the inner, spiritual nature of Romola's experience the sequence is also however designed to show that belief in a guiding, supernatural destiny is unnecessary. The idea of supernatural guidance is simply a symbolic way of understanding the pull of human needs and the power of human love and compassion called out in response. To the plague stricken villagers Romola is a saint sent by God, but the author insists that Christianity is not the motive behind Romola's action,
but merely the symbol of it:

they were legends by which all who heard might know that in times gone by a woman had done beautiful loving deeds there, rescuing those who were ready to perish  

(p649)

To rescue the perishing implies for a Christian rescuing those who are ready to perish eternally. In Romola the true weight of the words, the meaning behind the legends, is the human self-sacrifice that has rescued the villagers from physical death. In the act of being introduced into the text God is cancelled out, becoming simply a symbol for human love. The dynamic forces which direct and guide romance heroes and heroines and which we might expect, by association with the motif, to find directing Romola's boat are also denied. The universe is empty of supernatural help:

Romola felt orphaned in those wide spaces of sea and sky. She read no messages for her in that far-off symbolic writing of the heavens, and with a great sob she wished that she might be gliding into death  

(p590)

The boat, stripped of its mystery as George Eliot insists that it must be, is ultimately nothing more than a convenient means of moving the character out of her impasse. The author, arranging events for Romola can offer no guarantee that the method will work for others, there is no reality here extending outside the novel, except that God is absent, and each individual must find his or her own hallowed motives for duty.
The sequence in *Phantastes* in which Anados drifts to the old woman's cottage shares a number of details with the sequence in *Romola*. Through it Anados, like Romola, is moved from a position of moral despair to one of renewed moral purpose. Like Romola he at first longs for death as a solution to his problems. Indeed, he actively seeks it by plunging into the sea to drown himself. However, Romola imposes her own destiny on herself by choosing to set out in a drifting boat, while in *Phantastes* the boat is sent by forces outside himself to rescue him as he sinks.

The boat

rose and sank on the waters, and kept touching me in its fall as if with a human will to let me know that help was by me (p191)

In *Phantastes* the supernatural is affirmed. Unlike Romola, Anados reads messages of love wherever he looks:

The stars, great and earnest, like children's eyes, bent down lovingly towards the waters; and the reflected stars within seemed to float up, as if longing to meet their embraces (p191)

While Romola dreams of the dead and tries to wake them, Anados half dreams and half sees,

love which said it had never died ... faces that had vanished long ago, yet said with smiling lips that they knew nothing of the grave (p192)

Romola awakes to a consciousness that is pleasant because it is physically absorbing - the demands
of her emotions and intellect are dulled. Anados awakes emotionally refreshed and restored, feeling that, 'I had been kissed and loved to my heart's content' (p. 192). On leaving the boat Anados continues to receive love, finding a mother who nurtures him, while Romola finds a child that she must nurture. The love and compassion that she experiences can only be her own, flowing to others.

In *Phantastes* the sequence is used with opposite intention to *Romola* to suggest a source of love outside the human soul. Where the motif proclaims God's absence in *Romola* in *Phantastes* it suggests God's presence. The weapons of Christian warfare can, it seems, be sharpened at the forge of romance, but the intention to do so must be insisted upon.

The use of a fantasy mode to describe religious experience in novels became so accepted, however, that to Kingsley and MacDonald it came to seem a natural form for expressing Christian experience. Already in 1849, Kingsley commented in a review in *Fraser's Magazine*:

> we want something yet in the telling of a Christian fairy tale, and know not what we want. 33

Kingsley himself was to supply some of the need he felt in *The Water Babies* in 1863. Subtitled, 'a fairy story for a land baby', Kingsley claimed that he used its 'Tom-fooleries' to preach the gospel in
a way that his contemporaries would accept. 34

The Water Babies has attracted a certain amount of critical attention in recent years, partly because of its accepted status as Victorian fantasy, and partly because of the number of key Victorian ideas it draws into the melting pot of its fairy tale form. 35 Where MacDonald focused simply on the presentation of God's love, controlling each individual's life and destiny, Kingsley dealt with Anglican theology, woman worship, the atheism attendant on natural science, Darwinism, evangelicalism, technological progress, urban deprivation and the rule of the squir- archy in bewildering succession. Indeed his style has been characterised as one in which the reader has the carpet perpetually pulled from under his feet. 36 For the purpose of this study, however, I want simply to consider The Water Babies for the way Kingsley incorporates the presence of God in the text.

Kingsley's fairy story is more closely tied to official doctrine than Phantastes is. The reader can see in Tom's transformation in the river an allegorical account of the baptismal regeneration of infants. Tom, before his 'baptism' in the river was 'as the beasts which perish'. 37 His experience of death in the water frees him from his corroded husk, 'and the pretty little real Tom was washed out of the
Tom's new nature means that he is at home in the water, which corresponds to the spiritual environment of the church. He can now grow in his new environment as the christened child can grow up responding fully to a Christian education. Since the story begins in baptism we expect to find God at the conclusion—the doctrinal meaning of the allegory suggests that ultimately this story will be about God, even though he has not been specifically mentioned.

Christian education forms one of the main themes of the book, allegorised in the account of Tom's development as a water baby. Aspects of the growth in grace are personified in various fairies. The fairy Mrs Doasyouwouldbedoneby who takes care of the water babies is a personification of Christ's teaching about the way of life appropriate to his disciples, while the fairy Mrs Bedonebyasyoudid represents the moral law of the Old Testament, which according to St Paul was 'our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ that we might be justified by faith' (Galatians 3.24).

These two fairies also reflect two forces in nature which Kingsley had named in an earlier book for children, *Madam How and Lady Why* (1870). Colin Manlove has pointed out the connection in their
functions:

Mrs Bedonebyasyoudid is equivalent to Madam How in Kingsley's Madam How and Lady Why, who has a 'terrible school-house, which is called Nature and the Law'; and Mrs Doasyouwouldbedoneby parallels Lady Why, whose teachings are those of Grace and the Gospel.

Tom encounters another fairy, Mother Carey, who is also associated with the forces of nature. She generates the abundant sea life with which Tom is surrounded. In doing so she reflects attributes of God who 'makes all things new' as well as evolution:

'I heard, ma'am, that you were always making new beasts out of old.'

'So people fancy. But I am not going to trouble myself to make things, my little dear. I sit here and make them make themselves.' (p315)

The themes of Christian education and an exploration of the natural order are linked in the fairies who embody the points at which nature reveals God. In doing so they scarcely bring God into the narrative however. The story remains fixed in the created world, pointing to God, who, while imminent in his creation is essentially outside nature, and consequently outside the story. At the conclusion of *The Water Babies* the point that exploration of nature will lead to God is made through the vision that Tom and Ellie share in which all four fairies coalesce into one being:

And her eyes flashed for one moment, clear white blazing light: but the children could
not read her name; for they were dazzled and hid their faces in their hands. (p384)

The fairy is revealing herself as God's wisdom in creation, manifested in the laws of nature and the moral laws that govern human life. Kingsley however returns us quickly from the vision to the 'Tom-fooleries' of the story in which Tom abandons his identity as a water baby and becomes:

a great man of science, and can plan railroads, and steam engines, and electric telegraphs, and rifled guns and so forth. (p385)

The story is one of a journey towards God through growth into Christian maturity, but the reader is steered away from finding any manifestation of God in the text beyond those that come inevitably through descriptions of his creation.

Tom's spiritual education has phases in common with Anados' in spite of its closer attention to Anglican doctrine. Both Tom and Anados sin and reap the consequences, both are loved by maternal representations of God, both are inspired by falling in love with apparently unobtainable women. Both, too undertake quests that 'make men of them'. In Phantastes however the reader is encouraged to look beyond the material world and sharpen her perceptions of spiritual reality, while in The Water Babies the reader is encouraged to appreciate the chaotic richness of the created order. The
contemplation of creation, it is hoped, will be sufficient to lead to an understanding of its creator.

Kingsley approaches MacDonald most closely in his use of the female fairies, who convey a sense of numinous power, particularly in the visionary encounter with which *The Water Babies* concludes. Like the wise women in MacDonald's novels and stories, those in *The Water Babies* engage their pupils in metaphysical discussion - one example is Tom's exchange with Mother Carey. Apart from the fairies however, the incidents and landscapes of *The Water Babies* create no inner worlds for the exploration of psychic encounters. In this respect, in spite of its fairy story status, Kingsley's story is more like a tract. The temporal order, dismissed by MacDonald, is positively celebrated in *The Water Babies*. The conservative English establishment enshrined in Harthover House is exuberantly accepted, and numerous digressions deal approvingly with aspects of material existence such as fishing and seaside holidays. Even the secondary world of the water babies and fairies is less fairyland than an educational tour of underwater flora and fauna. Even on Tom's journey to the Other End of Nowhere, where the landscape does become strange, we are not
introduced into a mysterious dreamlike world. The dominant mode is satire rather than fantasy. Kingsley uses his new country to attack scientists, educational bullies and evangelicals, not by threatening their significance with the uncertainty of fantasy, but by laughing at the significance they claim for themselves.

The fairy story status of The Water Babies is used neither to open up areas of meaning beyond the material world nor to cover up absence when a spiritual dimension is considered. It is used instead to sugar the theological and moral pill that Kingsley wanted his contemporaries to swallow - it is a tract dressed up in nonsense. Perhaps it is hardly surprising that Edward Lear was an admirer of the book. 41

In spite of Mrs Sherwood's insistence that fairy stories could never be religiously useful, the fairy tale became, in the hands of Kingsley and MacDonald a recognised way of presenting the Christian message to adults as well as children. Through the fairy tale form an encounter with God could be explored on a spiritual plane. Even Kingsley's presentation of material creation in his story was coloured by that same sense of wonder that lay at the centre of the secular approach to religion. His attitude is summed up in Madam How and Lady Why;
more wonderful sure than any fairy tale it is, that Madam How should make a rich and pleasant
land by the brute force of ice. 42

To those in pursuit of a sense of wonder God must be presented as wonderful, a mysterious being only accessible to those with the privileged vision of imaginative perception. Kingsley and MacDonald used the fairy story to show a central character being initiated into a world of wonder, and learning how to respond to it. The hope was that the reader would be educated with the protagonist and become capable of the vision of God. Within these Christian fairy tales attributes of God were presented manifested in marvellous beings who had roles in their own right in the story. Like Tom and Ellie the reader had to learn to read their true names, and to look, not at the character, but at God to whom the marvellous being pointed.

The emphasis of the tract writers on the correct preparation for salvation was different, and their representation of God correspondingly so. For the tract writers, readers needed to be doctrinally rather than imaginatively prepared to see God. Consequently God is manifested in the tracts through doctrinal statement and occupies an inevitable place in an order prescribed by a tightly constructed view of the universe. The sight of God at work in his world might fill with awe, but the good evangelical would never have Tom and Ellie's uncertainty about
whom they were beholding. The effort to claim a new area of romance for Christian narrative could lead to confusion and uncertainty - a mixture of Christian and secular religious thinking which even the author had difficulty disentangling.
NOTES

Chapter six

1. The evangelical writer Charlotte Elizabeth abandoned fiction writing at the end of her life because it seemed like profanation to her to invent stories about God. Charlotte Elizabeth, Personal Recollections, third edition continued to the end of her life (London 1847)

2. The Governess or the Little Female Academy (Wellington, 1820) piii-iv (iv) The original story by Sarah Fielding was published in 1749

3. For example in 'Tawney Rachel; or the Fortune Teller', Cheap Repository Shorter Tracts, pp95 -111

4. The Guardian of Education was founded by Mrs Trimmer in 1802 and ran until 1807. It was an Anglican magazine with Evangelical leanings although opposed to extreme forms of evangelicalism

5. The Guardian of Education, volume 2, no 15, July 1803, p 448

6. 'Sorrowful Sam', Cheap Repository Shorter Tracts pp 209 - 230 (p218)

7. Houlstons Series of Tracts nos 43,44 published Published in Narrative Tracts Moral and Religious (London,1860)

8. RTS Second Series Tracts, no 557, p3

9. Annual Report of the Sunday School Union (London,1824) p 12. The Sunday School Union was an interdenominational body that co-ordinated the activities of Sunday Schools throughout the country

10. 'Little Nelly', RTS Narrative Tracts, no 821, p4

11. 'Sixteen short sermons by a clergyman of the Church of England' RTS First Series Tracts, no 38

12. The Father's Eve. (Berwick,1833). The tract was first published in 1830

13. The History of the Fairchild Family, p189
14 'Poor Sarah or the Indian Woman', RTS Second Series Tracts, no 583, p3

15 Donal Grant, three volumes, (London,1883)

16 'The Fantastic Imagination' in A Dish of Orts (London,1895), pp313 - 323

17 Greville MacDonald, George MacDonald and his Wife, (London,1924) p299

18 Phantastes; a Faerie Romance (London,1894) p11

19 'A Sketch of Individual Development' in A Dish of Orts, (London,1895) pp 43-76

20 F D Maurice, (1805-1872) was an Anglican theologian who denied everlasting damnation. He influenced both Kingsley and MacDonald.

21 'The Fantastic Imagination' in A Dish of Orts, p320

22 The Golden Key - a study of the fiction of George MacDonald, (New Haven,1961)

23 'The Fantastic Imagination', A Dish of Orts, p317


25 Phantastes, (London,1894) p 108

26 MacDonald was particularly influenced by Novalis. One of his first works was a translation of Twelve of the Spiritual songs of Novalis, printed for private circulation in 1851

27 'The imagination;its function and culture' A Dish of Orts, pl - 42 (p 25)

28 'The Imagination its function and culture' p25

29 MacDonald's attitude is discussed in Greville MacDonald, George MacDonald and his Wife (London,1924)

30 Erich Auerbach, Mimesis the representation of Reality in Western Literature, translated by Willard R Trask, (Princeton,1968), p12
31. **Lilith** (Tring, 1982) p251

32. Romola, edited by Andrew Sanders, (Harmondsworth, 1980) p586


34. Frances Kingsley, Charles Kingsley: His Letters and Memories of his Life two volumes, (London, 1877) volume 2, p137,138


39. Modern Fantasy p47

40. Revelation 21:5

41. Edward Lear wrote to Kingsley in 1871, 'I have often thought I should like to thank you for so much satisfaction given me by your many works - (perhaps above all-'Water Babies', which I firmly believe to be all true)' The letter is given in full in Notes and Queries, volume 214 (June, 1969) pp216 - 217

42. Madam How and Lady Why (London, 1889), p97
CONCLUSION

The young Mary Anne Evans maintained that the Christian cause could not be served by fiction, particularly romance. In this thesis I have examined not only what happened when writers attempted to use fiction apologetically, but also how some of 'the weapons of Christian warfare' were incorporated into the works of writers who had no wish to wield them in the orthodox cause.

In bringing together the widely different forms of the early nineteenth century tracts and the mid century novels I have suggested that the different forms provide examples of distinct ways of describing religious experience; the tract mode and the fantasy mode. By concentrating on these modes it has been possible to make useful comparisons between the different forms of tract and novel.

One of the problems for both modes is how to incorporate the supernatural element of religious experience, although this problem obviously presents itself differently to different writers according to the mode they are using and the degree of their commitment. For the evangelical tract writers encounter with God was viewed almost entirely through the events of the physical
world which were interpreted through a narrow doctrinal system that gave them religious significance and authority. Religious experience in the tracts seems, because of this approach, to have a materialist rather than a supernatural basis. God is limited to human understanding and experience.

For the novelists George Eliot and Charles Dickens who in different ways were less committed to a Christian position - George Eliot had consciously moved beyond orthodoxy - the problem took a different form. Their need was to create a spiritual space in their novels, to emphasise the importance of religious experience for the human spirit, but at the same time to deny its supernatural power. They wished to describe experiences that were sufficiently mysterious to be awe-inspiring, but at the same time remained contained within a human framework.

For the committed novelists, George MacDonald and Charles Kingsley the problem was less acute, although Kingsley recognised it, commenting to a friend:

What is a poor wretch to do, who, disbelieving the existence of matter far more firmly than Bishop Berkeley, is accessible to no hints from anything but matter? A mystic in
theory, and an ultra-materialist in practice - who if I saw a ghost tomorrow, should chat quietly with it, and take out pen, ink and paper to get an exact description of the phenomenon on the spot, what shall I do? 1

George MacDonald was hampered less by the problem of accommodating the supernatural than by that of accommodating the material settings of his stories. His insistence on spiritual reality encouraged him to idealise the city streets and the Scottish moors against which his novels other than his fantasies are set. In Donal Grant (1883), for example, the hero spends a night out on the open moors, happy and secure because he is in God's tent. The physical discomfort of such a night, and the problem of the unfriendliness of God's tent in the autumn and winter is ignored.

Although the approaches of the tracts and the novels are different the narrative vocabulary used by both tract writers and novelists to describe religious experience is often very similar. Deathbeds, conversions, traces of The Pilgrim's Progress and holy children, for example, figure in both sets of writing. Throughout this dissertation my argument has been that the narrative vocabulary, established in an orthodox Christian tradition limited the analysis of religious experience that the novelists could make. I have seen the vocabulary of religious experience as a currency which changed its value in the different contexts in which it was used. My concern has been
to examine the nature of the changes and indicate some of their effects for the significance of the religious experience they were used to describe.

The uneasiness of mid century writers and thinkers with the strictures of Christian orthodoxy is commonplace and a number of commentators have recognised the ambiguous religious position of novels produced in a period when orthodox Christianity was losing its grip, but its forms had not been superseded. My research has led me to conclude in addition that an understanding of some of the tensions and ambiguities inherent in the use of an essentially Christian vocabulary in the novels with which I deal contributes to more than simply the observation of cultural change. Uncertainty of meaning generated by the use of a Christian vocabulary drained of its original significance can be a reason for contemporary dissatisfaction with aspects of certain novels, the case, as I have argued, with the conclusion of The Mill on the Floss. An examination of the various attempts to describe religious experience considered here also indicates how the novelists were driven towards a fantasy mode to accommodate both the ambiguities they were conscious of and their interest in exploring the psyche of individuals. As a result we can begin to read the novels with a greater appreciation of the complexity of their structure and meaning.
NOTES

Conclusion

1 Letter to John Bullar, February 8, 1857, Frances Kingsley, Charles Kingsley, His Letters and Memories of his Life, 2 volumes, (London, 1877) volume 2, p19

2 For example, Alexander Welsh in The City of Dickens (Oxford, 1971) and Barry V Qualls in The Secular Pilgrims of Victorian Fiction; the novel as Book of Life (Cambridge, 1982)
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The bibliography is divided into three sections; 1) Tracts and Tract Tales, 2) The Evangelical Background, 3) General Bibliography. Any divisions in a bibliography of this kind must be somewhat arbitrary, but because of the number of books involved some subdivisions seemed necessary for the sake of clarity and ease of reference.

The General Bibliography includes some works by the four main authors discussed in this thesis, but not those works which are referred to in detail. These are listed at the front of the thesis under Texts. A note on the editions of the tracts most frequently referred to will also be found in this section in addition to the list included here. Those tracts that are included in collections have not been listed separately.

Because of the difficulty of dating the tracts accurately, the dates given in each case are the dates of the edition referred to. In most cases an earlier date can be assumed.
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The Two Lambs; an Allegorical History (Wellington, 1821)

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