A Different Light - Painting As Parabolic.

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Abstract.

Art and Theology have two very different languages and structures, and communication between the two can be highly problematic. Christian Theology seeks to establish a core of thought whereas Fine Art exists on the frontiers of experience. The one area where they may overlap is in their handling of space. Both offer invitations into space and, on acceptance, the viewer is questioned and examined, and made to re-define the nature of space.

Theology is greatly concerned with sacred space, meditative space, a space wherein we can approach the divine. Painting has always been concerned with the depiction and representation of space but, paralleling illusionistic space, painting provides an area of interaction: a space between the viewer and the viewed that can function as a sacred space, where a movement from the finite to the infinite can be facilitated.

This inquiry seeks to establish how painted space can function in a parabolic manner. Gospel parable structures of narratives, located in familiar events and activities to illustrate complex ethical and religious situations, are highly provocative; forcing the viewer into an alternative state of awareness. Parable performance is unconfined and can approach areas of taboo, changing viewing to voyeurism to pornography. It questions who we are and what we want, forcing us to take decisions - and by those decisions we are judged. It is a disturbing, disorienting space of strangely familiar features, of unknown but recognisable visions.

Not all paintings produce this effect and not all of the artists generating this parabolic reality are dealt with, but those selected as illustrations of this spectrum all conform to the structures of Gospel parables. They all effect a narrative in easily recognised language and experience. They operate at multiple levels of reality generated by the parabolic nature of the narrative structure.

Ordinary space is made sacred by the parabolic. In the movement from depicted parable to parabolic painting one of the prime definitions is seen in a capacity to question our attitudes, to force us into considering alternatives and, by that, provoke us into decision making. In taking that step we make judgments about our lives, our relationship to existence and our place in the cosmos, and, having made those judgments, we in turn are judged by them.

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"The process of artistic invention
probably casts as much light as
anything human on God's
devising of the world."[1]

"The clean, clear joy of creation,
which does not come to a man
too often, lest he should consider
himself the equal of his God."[2]

Introduction.

Encounters with 'Christian' Art are often limited by the style of illustration politically pertinent at the time of painting. Historical and political pressures have weighed on artists and the art they produced, in addition to the tensions of development and innovation in the use of form, light and colour. The requirements of iconography codified the language of Art into the cipher of "the sign and the symbol, the outward and visible form through which is revealed the inward and invisible reality that moves and directs the soul of man."[3]

1 Farrer. A. Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited. Fontana, London. 1968. P. 62.
2 Kipling. R. The Light That Failed. Macmillan, London. 1918. P. 175.
3 Ferguson. G. Signs and Symbols in Christian Art. Hesperides/OUP. 1961. P. 7.

Baptistry of Dura Europos

Ark of the Covenant-
Dura Europas

The first sarcophagi bearing Christian subjects belong to around 230CE and the mural paintings of Dura-Europos are also from this period. The symbolism contained in these examples is endowed with a religious function made apparent in the circumstances in which they appear, "the fruit perhaps of competition with the art of the synagogue"[4] but already the parabolic in Art was being employed. The figure of 'the good shepherd'[5] carrying a lamb already held the status of the caring individual but also operated beyond this as an icon for Christ's love of humanity. The parallel image had been adopted and, if not yet fully parabolic, was indicative of the visual language necessary for the symbolism to operate.

By late antiquity, Biblical and Gospel images appear on many public and private surfaces in the form of image-signs "which call to mind but do not describe"[6] a narrative. As Christian doctrine transposed into image, foundered on attempts to represent the Holy Spirit and the idea of the Holy Trinity, the use of figures became awkward and objects appeared; the empty throne, the open book and the dove, became symbols of the Trinity. The expansion of Christian iconographic language into the Hebrew Bible was a stimulus, as often Christ's teachings were less dramatic and less adaptable to iconographic interpretation. From late antiquity to the Middle Ages the use of 'Old Testament' subjects greatly enriched the vocabulary of iconographic images, providing new ways of demonstrating the Gospel message where the Sacrifice of Isaac took on Christian overtones and the story of Jonah echoed the message of the Gospel.

An examination of aspects of New Testament writing based on the critical language and formats developed in Fine Art, and in particular the exploration of Painting as a parabolic event can be approached where we observe the artist's representation of what he perceived turn from depicted statement to a many stranded question. Scriptural parables incite action. We enter into them, following a figure involved in the core of the story or reacting to an interpretation of a domestic genre. The shock of their reality confuses, and we try to extract a system of thoughts via our senses. The issue of clarity is intertwined with questions of context, history and culture, but the narrative is there in the text; 'Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow' (Mk. 4:3). We behold, visualising and following the unknown stranger; someone we half know, whose actions are half expected. "Experience is full of memories of pasts we

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4 Grabar. A. Christian Iconography. Princeton U.P., Princeton N. J. 1968. P. 51.

5 The earilest representations of this image are found in the catacombs of St. Calixtus, and of Sts. Peter and Marcellinus, in Rome. Grabar P. 179/180.

6 Grabar. P. 59.

never really experienced"[7] and it is the nature of parables to facilitate that backward, remembering glance to heal that lack of cohesion in the days of disruption that we sense as our lives. The unknown figure evokes desire and anxiety, and intensifies our concentration as he leads us forward into a field of self-consciousness. Within the framework of the parable "we are neither the centre nor the origin of our vision, and what we see has already been formed by a gaze prior to our act of seeing."[8]

The parabolic in painting starts with a figurative based sub-genre issuing a direct call to the viewer to mentally interact, as opposed to the pictorial image whose passive observation demands a minimal intellectual response. It takes us from illustrative art to exploratory question in a single, smooth movement. No epistemology or methodology is suggested in them, no theory or theoretical process but a structured narrative that incorporates the viewer and provokes an instant and complex response. Within this arena the artists examined may be illustrating their own theology, but their work is more than mere depiction. The 'Behold!' of the Markan Sower is derived from the parabolic inclusion of the viewer as a partner in the narrative, obliging him/her to look in a different way. By questioning what is the subject, looking forms the process whereby we realise that we cannot "see" the subject of the painting. The point of the parabolic is driven home in the obscuring of the object and we are forced to engage with the vision, to stop interpreting and actively connect to the narrative and commit to the parabolic. The parabolic gift is that they shake loose the structures they inhabit. Parables are not subject to any defined meaning and force us to confront the movement from theory to praxis. As if, for the first time, we see this individual walking away from us in this barren landscape. The harshness of the sun, of the bare ground of existence, binds us to the moment and relates us to the life of the individual, who leads away from the foreground and instructs us in the mystery. We have to move with him "as the arrow endures the string/ collecting itself/ to be more than itself as it shoots./ For there is no remaining,/ no place to stay."[9] The parable may provoke various kinds of reaction but the motion towards praxis forces us to follow in the footsteps of the unknown sower whose back is always towards us, as in Rilke's phrase of his First Duino Elegy, "denn bleiben ist nirgends" - "for staying is nowhere".

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[7] Koerner. J. Casper David Friedrich and The Subject of Landscape. Reaktion, London.1995. P.236

[8] Koerner. P. 239/240.

[9] Rilke. R. Duino Elegies. (Trans. Young. D.) Norton & Co. New York. 1992. P. 23.

The sacred undercurrent in the flow of the secular moves easily into the flood of abstraction where we "sense the infinite in the finite, intuiting the universe."[10] In the pursuit of the parable an attempt is made, by illustration, to define this lost genre where our half knowledge is forced to leap into "aesthetic intuition which is seen as providing humanity with immediate access to knowledge of the divine or absolute."[11]

What we see, and partially understand, is an aspect of the unusual, the unfamiliar. We recognise something singular and unique whose strangeness and curiosity arrest us in an inexplicable way, and this unaccountable strand is seamlessly woven into the unmistakable. It is this unity, the perception of the alien yet familiar in its inseparable connection, that shocks and awes us, holds our attention and makes us search for more. The heart of this inquiry seeks answers from the most invisible of our sociological patterns - the structure of the parabolic, the narratological use of familiar, ordinary events to illustrate complex ethical or religious situations, provokes us to confront our standards and the nature of our being.

It is Art that ensures that theology, at its core, must be in praxis, grounded in the pre-theological. The parabolic in painting encourages us to see that theology must be lived with and acted on, and not merely held in texts. The Collects and Psalmody of the Church must be engaged with if they are to be vital, and not left to mere recitation. For Art to progress it must evolve at the frontiers of human experience and, if theology is not the apocalyptic reversal of all history, it loses that quality of kenosis which is the vitality required.

In approaching an examination of visual awareness I want to endorse the notion that, as readers or viewers, we cannot "even theoretically, approach a final, single or definitive understanding of biblical texts"[12] nor is anything to be gained from a search for the sacred in art if the process does not make it more logical to find it in humanity.

Before considering paintings, it may be useful to examine the nature of the viewer as viewing, like reading, is not an objective exercise. Reading is a dialogical process whereby the reader's social history, personal experiences and

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10 Dillenberger. J. A Theology of Artistic Sensibilities. SCM, London. 1987. P. 108.

11 Pattison. G. Art, Modernity and Faith. Scm, London. 1998. P. 21.

12 Jasper. A. The Shining Garment of the Text. Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield. 1998. P. 13.

assumptions about the text will modify the reading, dictate attitudes to it, and influence his interpretation.

If one allows the interpretive aspect to be dealt with by an academic authority, or in the case of a sacred text by the Church, there can be a loss of personal interaction with the text and the authority's writings might as well be consulted. The fact that, as individuals, we have read many texts on a wide spectrum of subjects creates an encyclopaedic reference base for us, and this accompanies us as we approach the new text. This personal approach will be dictated, in part, by our personal history. Similarly, the period in this personal history when we approach a text can have an affect on our view and understanding of it. Alongside this is the acquired language that we carry, that continues to change and develop, and can sway our appreciation and interpretation. The approach to a 'sacred' text having 'divine' authority may be full of assumptions that blind critical interpretation. The context of the writings must be borne in mind, as we can only read in the 'now' and not in the situation of the authors. There is also the problem of contemporary relevance of ancient texts, and "the challenge is both to recognise this process, and by being aware, to be enabled to apply it more powerfully."[13]

It is similar with artwork, but two aspects make the approach special. Viewing a painting has an immediate impact, unlike the time-related process involved in reading a text. Even a short incisive poem, like those of Paul Celan, takes time to read, and in that space comes revelation. Painting is unique in its total and immediate impact. All details are revealed instantaneously, but the impressions these create take time to be assimilated as in the case of the text. This effect can cause distress and confusion in the general viewer. The need to respond is forced to correspond to the instant of revelation, but this presupposes a single inspection, and painting, like many other forms of narrative, requires re-reading and re-consideration if the details of nuances, messages, philosophies, subtleties and brutalities are to be located in our visual language.

Part of the problem is the move to a different medium. We appreciate a good novel or poem as we share the language. We write. We use the tools of the trade. Paint is different. Not many of us are at home with a tube of oil paint, far less a loaded palette. Art language is not our own. The definitions of tint, tone and shade are all different, not similar. As the confusion mounts, we do not want the intricacies of Analytical Cubism explained to us. We are forced to acknowledge that we do not

13 Hunter, A.G. Psalms. Routledge, London. 1999. P. 37.

know much about Art, and rely on the notion that we know what we like, but the question 'why?' lingers in the background.
This attitude has engendered the notion that painting is more 'difficult', 'special' and ultimately more 'creative'. The quasi *ex nihilo* aspect voiced by the increasingly confused and awed viewer, reveals that the work of art has become a monologue rather than a dialogue.
Traditional methods of art interpretation have generalised the process to such an extent that anyone seeking any form of spiritual refreshment from art must take the responsibility for active engagement and for analytical perception. The ability to synthesise a response to a work of art is the means whereby we can place it in the gallery of spiritual life.

Parables.

What Parables Are.

> "Neither shamed nor edified, although
> Something was made manifest - the power
> Of power not exercised, of hope inferred
> By the powerless forever."[14]

Parables are stories employing metaphors and similes to illustrate key areas of the theme indicated. "They are stories both of promise and warning"[15] which lie within the main narrative illuminating the central message. The term 'parable' comes from two Greek words which mean ' to cast by the side of' or to lay parallel to - metaphorically, 'to compare'. They provide a description of that which cannot be described directly.

What is not normally permitted is allowed in parables, as they approach areas of social convention, assumption and taboo. Parables allow access to an alternative strand of thinking that sets the reader on a voyeuristic course of discovery leading to displacement and questions of permission. The journey takes the reader/traveller off the chart and continually keeps them guessing about the space they are about to enter and "getting lost is the only way to really challenge everything one knows and believes in."[16]

A parable provokes the impossible conditions that are necessary to create the environment for perception. This allows a judgment to be made and in that judgment, the parable judges us. By reading a parable we are incriminated by what we do; by access to the taboos of reality where relationships cannot be concealed in aporia but must be acted on justly.

The precursors of the New Testament parables are found in Jewish literature and in the Hebrew Bible where the Hebrew literary form of the *Mashal* is found. The use of proverbs and riddles opens the mystery of the text (Jud. 14:14), creates a test of ability, provokes thought and makes the reader question themselves and the adequacy of their expertise.

These are pivotal, judgmental points, as in 2 Sam.12. where the story is thrown

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14 Heaney. S. 'Weighing In' The Spirit Level. Faber, London. 1996. P. 18.

15 Jasper. D. & Prickett. S. The Bible and Literature. Blackwell, Oxford. 1999. P. 223.

16 Tobias. M. 'Sinai' The Winding Trail. Smith. R. (Ed) Diadem, London. 1981. P. 247.

back at David who does not understand the parable and fails the test; not understanding the parable is judgment. The judgmental moment is one of revelation, the acknowledgement of self and the role to be adopted. Similarly, in Amos 8 the parable arouses a moment of recognition and in that instant of perception are carried the seeds of change. The parable is designed to stimulate thought, to awaken perception and incite the mind to action. It is a provocative genre that instigates judgment in the minds of listeners and readers.

The parable can be seen as allegory, as it mirrors reality, revealing the flaws in society. There is no need for it to be systematic. Allegory can be quite disjointed, as what is at issue is the illustration of the moral question and not a legal concern. "Metaphor is the rhetorical device that an allegorical interpretation reads into parables"[17] where the substitution of a word or phrase by another is utilised for the purpose of concealing the meaning. Parables can be allegories and do not aim to conceal but rather to illustrate teachings. The notion of allegory is a characteristic of the interpretation required 'by' the style of the narrative, and metaphor the parallel trait 'in' the narrative. Parabolic metaphors construct a tension in known theories through their new affiliation with sentences in the narrative rather than as isolated words. These "make sense at the level of the sentence because they twist the meaning of the words."[18] The metaphoric sentences are not the total of the parabolic discourse; they are sentences composing a parabolic composition greater than the sum of its parts. The metaphors have no power outside the parable, have no status in ordinary language, for if they became common they would lose all impact and become trivial. The parable itself displays none of the tension of the metaphors as the narrative is related at the level of ordinary life events, known and recognised by Jesus' audience. The tension is deflected between realities, between the known and the imagined, and operates at a level issuing a new stream of consciousness.

Jesus' use of this device was therefore not an innovation, but his application of it reveals original significance. "All the parables of Jesus compel his hearers to come to a decision about his person and his mission"[19]. Jesus' parables are full of 'the secret of the Kingdom of God' (Mk.4:11) which recognises that the eschaton is in the process of realisation, that the end of the world is close. There is a sense of urgency in all of them. What was meant to happen is happening: lepers are

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17 Ricoeur. P. 'Biblical Hermeneutics'. Semeia 4. Crossan. J. (Ed). University of Montana, 1975. P. 89.
18 Ricoeur. P. 93.
19 Jeremias. J. The Parables of Jesus. SCM, London. 1976. P. 230.

cleansed, evil is in retreat, debts are cancelled, lost sheep are returned, all are invited to the banquet, and the father's house is open to all who return. Alongside this, there is the first marked similarity to painting: what is meant to be revealed often remains veiled. We are shown what we are meant to see, beyond, or behind which, we can only surmise. When a parable relates or depicts the goodness of God, that goodness and love is realised in Jesus. When a parable teaches about the Kingdom, Jesus is veiled behind the word 'Kingdom' - there is a secret content, a hidden glory that shines through. The notion of insiders and outsiders pervades Mark's Gospel with mystery and secret. The Sower (Mk. 4) is followed by the explanation of the parable and the reason for teaching in parables. The secrets alluded to lie within them and encourage the rethinking and discussion that leads to the moment of recognition. The answer to the riddle is often found in the first verse of the story and this re-inforces the message and heightens awareness of similar issues. In the parables of Jesus the whole notion of neighbour is expanded and changed by this means.

The impact Jesus' parables had on his audience is difficult to gauge. The entire *Sitz im Leben* of the parable, its location in the first century Jewish mindset, and its temporal context are problematic.

> "He preserves the sayings of famous men
> and penetrates the intricacies of the parables.
> He investigates the hidden meaning of proverbs
> and knows his way among riddles." (Ecclesiasticus 39:2-3)

The relationship of the modern, secular parable, seen in Kafka's work, to those of Jesus in the New Testament, is dependent on the "assumption that it ought to be possible to identify specific differences, in the language, between the parables of Jesus and of any other secular parables whatsoever."[20]

The parable would appear to be governed by its beginning and its end, that is, the relationship between the narrative displayed in the literal language and its meaning in more indirect, symbolic expression where comprehension is reliant on interpretation. The parabolic paradox lies in the fact that the similarities to be drawn in the symbolism are totally dissimilar in reality. The development of the Sower's seeds is not in any way similar to the development or growth of faith in humanity and without a commentary or interpretive statement the meaning of the parable may elude the reader completely.

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[20] Hillis Miller. J. 'Parable and Performative in the Gospels and in Modern Literature' in The Post Modern Bible Reader, Jobling. D.(Ed.) Blackwell, Oxford. 2002. P. 129.

What dominates this area is the fact that these parables are delivered by Jesus Christ. While Christ is only seen as the Logos, the Word, in the Gospel of John, this is also inherent in the Synoptic Gospels. The fact that Jesus speaks the parables underwrites the relationship between tales of the rural economy and the transcendent revelations of things beyond the domestic and visible. A "meaning that nevertheless can be spoken only in parable, that is, indirectly."[21] Christ speaks with the authority of the Word supporting the link between the actuality of the narrative and the parabolic reality indicated. It is this facet that makes any interpretation of the parables parabolic. How can anyone approach the divine to understand and communicate love, truth and justice which parables have been constructed to clarify? Commentary on parables becomes commentary on the Word.

The parable is not bound to literature. It is a performative utterance denoting some act, something that happens because of its voicing. The parables of the Kingdom affect the minds and hearts of the hearers, but the knowledge of the Kingdom and the way to realise it are known to Jesus. His parables are constative; they verify his statements. The secular parable is truly performative as its meaning is located in its words, its language, and our confidence in them. Both types of parable veer into an inner area of parable where they become parables about parables.

In the story of the Markan Sower, each of the four areas where the seed is sown requires an appropriate psychological interpretation. The way in which the Word operates, how it can fail, and the 'secret of the kingdom' are only open to initiates, not outsiders. This raises a question as to the point of parables. "A whole series of paradoxes operates at once in this parable about a parable."[22]

The secrets of the kingdom cannot be dealt with directly and must be referred to in parables which, it could be argued, puts Jesus at variance with the Word, if words have to be translated. If the words located in rural imagery are intended for the rural populace and cannot reach them, then in fact the parable becomes a format for denying access.

If you have 'been given the secret of the kingdom' then you no longer require parables anyway as they are superfluous, but Jesus then explains the secrets and what they mean to the core group of insiders.

There are logical aspects in the parables that step away from the literal language of rural Galilee where a single seed of grain can produce a hundredfold, or a mustard

21 Hillis Miller. P. 131.

22 Hillis Miller. P. 133.

seed an enormous tree, or saving your life can lose it. Certainly in the Mathean version (13:17-23) there are contradictions. The sower and the seed have a male bearing, whereas the soil would have been deemed female, but Jesus speaks of the differing soil types as 'he'.

What delineates parables is their language and their form of reality. Parables require that they are taken literally, and for them to become efficient they must be accepted as literally true. If they exist only as figures of speech, are seen as parabolic and not 'real', they fail to function. Not to enter the realm of the parable is to root oneself in 'reality' and to deny oneself access to the 'kingdom'.

Their language asks to be taken literally but their reality is parabolic, incomprehensible yet half-known, strange but alluring. The reader/listener is called to a decision in the light of what has been told; a decision that will judge them. This reveals the text as both mirror and window.

This is Kafka's extension of the parable - the plot without end. Kafka gives us a language and a reality and then keeps the silence of the parable. "The more tragic events are, the stronger becomes the reticence and omission: every time another writer would pour out with abundance, he offers the frightening absence of the void."[23] Whether this operates as a word of grace, acceptance, welcome, or refusal of the written law, as in *Amerika*, or as in *The Trial*, and *In The Penal Colony*, where the divine word is the law of the father, scripture and condemnation, there is an absence of comment, of emotion; a namelessness haunts the text. In our inability to grasp the parable Kafka senses that, as *In The Penal Colony*; "our guilt is always certain". "Nobody is innocent, nobody is absolved - this is the dreadful postulate on which Kafka has constructed"[24] *The Trial*.

The scriptural parable is delivered from a basis of knowledge, by someone who is that knowledge. The secular parable throws out a narrative across the frontier uncertain as to what, if anything, it will find. Both forms seem quite separate but their definitions involve paradox. The Word of God is delivered and is at the same time humanly comprehensible but subject to the limitations of human language. "Christ's dissemination of the Word is therefore performed over its logical impossibility"[25] as is seen in Mk.4:11-12.

The secular, while accepting the limits of language, implicitly claims knowledge and to bring knowledge even if it is presented negatively as the apparent

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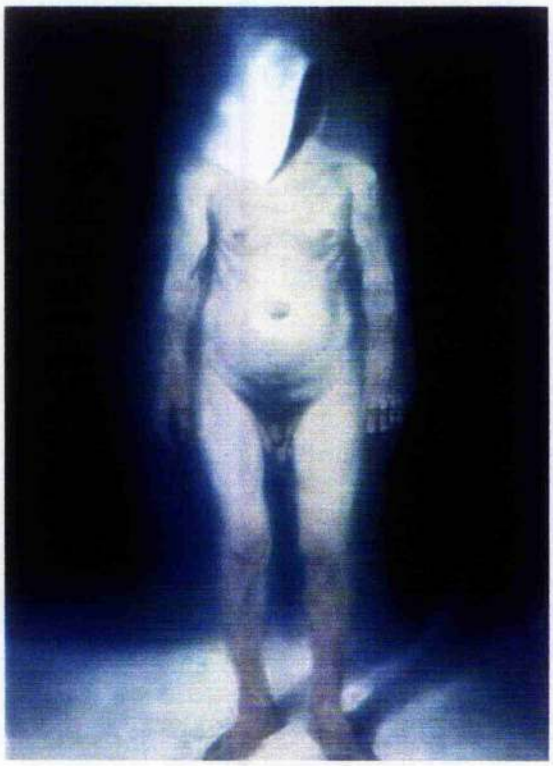
[23] Citati. P. Kafka. Minerva, London. 1991. P. 110.

[24] Citati. P. 139.

[25] Hillis Miller. P. 140.

impossibility of crossing the frontier, "alternating omnipresence and absence, omniscience and ignorance, vision and omission, light and darkness."[26]

[26] Citati. P. 108.



Ken Currie 1960-
"Standing Figure 2 2003"

Steven Campbell 1953-
"The Final Warning"

Theology.

The Relationship Between Art and Theology.

> "The best lack all conviction, while the worst
> Are full of passionate intensity."[27]

Many theologians do not see the visual arts as having any role in theology. Art is seen as an experimental force in human activity, constantly pushing boundaries and frontiers. Its nature is iconoclastic, avant garde, constantly on the edge of the abyss and not "an exercise in verbal, conceptual, philosophical construction, a series of regulative concepts."[28] Whereas Theology is essentially word based the language of Art is not concerned with words. In this difference theologians feared their lack of control over an activity that was often whimsical, personally rather than communally centred, and whose ideas and ideals were mobile. Finance could control outcome to a certain degree but beyond this there was the fear of artistic space and its unlimited freedom, the dread of idolatry resulting from specific works, and the constant tension located in any representation of the divine.
Others would argue that the inclusion of all our cultural aspects widens the perspective of Christian faith and questions the orientations by which we live. Here Art is not seen as mere illustration of what we know but as what it can uniquely do since when Art works from Scripture it acts as text and approaches Theology. It allows us to see below the surface, beyond the obvious, and explores the truths concealed in the ordinary. This promotes the notion of "a secular development that can be positively rather than negatively understood (where) the explicitly Christian subjects may have disappeared but the logos is now hiddenly and immanently present."[29] This allows the exploration of spatiality as a theological order where the symbolism and language of Art mirrors the desire of the Church. Painting, in a single frame, provides the narrativisation of time, the multiple moment, which does not exist in space/time, but can be dictated by the spatial status of objects. "The way in which objects are arranged in a space, the configuration of the objects, may also influence the perception of that space"[30] and this can link the semantic content of

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27 Yeats. W. 'The Second Coming' W.B.Yeats Selected Poetry. Jeffares. A. (Ed). Macmillan, London. 1967. P. 100.

28 Dillenberger. J. A Theology of Artistic Sensibilities. SCM, London. 1987. P. 219.

29 Dillenberger. P. 222.

30 Bal. M. Narratology. University of Toronto. 1985. P. 95.

spatial aspects to the semantic content of the character..
Another approach sees Art as proper to theological understanding, as the contemplation of God is similar to that of Art, and theology requires new interpretations and methods of incorporation.
If there is a relationship between Art and Theology then at its core must be the understanding that from the diversity of the expressive arts comes the reminder to theology that its interpretive boundaries must be stretched, its margins constantly pushed.
The terrain of the visual arts lies on the frontier of human being. A constantly mobile border that encompasses all the fine art forms and ripples forward usually at the same time but rarely at the same phase. It may well be that Theology and Art are concatenate, linked together to provide expression to the created order, to allow meditation on the vastness of infinity, or in contemplating the nature of being, but only a liberal theology can free itself from its confines and reveal an interior vision of interest when it is presented and articulated to others.
Theology and Art can act as guerrillas of the voiceless, force incursions into the unutterable and display an alternative future. When they achieve this, they may still be separate entities, but their overlap, like pieces of coloured cellophane, allows a new and distinctive colour to be visualised, and within that distinctive light something different and remarkable can take place.
It is Art's role to delimit, deconstruct, to push the frontiers of itself as "the history of art has become a series of formal revisions and innovations in which painting is concerned with nothing other than itself "[31] since loosing itself from the confines of depiction.
Theology also drives to the boundary but "theological method is already theological affirmation"[32] and while its horizons are scanned they are viewed through reason which will not be contradicted, set aside or ignored.
The notion of a link between Art and Theology does not have to be that of one eclipsing the other; they can occupy the same space. "Space may be indicated explicitly, not because of an action taking place in it, but because of an action performed with it."[33] The delineation of sacred space in our churches and cathedrals is that form of space produced for an action to be performed in it. Within the painted space contemplation may occur; a space that allows theology to take

31 Taylor. M. Disfiguring. University of Chicago. 1992. P. 4.
32 Dillenberger. P. 216.
33 Bal. P. 99.

place. The space generated by non-mimetic art creates a gap between the viewer and the viewed that caters for meditation wherein theology may arrive. Any religious significance in modern artwork may not be immediately apparent but leading painters of the abstract school, including Rothko, Louis, Newman and Pollock, insisted that their work contained theological issues.

It is too easy to proffer an art-historical outline of Christian Art reduced to visual theology, but Art is no longer engaged in the aesthetic expression of Christian doctrine. While churches still commission artwork for their interiors it is very rarely the expressive art at the frontier of experience, and most Christian churches will desire the 'modernised' statements of figurative representational art within and upon their walls.

Where "nineteenth century theologians, philosophers and artists insisted upon the inseparability of art and religion"[34] we now have an art that offers an alternative space for theological imagination. Art interpretation will not explain the implicit or explicit spiritual preconceptions of abstract art, as it cannot. "There are no verbal equivalents for the visual expression in a work of art."[35] The dichotomy of word and image that raised iconoclasts and iconophiles was no longer relevant as fine art moved away from figure composition to abstraction. "The central question then, as now, was whether art is a way of seeing and knowing which is as truth-bearing as philosophical and scientific method."[36] This was, and is, inherently the wrong question and reflects the desire to return to that 'golden age' when all art was sourced from Scripture. Art is not about 'truth bearing' and is not engaged in philosophical or scientific methods. The methodologies of theology are not relevant to Art and that has placed Art in an area of distrust where the artist is seen as creator and promotes the second commandment, leaving pictures of the divine hanging between the sacred and the blasphemous.

If Art and Theology are in relationship, it must be more than an acknowledgement of the obviously Christian in Art, and must go beyond the figurative or figuratively semi-abstract works popularised by those involved in Art and Christianity. The view of Cubist painting was about looking in an analytical sense at de-idealised, non fixed representations of nature. The resurgence of realism in the post-painterly abstraction period is seen as Photo-Realism, "where technique and subject matter

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34 Taylor. P. 5.

35 Stone. K. Image and Spirit. Darton, Longman & Todd, London. 2003. P. 102.

36 Howes. G. 'Theology and the Arts: Visual Arts.' The Modern Theologians. Ford. D (Ed.) Blackwell, Oxford. 1997. P. 671.

are alienated or are set up to deliberately negate each other."[37] This rawness has its roots in the Post-Cubist outcry of "Guernica" which brought an apocalyptic anguish to Art which was later echoed in Photo-Realism where "the idea of non development is knowingly built into the work and held by some to be one of its virtues."[38] This appears to be the status of the union of Art and Theology where the need for image and illustration of the verbal relies on forms of naturalism or realism. Realist painting "is limited in its ability to invent its own space"[39] as all picture space, while attempting naturalism, only succeeds in dramatising the difference between the fictional and the illusory. "Paintings can take an independent line and are freer to invent situations within themselves"[40] and it is through this aspect that the viewer can realise that the space itself is the illusion and not merely an illusion of space.

In the abandonment of the mimetic the abstract expressionist painters of the New York area in the 1950's concentrated on the creation and development of "a profound space, which refuses to be bounded by the framed canvas, suggestive of infinity."[41] This movement in painting approached post-Cubist space as a flattened concept, that came to be referred to as 'shallow field depth', paradoxically producing the illusion of vastness that provoked in the viewers a sense of the "deeply sacramental, as a mystical space between the finite and the infinite."[42] It is here we find the link with Caspar David Friedrich's haunted vistas and Turner's blinding illumination. That quality of presence found within the painting whereby painting ceased to be the static artform presented on gallery walls and became an arena devoid of preconceptions wherein the viewer might establish "a renewal of faith, not its abandonment."[43]

What Turner's 'Angel Standing in the Sun', Friedrich's 'Morning in the Riesengebirge', and Pollock's 'Lavender Mist' have in common is "a primal place which is transformative of how we both see and feel the world"[44] something akin to

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37 Clark. J. 'Naturalism/Modernism: A Future for Figurative Painting.' Studio International Nov. 1974. P. 171.

38 Clark. P. 171

39 Sweet. D. 'Paintings and Picture Limit'. Art and Artists. Sept. 1974. P. 9.

40 Sweet. P. 8.

41 Jasper. D. 'Theology and American Abstract Expressionism.' Arts: The Arts in Religious and Theological Studies. No.7:3. 1995. P. 17.

42 Jasper. P. 17.

43 Jasper. P. 21.

44 Jasper. D. 'Light in the Darkness of the Heart; Art and the Spiritual' Contemplations on the Spiritual. University of Glasgow. 2002. P. 41.

love and pain, that is, a personal experience locked in uniqueness that typifies the relationship between Art and Theology and that can only be communicated through the parabolic. Picture space is akin to sacred space in that where we are situated immediately limits our vision, alters our perception, yet in that place apart we most can feel at one. Our relationship to picture space mimics our space in church, our space in the cosmos, our position relative to God. The parable places, then displaces us in different spaces at different levels, and no place is ever satisfactory where parables locate us. Parables draw attention to the blindingly obvious that we have missed, and art can supply that moment of dawning and the realisation that we are judged by the fact that we did not see and do now. In removing art from the context of the gallery and creating the private, individual experience for the viewer the theological context is revitalised and contemporised. The experience of the beyond becomes "modern, in a world for which that narrative no longer provides an all-inclusive frame of moral reference."[45]
In the Abstract Expressionists' denial of representation there is also the removal of the safety of tradition. Art has come down from the wall and beckons towards the frontier of infinity. The invitation to "the impossible possibility of vision apart from knowing - a seeing which admits the sight of our own blindness"[46] is the disorientating reality we are brought to; provoked to the edge of the abyss.

"The examination of what constitutes, irreducibly, a painting or sculpture - a question we here call modernist - has been the basis of the best of modern art."[47] It is this capacity of art to define and redefine itself without limit that also separates it from theology and the role some theologians would like it to adopt. "A parabolic theology locates its sources not in its doctrines and systems but in what lies behind doctrines and systems - in language, belief and life style that have attempted to be metaphors of Christian faith."[48] The spatial metaphor of parabolic theology sees painting specifically and Fine Art generally as resources of this intermediary theology. To use visual language in novel ways to evoke insight takes us to the frontier where images are wild and untamed, not the images of doctrine that McFague sees as the "sedimentation of metaphors" - the agreed upon understandings that are dead or dying.

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45 Pattison. G. Kierkegaard, Religion and the Nineteenth-Century Crisis of Culture. CUP. P. 197.
46 Jasper. P. 24.
47 Carmean. E. 'Modernist Art; 1960 to 1970.' Studio International. July/August 1974. P. 9.
48 McFague. S. Speaking in Parables. Fortress Press, Philadelphia. 1975. P. 92.

The parabolic mode of thinking, a "hidden way of locating the graciousness of the universe within the ordinary and the mundane"[49], openly operates within the secular and is a vital resource for the intermediary theologian.

Currently in Scotland painting competes with television, video and computer generated images alongside tabloid journalism in generating entertainment rather than debate and fine art has been reduced to the level of a craft. However it is the 'handmade' process which continues to provide painting's cutting edge as the entire surface of the canvas is worked and considered as opposed to the limits of the mechanical process. Painting "has developed strongly in Scotland over the past few years - simply because it can still say more than modern media."[50] What has emerged is a Post-Realist Figurative School of painting centred on Glasgow that is rooted in the Post-Modern and provides a disturbing, deconstructed narrative; an apocalyptic view of society today. The key is disassociation from the symbols and signposts that now indicate nothing and nowhere in "the constant theme of the wanton unreliability of the represented world."[51] Image does not possess truth, nor authority and "the dismantling of the hallowed ground of the realist project"[52] forces an unrelenting, unapologetic concentration on the subject of man's inhumanity to man. The difficulty of further definition may be its strength where the condition of knowledge is presented as fragmented and is seen as a field of relationships that must be constantly renegotiated. As art emerges into the post-modern it can reclaim its expressive domain and show us things we do not want to see, making us aware that "abstract art is still young and we are not yet used to looking at it in a picture."[53]

What is immediately apparent is the fact that no longer is there a social or liturgical need to employ the Bible as a source for new work.The literal depiction of the Gospel is too narrow a concern for these Glasgow artists.[54] Christianised content or iconography is not a part of the structure of contemporary art, yet it is in contemporary artists testimonies to the state of their times; the complexities,

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[49] TeSelle. P. 95.

[50] Spalding. J. 'Art For People.' Gallery of Modern Art, Glasgow. Scala, London. 1996. P. 18.

[51] Macmillan. D. The Paintings of Steven Campbell. Mainstream, Edinburgh. 1993. P. 21.

[52] McCarthur. E. 'An Uncertainty Principle'. Steven Campbell on Form and Fiction. Third Eye, Glasgow. 1990. P. 11.

[53] Spalding. P. 21.

[54] In this context the work of Steven Campbell, Peter Howson, Ken Currie and Adrian Wiszniewski is outstanding. All trained at Glasgow School of Art, and live and work in the west of Scotland. Their work is held in The Gallery of Modern Art, Glasgow, The National Gallery of Modern Art, and the National Portrait Gallery, both in Edinburgh.

ambiguities, disruptions and fragmentations that have characterised a great deal of the apocalyptic nature of the twentieth century.
The universal language of colour and form located in abstraction struggles to be accepted because the historic imprint of art as representative and decorative has made abstraction psychologically inaccessible to the lay person. Yet abstraction offers a quiet space in which a relationship with God can re-open, creating an area where the Holy Spirit can be met and recognised. The vast, seemingly meaningless, abstract canvases have engaged harmoniously with the problems of space and infinity, and have appropriated the role of recorder for those artists who have striven to enunciate in an aesthetically meaningful way the problems of their time.

In Jesus' parables we are forced to confront ourselves, our reactions and biases. We are forced to judge ourselves and redefine our activities as we are drawn into the narrative which, like painting, must be seen as "an arena in which to act - rather than as a space in which to reproduce, redesign, analyse or express".[55] What must combine from Art and Theology for the relationship to operate is that form of reaction provoked by the parable, the realisation that what operates on the canvas is not a static picture but an event.
Since there is no total, comprehensive, religious tradition, and any attempts to produce artwork along those lines will result in weak parochialism, the interaction of Theology and Art will remain problematic. The problems of Post-Modernist appropriation of Scripture as text and of icon as image whereby the "paradox of a highly visible culture in which Christian imagery has itself become increasingly invisible"[56] will continue as long as theologians shrink from grasping the nettles of space and immanence.
Space for Christians has always been enclosed in a close and holy darkness. Even the light structures of Perpendicular Gothic enclose and sanctify, guard and protect with safe borders. Images limit imagination, altarpieces set margins on space, reredos act as a rim of the world, and Scriptural depiction defines and fences off options.
Abstraction opens interactive space to all who wish to explore for themselves. The boundaries between the official, sacred, authorised version and the secular, personal experience have been erased. The personal immanence of Pollock's

[55] Rosenberg. H. The Tradition of the New. Paladin, London. 1970. P. 36.
[56] Howes. P.682.

'Blue Poles', Louis' 'Veils Series', Rothko's, Newman's and Motherwell's large abstract paintings "and our delight in responding to it in the medium of art as in every dimension of life, is not about to vanish away."[57]

[57] Howes. P.683.

Painting as Parable.

J.F. Millet (1814-75) turned his back on Paris in 1848 at a time when capitalism and the industrial revolution were making an impact on people's lives. Instead he chose "a rural existence in which human values were paramount, and commercial ones non-existent."[58] While this attitude and his 'Sower' resonate with the Markan parable it must be noted that Millet was not a Christian and his humanism was tempered with stoic resignation.
He settled in the village of Barbizon and remained there for the rest of his life, attracting many followers who developed the 'plein air' style of painting that granted their work immediacy and freshness.
His 'Sower'[59] is a sombre figure. His face concealed, he is that half known, half recognised image we gain in Mark. Whereas the Markan sower moves away from us inviting us to follow, Millet's figure strides purposefully across our line of vision as a warning, a final display of the reality of life and the importance of Christ's teaching. He is the sower and the reaper, the alpha and the omega of life. Strong and direct, he is not going out to sow, but is actively sowing. His message is blatant but subtle, encapsulating the full impact of the parable; the time is now, the process has started, and you just have time to begin.

The tragic biography of Vincent Van Gogh (1853-90) is well known and he was greatly influenced by Millet and the 'plein air' school. Son of a Dutch Protestant Pastor, he had trained for ministry himself and was acutely aware that Millet had represented Christ's teachings in the 'Sower'. Its symbolism "haunted Van Gogh's imagination from the moment he began to draw and paint."[60]
Van Gogh painted several works covering aspects of this parable. His 'Wheatfield with Lark'[61] is full of light, colour and nervous intensity. One "cannot avoid the symbolic association evoked by such an image."[62] The wheat is tall, straight and mature, bearing thirtyfold and sixtyfold. Above it rises a lark singing its praises to the sky, heralding the triumph of those who have acted on Christ's teaching. The wheatfield is devoid of people, only the lark, possibly doubling as a dove, reveals

58 Bowness, A. Modern European Art. Thames & Hudson, London. 1972. P. 65.
59 Millet: 'Sower' 1850. Oil on Canvas (101 X 87.5 cms.) Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
60 Bowness. P. 63.
61 Van Gogh; 'Wheatfield with Lark' 1887. Oil on Canvas (54 X64 cms.) V.G.Foundation, Amsterdam.
62 Bowness. P. 67.

and revels in the spirit of the scene.
In his 'Wheatfield with a Reaper'[63] he acknowledges the image of death but the single, distant reaper in the large field under the bright sun is not doom laden. He portrays a sense of completion, of reward "in broad daylight with a sun flooding everything with a light of pure gold."[64] This is the fruition of those bearing thirtyfold and sixtyfold as their work is done they are gathered up. This is the omega to the alpha of his 'Sower', for Van Gogh "saw the forms and colours of nature as standing for human passions"[65]
'The Sower'[66] is a heavily emblematic, religious picture that has nothing to do with orthodox Christian iconography. The dominating presence of the sun emphasises the need we have for the immensity of God. It acts as a halo for the sower thrown into anonymous silhouette who, like Millet's 'Sower', has started the process: the kingdom is present under the sun. The sower moves towards the bare tree, thorned and ragged; a cruciform emblem in its stark dominance of the centre of the scene. The "central premise that nature can be seen to reflect, simultaneously, the will of the Creator and the passions of its observers"[67] is the utterance of a religious heart acknowledging that the parable's reality and his own are not only relevant but also concurrent .

The Hermeneutic Question.

Modern research into parables began with A. Julicher (1857-1938) who was responsible for "the final discarding of the allegorical method of interpretation."[68] This had viewed parables as codified theology; the consequence of an early stage of Christian development. Julicher had a didactic understanding of the parable seeing it as a figurative depiction of a universal truth where Jesus had focused on a single point of comparison.
Objections to the notion of parables as timeless truths were introduced by C. H. Dodd (1884-1973) who identified an eschatological bias where the parables proclaim the kingdom of God in the person of Jesus. The kingdom was seen as

63 Van Gogh; 'Wheatfield with a Reaper' 1889. Oil on Canvas (59 X 72 cms.) V. G. F., Amsterdam.
64 Bowness. P. 71.
65 House. J. 'Van Gogh'. Post Impressionism. House & Stevens (Eds). RA, London 1979. P. 84.
66 Van Gogh; 'The Sower' 1888. Oil on Canvas (31 X 38 cms.) Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.
67 Hughes. R. The Shock of the New. Thames & Hudson, London. 1991. P. 276.
68 Jeremias. J. The Parables of Jesus. SCM, London. 1976. P. 18.

salvation now available through Jesus and within reach if, like the owners of the treasure field and the precious pearl, we leave them and follow Christ.
J. Jeremias (1900-1979) extended Dodd's view, agreeing that there was an eschatological message but adding that they revealed the impact of their time and Jesus' biographical situation. The imagery employed often derived from concrete events reflecting life as seen at the time and the concerns of the rural poor. In addition Jeremias saw the division between Jesus' presentation to the public, which he defined as a setting in the life of Jesus, and the post-Easter slant stressed by the disciples which was aligned to the life and thought of the primitive church.
The hermeneutical understanding of parables as "a dynamic speech event"[69] was posited by E. Fuchs, E. Jungel and H. Weder amongst others. Here Jesus is present in the parables in authority and "those who are addressed are 'changed' by the speech event of the parables so that they become open to God's message."[70] It is within the nature of the parables to provide conditions for understanding in the listeners. They differentiated between substance and imagery, presenting substance as simile and the basis of imagery as metaphor where the substance was part of the picture itself and the metaphor helped to create the reality it expressed.
Existential hermeneutics also saw the parable as a speech event based on metaphor which transformed existence, but its literary-critical approach saw them as closed works, containing a provocative message opposing conventional religious practice. R.Funk, B. Scott and J.D. Crossan represent this view where the parable was dependent on the interplay of inter-related fictive elements for meaning rather than something external. They could be understood as independent "of their original situation and are even autonomous over against their author."[71] It is their language that provokes reaction and determines the direction of faith.
L. Schottroff represents a sociological exegesis based in feminist theology focusing on liberation theology. She postulates that the imagery derives from the socio-economic realities of the time, that their message is rooted in the examination of these conditions and in forcing people to see them in a new light, and that the primitive church was akin to a Jewish liberation movement utilising the content of the parables.

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69 Theissen. G. & Merz. A. The Historical Jesus. SCM, London. 1998. P. 320.
70 Theissen & Merz. P. 321.
71 Theissen & Merz. P. 321.

What is certain is that parables were part of a common narrative tradition in Judaism where their character revealed the background of the shared tradition and the attitudes of expectation established in them. Their *Sitz im Leben* is probably at a pre-written stage where they would be employed by any teacher or preacher as part of their repertoire. This developed from the Jewish wisdom tradition and was already established at the time of Jesus.
To omit any redaction-critical questions regarding the parables of Jesus would lead to anachronistic conclusions. The Synoptic Gospels reveal the need of the evangelists to place the parables in current situations within their communities and an analytical comparison will reveal this.

The Markan Sower.

The Gospel of Mark, Chapter 4.
Again he began to teach beside the sea. And a very large crowd gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat in it on the sea; and the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land.
2. And he taught them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them:
3. "Listen; Behold, a sower went out to sow.
4. And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it.
5. Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it had not much soil, and it immediately sprang up, since it had no depth of soil;
6. and when the sun rose it was scorched, and since it had no root it withered away.
7. Other seed fell among thorns and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain.
8. And other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold."
9. And he said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." R.S.V.

In v.1 the 'Again' is a resumptive device in the narrative of the Gospel. There is no attempt to link this to any other passage. Jesus is seen teaching a great crowd from a boat. After delivering this parable the narrative is broken and it is not until v.36 that it resumes 'as he was, in the boat'. "Parallel with this break in the situation

goes a change of audience"[72] where Jesus deals with questions from a much smaller group which, linguistically, would indicate a later stage of the tradition than the parable itself.

The command to "Listen!" demands attention and emphasises that "the words of Jesus were the words of God bringing true understanding to the receptive hearer."[73] From v.3 there is justification in seeing this as going back to an Aramaic original as the details of agricultural practice common at the time: sowing before ploughing, sowing on the path which will also be ploughed, the state of the rocky ground in v.5 where a thin soil often covers the limestone geology that is only apparent at ploughing, all relate to the actuality of farming practice in Galilee. "There is no suggestion of bad farming"[74] and the notion in v.7 of sowing in thorns is reasonable since all stubbles and weeds would have been ploughed under in what is now referred to as 'green manuring'. All this supplies evidence of a well observed, fact based narrative which the audience would easily relate to.

The yields in v.8 are exaggerated to enhance the message of the parable but, with the loss of the original context, the exact meaning of the parable is only conjecture. It may be that it was told to encourage the disciples in their setbacks and let them realise that not all the people they met would believe, but those that did would be very valuable. The centrality of the kingdom of God to Jesus' teachings may indicate that the harvest is 'now' and, despite a lack of response to God's word in the Old Testament era, those who have listened have provided a rich harvest. It may also have suggested that, regardless of the opposition Jesus faced, his message and actions would usher in the kingdom.

The parables in Mark's Gospel, and all the sayings about them, are linked to "the question of the nature and purpose of the parables themselves."[75] The view presented in Mark suggests that parables obscure Christ's teaching to prevent it from having an impact on those who were not entitled to be saved. This, at the time of their utterance, may have referred to Gentiles. By the time of Mark's recording of them this is not credible, as already the Church was well established in the Mediterranean world. An alternative is to view the statement as enigmatic; a form of teaching "which enables him to produce and preserve his divinely willed division

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[72] Jeremias. P. 13.

[73] Nineham. D. Saint Mark. Penguin , Harmondsworth. 1977. P. 134.

[74] Nineham. P. 135.

[75] Nineham. P. 126.

among his hearers."[76] The difficulty with this is that, at the time of saying, he was apparently alone with his disciples, having to explain what he meant to them, which in turn would imply that no one understood at all. If this had been a private or secret matter, there would have been no reason for Jesus to discuss it in public. It also completely misrepresents the totality of Jesus' teaching to all people, whether they were regarded as poor, common, sinners, sick or unclean. Furthermore, the enigmatic view is countered in v.13 where all is explained to enhance the message, and again in v.33 where it is implied that parables are meant to be accessible to any that make the effort to understand. The disciples as insiders, according to Jeremias, now know that the kingdom of God is active in the present and "this recognition is wholly the result of God's grace."[77]

Parables force us to consider a radical reality where the state of things as they appear to be, or as we wish them to be, is *forced* into question. They thrust a new concept at our intellect whereby it becomes the passive recipient of the experience, as it has had no time to impose a structure on it. Parables provoke a re-definition, a new relationship within our concepts rather than the reliance on the facts as we thought we knew them. The result, in accepting this perception, is that it destroys the notion we have of reality. All we have left in our 'ordinary' lives is an overplan of conforming to established behaviour patterns. Our personal reality bears only a vague resemblance to anyone else's, yet the prime directive is not to be concerned with this but with the needs of others in their struggle to cope with 'reality'. The community, therefore, is what we strive towards; the development of human society. We are, however, ordered to love our neighbours as ourselves. Thus love of self is the basic building block of the kingdom.

It would be easy to see this aspect being abused, falling into greed, gluttony and selfishness when what is required is discipline, understanding, inner peace and love. Some may well see this but not perceive the implications, may well hear the message but not understand the resonances, and may remain outside in their own realities.

It is the "poor in spirit" (Mt.5:3) who have the kingdom of God. The poor in imagination, foresight and mental prowess may have no difficulty grasping the parabolic of the kingdom presented in the parables. Only they and children will have access immediately to it because they are Israelites "indeed, in whom is no guile"(Jn. 1:47). These are the open, receptive believers who hear and accept the

[76] Nineham. P. 136.

[77] Jeremias. P. 16.

word of God, whose concepts are easily re-defined, whose visual thinking is not entrenched.

If there is a concern that "they should turn again and be forgiven" (Mk.4:12) 'they' obviously are deemed to have the capacity to do this; the insight to realise their fault and the impetus to amend it. 'They' therefore are not "poor in spirit". The prophecy of Isaiah (6:9-10) quoted in Matthew 13:14-15 does not merely speak of poor people with inadequate mental resources but those Jews who, having heard the word and seen the work, refused to acknowledge the Messiah. This aspect is endorsed in John 12:39-42 where "many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, lest they should be put out of the synagogue."[78] It is a similar case when Paul quotes the same passage from Isaiah in Acts 28:26-27 to the Jewish community in Rome. As they disagree and refuse to accept the teaching of Jesus, they too put themselves on the outside, as "this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen" (Acts 28:28), echoing the "saving power among all nations" of Psalm 67:2. Ultimately the parables of Jesus are gifts of the Spirit and "the unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him" (1 Cor.2:14).

The outsiders, in terms of the post-Easter period of Jesus' followers until the rise of early Christianity, may be seen then as those Jews who remained outside the new Church. The use of Isa.6:9-10 in Mark's Gospel may reflect a certain amount of irony in the text where people refuse the word of God and the price they pay is sealed in an acknowledgement that they may yet turn and repent.

Nineham feels it is doubtful if this aspect amounts to evidence that parables were a deliberate means of clouding rather than revealing the truth. The notion that Jesus "employed them to conceal the meaning of his message is a contorted and tendentious explanation."[79] If Jesus was fulfilling prophecy (Isa. 35:5-6), his parables were cries of controversy issuing warnings and illustrating instruction. "Jesus never tired of expressing the central ideas of his message in constantly changing images"[80] and any covert attempt to limit the numbers who would appreciate his teachings would cut directly across his entire philosophy.

After the death of Jesus the parables were preserved within an oral tradition, without their original context, and the circumstances of their narrative and their

78 References to this fear of the Jewish authorities is also seen in John 7:13, 9:22, 19:38, 20:19.

79 Vermes. G. Jesus the Jew. SCM, London. 1994. P. 27.

80 Jeremias. P. 115.

J.F. Millet 1814-75
"The Sower

Vincent Van Gogh 1853-90
"The Sower

precise bearing would become a matter of uncertainty and conjecture. In the compilation of the first gospels the editing and structuring of the text to achieve a narrative flow would have been of considerable importance in attempting to win over a wider audience. "The process of treating the parables as allegories had begun, a process which for centuries concealed the meaning of the parables."[81]

Rhetorical Considerations.

"Rhetoric is that quality in discourse by which a speaker or writer seeks to accomplish his purpose"[82] by the treatment of the subject matter, evidence of argument, control and choice and arrangement of words.
The rhetoric of the parables lies in their style, conduct and delivery, and uniquely in chiasmus - "the reversal of the order in corresponding words or phrases"[83] - which was a tradition of Jewish speech.
In an examination of a text based on rhetorical analysis the intent of the author and how that intention is transmitted through the text is scrutinised, as the rhetorical situation demands a speaker, an audience and a discourse.
Parables operated like myths in a traditional rural society. No explanation is necessary for myths, as they are apprehended easily. Their "truth can be felt and the truth applied to a mystical understanding of the world."[84]
Variations in the rhetorical units of the Synoptic Gospels are noted in the Lukan Gospel where the formal beginnings and endings of narrative are interrupted and "integrity is disturbed by the intrusion of Luke's voice"[85] (eg. 6:39. 'He also told them a parable'). While this is consistent with Luke's historical style, it also implies that not all that Jesus said is recorded by Luke.
Matthew employs all aspects of rhetoric and strives "consistently to provide his reader with something close to logical argument."[86] In this attempt to supply proofs is reflected an audience who were Jewish, were familiar with Scripture, and who had doubts as to Jesus' status. It is therefore not surprising to find Matthew's rhetorical features emphasising the law and hostility towards Gentiles.

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81 Jeremias. P. 13.
82 Kennedy. G. New Testament Interpretation Through Rhetorical Criticism. University of North Carolina. 1984. P. 3.
83 Kennedy. P. 12.
84 Kennedy. P. 72.
85 Kennedy. P. 64.
86 Kennedy. P. 102.

Mark can be seen as "radical Christian rhetoric, a form of 'sacred language' characterised by assertion and absolute claims of authoritative truth."[87] Jesus' preaching in Mark is set in parables whose context is immediately apprehended.

In Matthew 12 Jesus engages in some disruptive encounters with Pharisees and, after healing acts, asks for those present to keep quiet about what he has done. Thereafter he speaks to the remaining group in parables (13:3) adding 'he who has ears, let him hear'. Whereupon his disciples ask why he speaks to them in parables, revealing an inconsistency in style. The account in Luke is softened by the disciples asking for a specific explanation of the parable (8:9); but the quotation from Isaiah and the Markan phrase, 'lest they should turn again and be forgiven', is not included. Mark's Jesus delivers this statement on his own authority. The section from Isaiah is given to all as a warning whereas in Matthew it is told to the disciples to provoke a reaction of dissociating themselves from those who will not hear the message. In Mark 4:13 there is a different emphasis, and the question is addressed to the listener/reader.
The Sower and subsequent parables are set out deliberately and do not arise out of debate or incident. The "scene setting for this major and central group of parables constitutes a broad hint that it occurs at a consciously planned point."[88] There are distinct signs in this parable in Mark that the narrative is not only addressed to, but is also about the reader. What is related in the 'Sower' "is going to happen in the story yet to come"[89] and it has its precedents in Hosea 10:12, Isaiah 55:10, Jeremiah 4:3 and 2 Esdras 4:27-32, 8:41 & 9:31.

The Whispered Code.

"Parables are now seen as aesthetic objects that possess an existential-theological dimension."[90] This approach to parable is distinguished by reverses in the audience's expectations, manipulated by the mimetic.
In the Platonic sense, a work of art is the imitation of the imitation of the ideal model, and mimesis is essentially retrospective. The Aristotelian significance lies in

87 Kennedy. P. 104.
88 Drury. J. The Parables in the Gospels. SPCK, London. 1985. P. 49.
89 Drury. P. 51.
90 Parris. D. 'Imitating the Parables: Allegory, Narrative and the Role of Mimesis.' Journal for the Study of the New Testament. Vol. 25:1. September 2002. P. 37.

the notion that mimesis is "not the wooden replication of what is already known but every act of mimesis is a disclosure and revelatory in nature,"[91] a creative event in which representation is produced. What mimesis posesses is configuration and creative space that delineates what it represents from reality. There cannot be any notion of finality in the mimetic representation of a text or work of art, as representation is about displaying, revealing, exhibiting the scene depicted, which may involve the subject matter being isolated, highlighted, faceted or coloured to emphasise a specific point; and the encounter with it is part of the continual process of the work, as it persists in informing us of more than we knew previously. "The interpretation of Jesus' parables clearly illustrates the function of recognition at the different levels of mimesis."[92] The narratives relate to the rural poor and their theology which draws them into the representation and allows judgments to take place. The truth claim within the parable is also an aspect of the mimetic; readers are challenged to reconsider their definitions of life and theology against the background of Scripture, resulting in revision in relation to the truth claim. What Rembrandt facilitates is the opportunity for the viewer to recognise, in the portrayal of the parable, "earthy and often ambivalent sketches of human life, with resolutions that do not entirely stabilise this ambivalence."[93] Key features of the personae can only be achieved by representation, and it is through this that we learn to see in different ways while "the parable remains impenetrable in its resolution of life's moral vicissitudes and paradoxes."[94]

If image is "something that exists halfway between a representation and the thing itself"[95], then it is within that space, those confines, that we must interact. The search is not for an inert sign, nor for signs of life, but for image. Image stands at the threshold between us and the abstractions we employ as representations of ourselves, whereby we attempt to reconstruct their story. Image is an aperture, a gap between the reality of our existence and the iconography of graphics we invent to communicate ourselves.

We can tire of text and demand peace, and the narrative will cease; but our gaze is inexhaustible. It is a primordial aspect of our nature that we ceaselessly scan the horizon for presence. Distance is not a problem with modern technology, and

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91 Parris. P. 41.

92 Parris. P. 45.

93 Curkpatrick. S. 'Parable Metonymy and Luke's Kerygmatic Framing.' Journal for the Study of the New Testament. Vol. 25:3. March 2003. P. 292.

94 Curkpatrick. P. 296.

95 Durrant. M. 'The Blur of the Otherworldly.' Art Journal. Vol. 62:3. Fall 2003. P. 9.

distance is inherent in the narrative and the parable. "The work of art exists in a 'here and now' but always has the potential to exist beyond the restriction of any instant."[96] This involves a concept of temporality within which this potential endures and which may be likened to presence.

[96] Benjamin. A. Art, Mimesis and the Avant Garde. Routledge, London. 1993. P. 153.

Paintings.

Visual Thinking.

The need to order visual information stems from our infant search for new concepts and our need to represent them. The understanding of our sensory activity is translated into a concept in the creation of signs and symbols that form our initial drawings. The impact of our external world is rationalised through a process of drawing into a new relationship and realisation of what we, as children, actually know and see. As we age, our *gestalt* recognition allows us to organise quantity and compartmentalise speciality, and we establish an order and visual authority. Where juxtaposition does not relate to our scheme, "we run into the tendency to define abstraction as the ability to violate the natural order of things."[97] Breaking this natural visual link, opening the mind to other aspects and visual possibilities is part of the art education programme where the best practice is seen in allowing children to visualise sensation and thus stimulate the scene. The notion of walking barefoot on wet grass generates in primary school children's paintings the enlargement of the members, indicating the source of stimulation and giving an extended importance to feet and toes, with the possible increase in the number and size of toes as this allows a visual presentation of the level of stimulation and not the reality of it. Visual information is both empirical and perceptual and builds a vast vocabulary that extends from line to shape to colour; whereas essentially verbal thinking is an automatic response to connections we have in storage. Language activates our visual responses and allows us to cross reference information supplied to us at a linguistic level. The personal response is released by "the help that words lend to thinking while it operates in a more appropriate medium, such as visual imagery."[98]

We perceive the relationships in colour and form, in line and texture and we relate to them. We do not see shape and measure it in our mind's eye. We do not check angles and diameters, lengths and widths. Our visual response is based on reassembling discoveries found in different patterns and images which we have rationalised and which, in turn, create a sense of pleasure and security within us. It is only our perception that can resolve problems of comprehension through an interaction among the fields of patterns to be interpreted.

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97 Arnheim, R. Visual Thinking. University of California, Berkeley. 1997. P. 210.

98 Arnheim. P. 232.

The use of analogy in parables is fixed directly to this perception. "Analogies are traced best by a person who can take hold of a basic similarity of character in the items he compares."[99] The orders to "Listen, Behold" and the stimulation of the story activate the listener's capabilities of relevant abstraction when they come to deal with the visual information. This reasoned grasp of reality by a direct, personal vision is the basis for anamnesis and, by that, the process leading to an altered reality.

Language, presented visually, can decodify the classifications of objects or activities. The sower is imaged as more than a farmer broadcasting seed, and "such a change of function is accompanied by a definite perceptual restructuring."[100] Language helps to offset the tendency in perception to visualise in simple terms, as language suggests function and adds to the visual sense located in appearance; no two paintings of a house will be the same, but the word 'house' persists unchanged. Abstractness, on the other hand, "is a means by which the picture interprets what it portrays"[101] and the missing detail is supplied by the viewer to the abbreviated representation. Perception, as a complete recording of the visual field, demands that an incomplete representation be completed by the mind from the data of past experience. Abstractness is not an absolute term and should not be understood as incompleteness, as a picture is a statement about visual qualities and, as such, can be complete while containing a degree of abstractness. Where ambiguity is involved with regard to abstractness, the viewer must decide what they are looking at. This, at its most basic operation, is seen in the inkblots of the Rorschach Test.

Interpretation, questioning and judgment are thus introduced in visual awareness at an early stage of development and thus allow us to read Holbein's portrait of "Henry VIII" not only as a picture of a king but also as a symbol of kingship with qualities of brutality, strength and exuberance. The portrait is an abstract of the visual appearance as it sharpens formal features of shape and colour, making them analogues of symbolised characteristics. We react visually not only to physical stimuli but also to emotional and imaginative ones. "The ability to give objective form to the creations of the imagination does not depend on the capacity to see and observe things."[102]

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99 Arnheim. P. 79.

100 Arnheim. P. 239.

101 Arnheim. P. 137

102 Lowenfeld. V. & Brittain. W. L. Creative and Mental Growth. Macmillan, London. 1969. P. 270.

Art and language are not aspects of the pattern of nature; they are products of human spirit, thinking and emotion, and as we approach perceptive experiences we utilise what is essential to us; and everything is essential that directly relates to the expression of the experience. In provoking our awareness in the parables, Jesus creates an open-ended situation. We are not asked to see his vision; not requested to imitate him. This aspect evolved later in the Pauline Epistles[103] and it is important to see Paul's teaching as subject matter centred and thematically compiled, whereas Jesus' method of teaching is centred on a direct, personal and emotional appeal. Jesus stimulated his listeners in the parables and opening their visual senses and imaginations, allowed them to visualise in their own mind his new reality. This allowed them to express what came to mind and to tackle the problems that arose, whether emotional or mental, as the stories were located in encounters they had experienced in their own lives and as they had adequate visual language to perceive the new reality being presented to them. This is standard practice in the training of art teachers who must make themselves "acquainted with the physical and psychological needs of the child"[104] if they are to enable their pupils to identify with their own experience, before motivating them to creatively move to another level.

Jesus does not furnish technique, far less a prescriptive process of involvement. The narrative is revealed as a visual element of stimulation located in the experience of his audience and, thereafter, it is necessary for them to draw from their own resource of visual thinking to form their expression. The repetition of the narrative after a while or the illustration of the theme by a similar story "is of advantage because it exposes the [individual] to a variety of procedures and makes him sensitive to various possibilities"[105] of attaining a fuller expression of the expanded reality. This device of Jesus' parables, echoed in the best art and literature we create, entices the reader back to re-read and re-consider. It is important as it entertains, expands their own world and has significances beyond that immediate environment. We read 'as little children', as the parabolic re-issues the visual language we developed in childhood.

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[103] 'Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.' 1 Cor. 11:1.

[104] Lowenfeld & Brittain. P. 29.

[105] Lowenfeld & Brittain. P. 40.

Georges Seurat 1859-91
"La Grande Jatte"

Paul Gauguin 1848-1903
"Women of Tahiti"

What Paintings Are.

"Through blends of dusk and dragonflies
A music settles on my eyes."[106]

"The exteriorisation of thought in external marks which has encouraged the creation of images which not only are shadows or similarities, but also offer new models for perceiving the world."[107]
The development of the painted language was a process of abbreviation and reduction. The abridged alphabet of art has a history of progress related to technology and invention, and, like all languages, is an attempt to explain and order the world through its signs and colours. The combined resources assembled as a painting invariably display far more than their alphabetic parts.
With the establishment of oil based, non fugitive colour - the reliance on bitumen for black/brown was problematic, as it was invasive in oil and had a tendency to neutralise visual qualities - the establishment of depth refraction and surface reflection allowed the luminosity of the world to be depicted and created its own vogue. Painting remained mimetic, but in the confidence of the new materials "imitation is no longer a reduplication of reality but a creative rendering of it."[108]
Until the disruption of Cubism nearly all paintings had followed a convention of single point perspective, and this had generated the 'reality' or 'naturalness' of art for hundreds of years. Artists had striven for accurate flesh tones, spatial reality, textural quality and a visual presentation that was as fresh and detailed as eyesight but still allowed a freedom of expression in the studio. The Impressionist movement towards the effect of light upon colour - the defining aspect of their work - was a mental adjustment, not a total change in visual awareness. In late nineteenth century France, landscapes, still lives and portraits were still the order of the day within the Impressionist group. The rise in the dominance of colour in the Post-Impressionist period (1880-1900) fostered a re-examination of the science of colour and colour perception and the desire for a new art in the new century. Seurat and Signac and other Neo-Impressionists evolved Pointillism, but its subject matter, like that of Seurat's masterpiece 'A Sunday Afternoon on the Island

106 Dunn. D. 'Loch Music' Selected Poems 1964-1983. Faber, London. 1987. P. 203.
107 Ricoeur. P. A Ricoeur Reader: Reflection and Imagination. Valdes. M. (Ed.) Harvester Wheatsheaf, Hemel Hempstead. 1991. P. 131.
108 Ricoeur. P. 133.

of La Grande Jatte', is rooted in the French tradition of the '*fete champetre* ', while its scale (ten feet by seven) also places it in the heroic French style of Gros, David, and Delacroix. This aspect brought back into the public domain a feature of the parabolic that had lain dormant in French painting for some time.

With the rise of these aspects of Modernism the public were being asked not merely to observe and comment on works of art but also to judge and, in turn, be judged by them. From the new, seemingly overt mystery came impossibility. Form and content came into open conflict and revealed aspects of art that had been concealed before. This, in turn, prompted the re-examination of sources. If Seurat's Sunday afternoon scene on one of the islands in the Seine was in fact a homage to earlier, large academic paintings, and did not reflect a single afternoon but was painted from studies over many weekends what specifically were the public being asked to look at? An assumption was emerging in art. An alternative reality was being depicted, parallel to reality, of what a Sunday afternoon 'should' consist for the Parisian public. An allegorical image was presented: the language was Parisian but the scene was parabolically utopian. A notion of style and vogue was being fostered in contemporary art, "a world of flaneurs and feuilleton readers - and the sombre tones of the frock coats worn by the men in the picture."[109] A public awareness of painting as graphic chic, cultured trends was being introduced. This was a point of contact with a non-reality that left a half-memory, a yearning for the experience that never was.

Van Gogh's flattened colour, bright palette and emotional brushwork encouraged the Fauvist movement in France and, with an input from the work of Munch, gave rise to '*Die Brucke*' and '*Der Blaue Reiter*' in Germany. Another contribution to Fauvism came from the studio of Gauguin, whose work reflected a flat heraldic ground based on frontality and pattern rather than recessional perspective and depth and which ideally reflected his depiction of "a defiled Eden full of cultural phantoms."[110] His use of bold areas of flat colour and exotic linear rhythms inspired the short lived Symbolist movement and contributed to the rise of expressionism in Europe.

The late work of Cezanne was to promote the final break between tradition and modernism, although he himself was unaware of it. "The relation between late Cezanne and Cubism is quite one sided: he would not have imagined a Cubist

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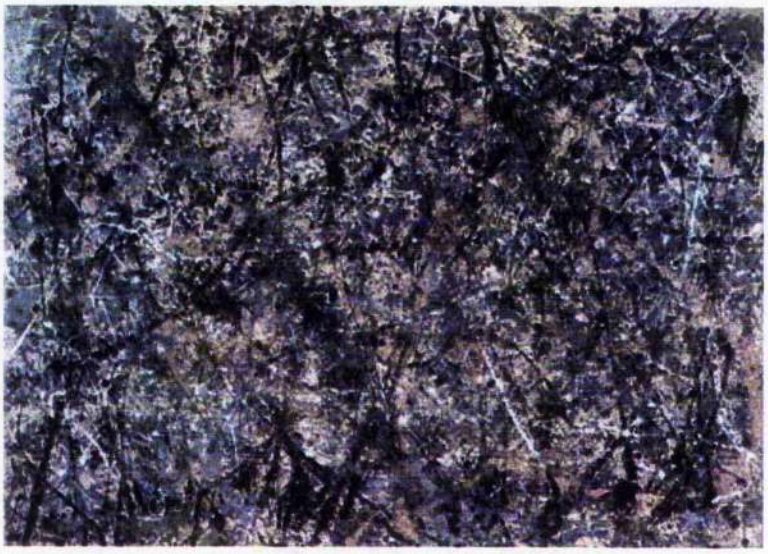
109 Pattison, G. Kierkegaard, Religion and the Nineteenth-Century Crisis of Culture. CUP. P. 183.

110 Hughes, R. The Shock of the New. Thames & Hudson, London. 1996. P.129.

Claude Monet 1840-1926
"Water Lillies"



Jackson Pollock 1912-56
"Lavender Mist"

painting."[111] Cezanne was an outstanding colourist, reaching out to a developing modernity. His late paintings have all the qualities of parables in that they are concretely about the process of seeing a different reality. They are concerned with what we see and know, not simply with what we view. Areas of interaction and perception were the elements that were to become the driving force in the emergence of Cubism in France; while in the colour dominated abstraction of Kandinsky in Germany, the new realities of colour as form, rhythm and expression would be revealed.

In all of this development, artists were re-employing ideas from previous cultures, for example from the frescoes of the early Renaissance and they were also borrowing from distant contemporary ones, as in the fashion for *'Japonisme'*, and *'Chinoiserie'* or in the trend for primitive art and the appreciation of the 'noble savage'.

While Monet's paintings of the 1920's may contain all the visual energy of a continual field of nuances, they are not versions of Pollock's "Lavender Mist" but it can be appreciated that the "Waterlilies" series would also have echoes in the future. The notion of no foreground or background but a continual skein of colour bearing its own texture would resonate in New York in the 1950's.

Painting allows us to view the world in a different way; fiction describes the facts. In the re-examination of what painting offers us "new realities become open to us and old worlds are made new."[112]

The Viewer As Judge And Judged.

One of the key elements that defined the Baroque movement was the highly accurate depiction of drapery. Baroque developed from Mannerism at the end of the Renaissance and, with modifications and changes through Rococo, lasted well into the eighteenth century. High Baroque was virtually confined to Italy and one could argue that it was limited to Rome and the period 1630-80. Here was a deliberate attempt to blend illusionism, light and colour, and movement in a calculated effort to overwhelm the viewer by a direct emotional appeal.

The upsurge in confidence at the start of the seventeenth century boosted Counter Reformation Catholicism which veered away from the qualities of plain domestic truth common in Northern European Art at the time. "The confused and flaccid

111 Hughes. P. 18.

112 Ricoeur. P. 135.

forms of late Mannerism gave place to a simple subject matter"[113] which combined unidealised naturalism, an uncomplicated iconography, and strong chiaroscuro effects that ranged from the dramatic to the subtle. The work of Caravaggio contains a clarity of composition, a reintroduction of balance and harmony derived from Raphael, and a directness of meaning, imagery and content. His work parallels that of Rembrandt, but is usually much lighter in its chiaroscuro effects. What emerges from this is a high degree of technical mastery over the media they used, an understanding of the body and objects in space, and the near perfection of rendering drapery in oils. These aspects of reality, especially the latter, filled the canvas, as often the rendition of landscape or architectural detail could be problematic or seen to detract from the foreground message.

Drapery had always both hidden yet revealed the inner form. This approach was featured by Greek sculptors, who used clothing to suggest movement and delineate the body beneath. By the time of Caravaggio, clothing was colour coded in a complex religious and social iconography, where meaning and status, identity and wealth could be indicated by the quality and colour of drapery surrounding the figure. This enabled the viewer to judge the quality of the painting and those depicted in it, but it also, in turn, judged the viewer, their clothing and their status. With Caravaggio's simplified iconography and unidealised subject matter the messages became more subtle, but the use of drapery as a delineating feature in art did not change. Depiction centred directly on the visual, but the didactic aspect concentrated on the hidden. This brought the notion of identity into conflict with that of reality. With the deconstruction of identity came the loss of character and the potential shift of reality into areas of transformation regarding age and gender, and the role of the spectator from viewer to voyeur. What was visible and what was intimated became a more subtle process and was often held in the details as in the case of literary parables. The viewer was forced to visualise the invisible and contemplate what was deliberately hidden; another reality. This aspect of parabolic painting remained true into the twentieth century.

If parables can be described as metaphors developed as narrative, they can be linked to paintings in two main ways. Their language and structure is image laden. We are asked to 'Behold', to listen and behold, and are immediately invited to visualise what follows. This may be the opening scene of the narrative - 'a sower went out to sow' - whereby we are encouraged to trail this half known man, a vaguely familiar back moving off upfield.

[113] Murray. P.&L. A Dictionary of Art and Artists. Penguin, London. 1964. P.16.

It can be a simile, 'the kingdom of God is like...', and we are asked to hold the image in view, from a stock of well known objects or substances in common domestic use. The visual similarity also operates with the dialogue beginning; 'which of you has a friend...', whereupon the mind's eye contains an image of the companion suggested. Once located at the start of the parable, the mental depiction will continue to its conclusion; simple strands of suggestion allow the individual to weave the tapestry of the narrative.

This is also endorsed by the specific nature of the image language used: the discreet introduction of 'a sower went out to sow' spins a web of images related to fields and boundaries, soil types, weeds, climate, harvest, and the physical labours involved in achieving crop production. It is this mental process; the build up of potential narrative tensions contained in all the facets of production, that permits a focus on visualisation.

Parables, like paintings, are autonomous, aesthetic objects "which do not point to something outside themselves; rather, their meaning arises in the interplay of inter-related elements of the fictitious narrative."[114] Yet they dominate the point of contact; we are warned 'Listen!' and then ordered 'Behold!' They contain an implicit understanding of existence in the composition of their parts which has the power to confront and force discussion from the hearer/viewer.

Existential hermeneutics may have their own gaps and unsolved problems especially in the area of "subjectivizing the historical element in the New Testament that the distinction between history and fiction gets blurred"[115] but their view of parables as speech events based on metaphor which transform existence can also apply to visual language. If "the original effect of a parable is to be rediscovered by a radical decontextualizing"[116] involving a literary analysis of the structure and relationships with a literary work of art, then a visual work of art could accept the same analysis.

A Lost Genre?

The parabolic narrative is peculiar in that the specifics of the language used and its demand on readers force them to consider a deeper parallel truth. Parable "illustrates and clarifies truth; challenges the imagination and will of the hearer, and

114 Theissen. G. & Merz. A. The Historical Jesus. SCM, London. 1998. P. 321.
115 Macquarrie. J. Studies in Christian Existentialism. SCM, London. 1966. P. 124.
116 Theissen & Merz. P. 321.

so demands that he face the claims of the truth presented."[117] This reality is metaphorical but not unknown, strange but not unfamiliar, where nothing is purely as it seems: "that metaphor includes a denotive or referential dimension, i.e., the power of redefining reality."[118] Jesus' skill in the use of the parable is distinctive adding a new dimension to the genre. The reality of the parable is the reality of new information, a new point of reference; a reality opening up in front of the text, not merely within it. Parables are "depicted as a mimesis of human action"[119] wherein the implied relationship is redescribed in a way that demands response. This response makes the listener/viewer a judge and their judgment in turn is a judgment of themselves.

To hold the reality of Jesus' parables in the centre of the mind is to be aware of the totality of existence; to be in the now of the kingdom of God.

It is existence as an outsider, an independent, and, while we admire the strength, dignity and courage of the 'lone rider' imagery, we cling to comfort and the assumed security of society.

The essential landscape, still life or figure painting offers another way of seeing, countering our own view, reminding us that our horizons can be broadened, that the richness of diversity is infinite. The parabolic painting demands a considered interpretation, one that is problematic, relying on critical analysis and an acceptance of the unresolved nature of examination that is on the margins of mystery. The parabolic genre asks us to make judgments about the way we see and understand, about what space and colour, shape and light do, and, in that, how they reveal the processes whereby we come to organise our reality. In making such judgments we enter into the parabolic gap where re-interpretation takes place, and at the same time we are judged by the work and our own judgments. The key to the parabolic vision is questioning and analysis dependent on the refusal to rely solely on previous methodologies. The need to question the difficulty of entering the parabolic space and, in so doing, inch forward to read the question asked on the canvas. Nothing is as it seems. Nothing is accidental. Questioning the depicted reality is answered by further questions, but the basis of this is that everything is the way it seems, and our desire to improve the narrative reflects our need to correct our vision; to attain the perfect vision. The fixing of pigment corresponds to the fixing of time. Moments superimposed on each other, layered in

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[117] Filson. F. A New Testament History. SCM, London. 1971. P.104.

[118] Ricoeur. P. 75.

[119] Ricoeur. P. 87.

William Holman Hunt 1827-1910
"The Awakening Conscience"

strata to be teased apart to reveal a distillate of the original question - how do I get in?

In considering the notion of a genre of painting as parabolic, the merely depictive styles of landscape and still life cannot be contemplated, nor can the anecdotal qualities of much Victorian painting. The paintings of the Pre-Raphaelites may provoke their viewers to question social standards, and William Holman Hunt's "The Awakening Conscious" may depict a parallel moral standpoint, but it does not project an alternative reality. The definitive aspects of the Gospel parables are also the essentials of the painted. The quality of language derived from an interplay of words constructing the narrative creates a reality into which we are invited. Similarly, in painting, the elements of the picture and the compositional arrangement form a scene where the reality presented has that quality of comforting uncertainty that is invitational. The viewer becomes voyeur and we have entered a different state of being. These paintings provoke the viewer. They disturb the onlooker in their creation of uncertain space, questionable encounters and voyeuristic tendencies. They bait the spectators as outsiders and lure them into the painting, forcing them to consider where they are and what is confronting them. The evidence of parabolic paintings lies in their narrative detail. Just as the sower moves out into the field and illustrates differing soil types, so the viewer is led into the visual counterpart, and scene behind scene is revealed. These paintings may be structured to lead the viewer further into the narrative, may present more than one moment, more than one reality for inspection, or may contain a mass of miniature detail whereby the canvas reveals itself as a series of minuscule narratives bound within the one picture plane; but all question the notion of reality. The nature of the narrative is the same in all forms. It has to be commanding, challenging, to the point of being alarming, and the reality depicted has to hint at desirability, be in some way recognisably better than the stance the hearers/ viewers find themselves in, in terms of justice and truth. Finally, the 'reality' must seem reasonably attainable, if only as a lure to engage them in an alternative state, where the movement may be attempted and encouraged.

The Painted Parable.

The impact of Calvinist Christianity on the culture of 17th Century Northern Europe was profound and did not favour the arts. This was a reaction against what was seen as decadent Roman Catholicism. Only Rembrandt in the North continued with scriptural themes and he "is the only artist of the first rank whose work has a recognisably Protestant flavour."[120] His use of innovative compositional placings, dramatic lighting effects and the depiction of simple humanity continued to bind a natural humanism to the drive for an honest realism which was the core of the Northern European post-Renaissance period .

In Southern Europe the art of the Baroque was "the only vigorous movement in Christian Art since the Renaissance, (and) had a Counter Reformation aura about it."[121]

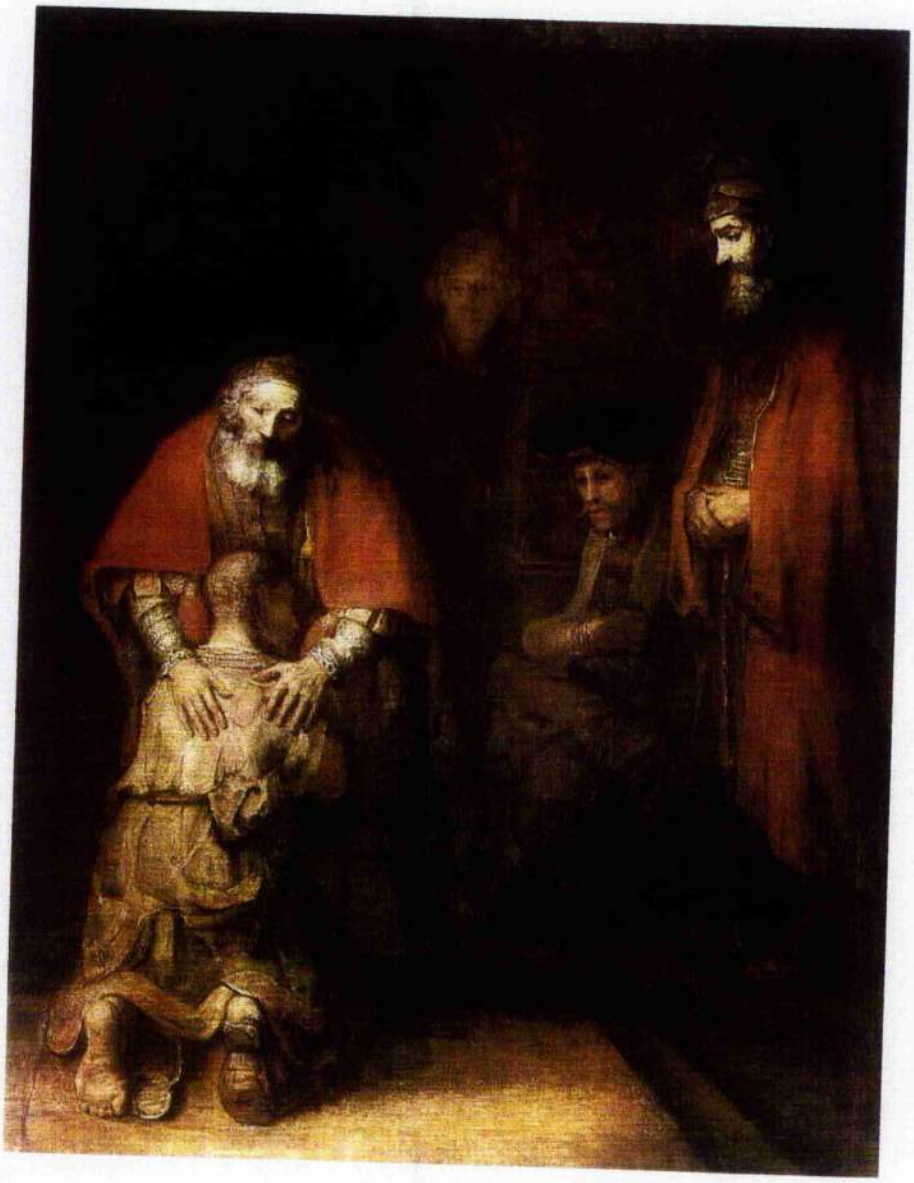
All artists working on themes reflecting the Gospel are confronted with the problem of making their images speak to a wider audience; of creating not only a record of the past but also that of a continuing truth. "Christian art is above all theology in visual form"[122] but the tensions between text and painting are not always resolved. This casts the viewer in the role of interpreter.

Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669) 'The Return of the Prodigal Son'.

Born at the time when Holland became an independent nation he studied under Lastman, "who was the means of his introduction to the rhetoric of early Baroque"[123] whereby the influence of Caravaggio may have reached him. Although he "never saw a painting by Caravaggio"[124] he was in contact with painters who had been to Rome and through them may have heard of his realism and use of light.

The selection of Biblical themes and titles was a matter of choice for Rembrandt, unlike Caravaggio whose Church commissioned the topics. It can be argued that the Baroque was the only movement in the history of art based entirely on Christian Art, as it was centred on Rome rather than Italy and financed by and for the

120 Wilson. W. Modern Christian Art. Hawthorn, New York. 1965. P. 8.
121 Wilson. P. 8.
122 Finaldi. G. The Image of Christ. The National Gallery, London. 2000. P. 32.
123 Murray. P. 266.
124 Mainstone. M. & R. The Seventeenth Century. CUP, London. 1981. P. 27.



Rembrandt Van Rijn 1606-69
"The Return of the Prodigal

Church. The Dutch Calvinist Church had no desire for religious art nor for any form of pattern or design in its liturgy or worship. Rembrandt emerges as the only Protestant artist of any stature to deal with the genre of Biblical Christianity. While often choosing Biblical subject matter in the course of his life, it was during the 1660's that he concentrated on this genre creating a Protestant iconography that was "deeper in emotional content and far less superficially dramatic."[125] His thorough use of drawing and etching gave him an enhanced sense of chiaroscuro; the use of a dramatic source of light to centre on the subject as opposed to aspects of perspective or colour iconography. Bringing this device to his painting created a far richer peripheral space and an immeasurable aspect to recession. While Rembrandt was keen to experiment and adopt any strategy that could contribute to the advancement of his work, "he was unable to accept a formula which might compromise the truth of his vision."[126]

In 'The return of the Prodigal Son', we can see Rembrandt as a supreme interpreter of Biblical Christianity, handling a subject "of profoundly human character rather than moments of blinding revelation or mystical experience."[127] In this canvas the qualities of "ugliness, poverty and other misfortunes of our physical life were not absurd, but inevitable."[128] A theme of repentance and forgiveness is painted at the end of his life with insight and monumental simplicity. What is depicted is our capacity to receive some radiance of the spirit, if we are emptied of all our pride, as expressed in "the meeting of two souls not with an exchange of looks but with an embrace."[129]

"The obvious interpretation is that the 'father' is God, and the younger son stands for sinful humanity"[130] which has returned to its heavenly home. The viewer also has to interpret the rest of the canvas as the father and son take up just over a quarter of it. The dark shadowy vault in which they are placed and the formal, richly clad onlookers are part of a greater parable that must be considered. As one journey ends another begins, and the newly returned son is reborn in the bare stable watched by Magi and shy herdsmen. This imposition of one moment over another is one of Rembrandt's greatest use of theological material.

Rembrandt's colour structure was based in the hot section of his palette. Reds are

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125 Murray. P. 267.

126 Clark. K. The Nude. Penguin, London. 1970. P. 325.

127 Mainstone. P. 31.

128 Clark. P. 327.

129 Nash. J. The Age of Rembrandt and Vermeer. Phaidon, London. 1973. Plates169/170.

130 Jasper. D. & Prickett. S. The Bible and Literature. Blackwell, Oxford. 1999. P. 257.

the nearest colours to us visually on the spectrum, and the father and son are portrayed in these. Red conveys warmth and affection, but it can also be associated with anger, hatred and blood. This colour 'centres' the subject of the painting in the lower left quarter of the canvas without recourse to drawn perspective or illusionistic devices. As the two figures merge in the warmth of their affection, we can read the message of the son as dead and returned, lost and reborn in the father, enveloped in the amniotic redness. This raises the question of Rembrandt's intention for the remaining surface area. All parables ask questions, pose the problematic and this is a major link with painting. In Rembrandt's compositional structure we can realise the whole content of the text and appreciate his ability to reveal the whole parable, not just a scene from it. The dark mass of the home containing the hard-working labourers and the discontented older brother is also present. Here is the area of concern that is never resolved and we are left with the vague notion that the older brother will eventually be pacified or "do we simply see him as an ironic portrait of the attitude of the Pharisees towards their less-strict fellow Jews."[131]

Hovering in the red mist of Rembrandt's background amid the textual questions is the riddle of red. Is this the unasked question of why he felt he had to leave in the first place? Does this represent the loosing of Yeats "blood-dimmed tide", a second coming in the return, where escape has failed, and he is forced to reappear in the hell of his home, bound to duty, tied to farmwork, loved and doted on by a father now enveloped by the feebleness of dotage, and under the control of a bullying, resentful older brother?

What Rembrandt has given us is a narrative response to the parable, not a mere illustration of it. We are presented with a single picture plane containing within it multiple frames of nuances and desires, sub-plots and asides. Rembrandt's creative mastery allows the narrative to flow in simultaneous directions. We are stationed at the back of this unknown youth, observing the red maelstrom of the parable swirl and flood, as the imposition of theological moments on secular ones spins provocative aspects of the depicted parable, forcing the viewer to ask questions that theology would avoid. Rembrandt's structure involves the two central figures as 'types', and his composition "is ruled by the 'plot', particularly by a kind of causality which overcomes the mere chronological succession of events."[132] The

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131 Jasper & Prickett. .257.

132 Ricoeur. P. 'Biblical Hermeneutics' Semeia 4. Crossan. J. (Ed) University of Montana. 1975. P. 38.

parabolic narrative has been structured by Rembrandt to reveal the end of the story but simultaneously include elements and nuances of the whole tale; a highly significant structural approach, as "its parts are not merely put in successive order, but they present several levels of discourse related to one another."[133] The reality we are facing is one of unease and questioning. Informed of his situation, we have followed this young man to witness this meeting where nothing is completely resolved and we are left in the doorway unsure of our next action or comment. The "distinction between the narrative as such and the narrational communication is that many more questions may be raised about the narrative than its structure."[134] Rembrandt's painting of the parable is parabolic in its own right: the consecutive, linear narrative of the text is balanced by the contemplative view of the painting. The response to the parabolic, which is the purpose of the device, although perhaps more advanced than the text, is still problematic. What do we do once we have an interpretation of the reality? What is our response and how is it manifested; is the reality merely acknowledged or acted upon 'positively'? It is in these areas that Rembrandt, more than any other who depicted Biblical parables, maintains the parabolic tension and removes us from the conventional expectations of portraiture and history, to tell stories and suggest interior landscapes that, finally, do not answer any questions but his own.

The Viewer as Witness.

What we see in art is directed by the artist, and much of what seems apparently natural may be manufactured by tactics developed in the studio. We are presented with finished products not a process. In some modern cases a process may be in evidence, but the main concern is to an outside truth. What is at question is the quality of a work, and that depends on the relations within it, and where the internal connections also link externally to the world, the nature of that relationship.
This could stand as a definition of parable and was summarised in the Abstract Expressionist Group Statement of 1950 in New York.
"Reinhardt: Do you consider the interrelationships of the elements in a work of art to be self-contained?
Hofmann: It is related to all of this world - to what you want to express. You want to

[133] Ricoeur. P. 55.
[134] Ricoeur. P. 72.

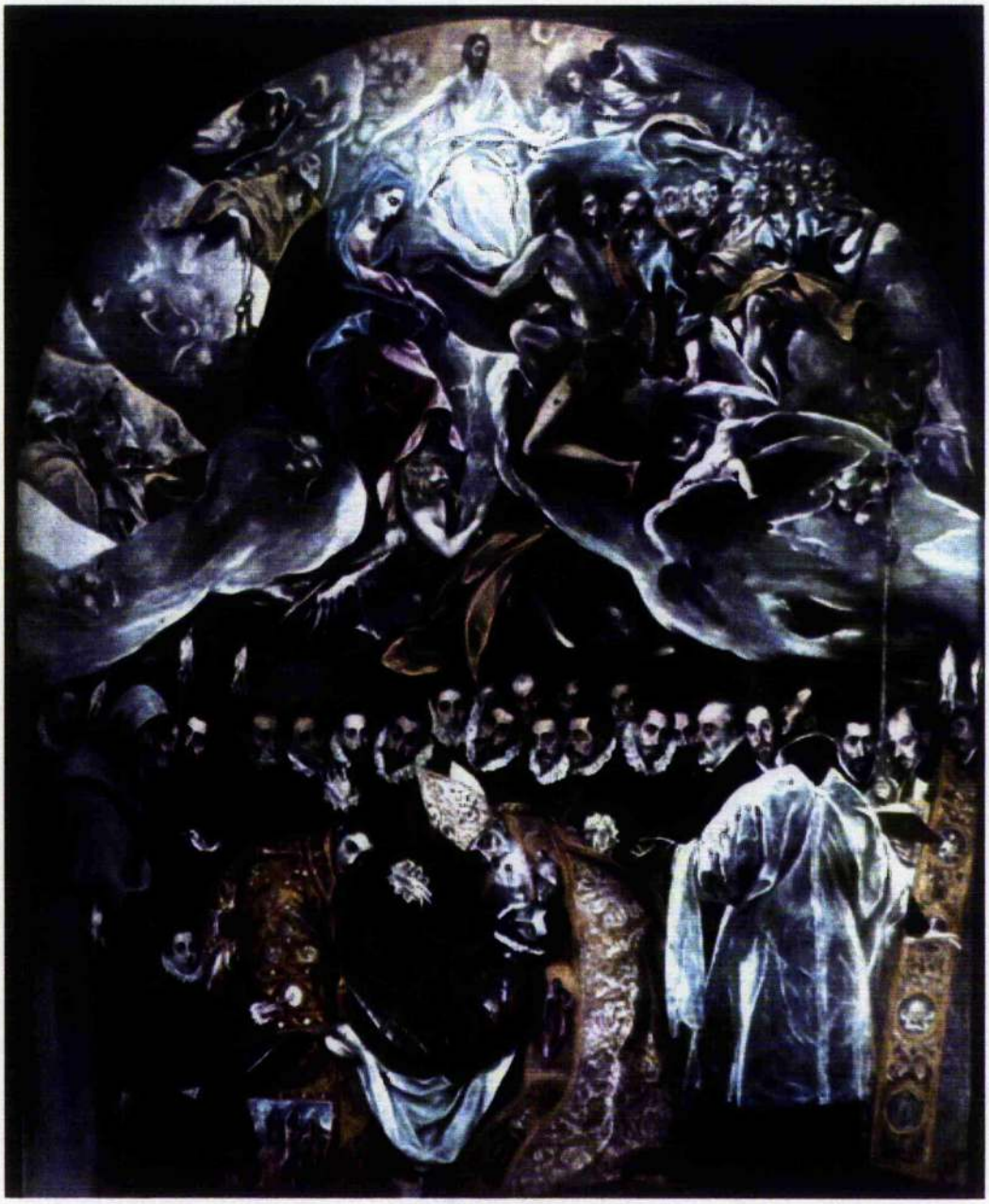
express something very definitely and you do it with your means."[135]
The involvement of parable as a genre in painting follows this relationship of elements to actuality, of the work of the individual affecting the awareness of the community. We may be asked to consider our actions relevant to the kingdom of God, or a kingdom on earth.

El Greco: 'The Burial of Count Orgaz' (1586).

The early years of Domenikos Theotocopoulos (1541-1614) are vague, and his move to Venice first comes to notice when the illustrator Clovio wrote to Cardinal Farnese in 1570 seeking patronage for "the young Cretan, a pupil of Titian."[136] His early work reveals a Byzantine heritage overlaid with the late Renaissance concerns of Titian, Michelangelo, Bassano and Raphael, which would evolve into the Mannerism of Pontormo and Parmigianino.
Mannerism spanned the movement from the High Renaissance to Baroque and as such displays the break with classical values of form and composition. Vasari first coined the term "to describe the schematic quality of much of the work produced, based on intellectual preconceptions rather than direct visual perceptions."[137]
While its principal characteristic is the primacy of the human figure, the mannered style of approach was peculiar to Italy. The Renaissance in Northern Europe had followed the line of visual realism, endorsed by Durer, to a realist expressionism seen in Grunewald, where the tension and agony of the 'Isenheim Altarpiece' reflected an anti-Renaissance quality. It must be noted that Mannerism held little sway in Venice, as the political conditions differed greatly from those of central Italy, and thus the work of Titian, El Greco and Tintoretto holds none of the neurotic, elegant petrification seen in much of the public art of this time.
It would appear that the Vatican's desire for this form of political correctness under Pius V, and the artist's outspoken condemnation of it, caused his speedy removal to Spain.

Overlapping these concerns were those of the Catholic Reformation. In Spain this was set against the backdrop of the wars with the Netherlands and England, and

135 Tuchman. M. The New York School. Thames & Hudson, London. 1974. P. 34.
136 Murray. P.139.
137 Murray. P. 192.



El Greco 1541-1614
"The Burial of Count Orgaz"

the expulsion of the Jews and Moriscos[138] from 1585-1609 which left Toledo desolate. It was also the time of Ignatius of Loyola, John of the Cross, and Teresa of Avila. This was a period of intense spiritual development in Spain and of military prowess both of which suffered from internal neuroses in the rise of the Spanish Inquisition and the failure of the Armada(1588) and any subsequent resolution with England.

The endeavours of the Catholic Reformation cannot be seen as purely centred on the Church. Although "a priesthood uncorrupted and incorruptible, educated and other worldly"[139] was a strong theme running through the Reformation, there was a secular dimension also. The "great flowering of quietistic mysticism, involving new techniques of meditative prayer"[140] impacted on the public, particularly the aristocracy who set the secular tone.

The Burial of Count Orgaz.

In many respects this painting follows the iconography of the assumption, and in scale, shape and aspects of format echoes Titian's 'Assumption of the Virgin'[141] whose composition El Greco had utilised in his 'Assumption of the Virgin' for the Church of St. Domingo el Antiguo in 1577. Titian's "God the Father waiting at the top to receive the Virgin and an angel beside Him holding a crown to be placed on the Virgin's head"[142] has definite reverberations with El Greco's structure in the burial. The painting goes beyond the influence of Titian and reveals the artist's ability to combine complex political iconography, the mediaeval inheritance of the Spanish Church, and the aristocratic hierarchy of the Spanish Court in this densely packed arena whose colour structure often states more than its forms.

> "All our work is ultimately directed by our answer to the question of who - or what - our God is, and where for us the ultimate source of all reality and life lies."[143]

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138 "Little Moors" - Spanish Muslims ordered by Philip II in 1568 to renounce their Moorish lifestyle and have their children educated as Christians.

139 Chadwick. O. The Reformation. Penguin, London. 1966. P. 255.

140 Walker. W. A History of the Christian Church. T.&T. Clark, Edinburgh. 1997. P. 503.

141 Titian. 'Assumption of the Virgin', 1516-18, oil on panel, 690 x 360 cms. S. Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, Venice

142 Mainstone. P. 6.

143 Rookmaaker. H. Modern Art and the Death of a Culture. IVP, London. 1970. P. 36.

'The Burial of Count Orgaz' for the Church of St. Tome in Toledo portrays a 14th Century Toledan nobleman being laid to rest. He is surrounded by dignitaries of the church and society, founding members of Holy Orders, and all the ritual and pomp of the period. Above, his soul passes through the strait gate to Heaven where it will be welcomed by the Virgin and St. John the Baptist, the communion of saints, and Christ Himself who already awaits him open-armed.
The painting, densely packed with humanity, indicates that he will have as many friends in heaven as he had on earth and will be just as dear to them, and welcomed by them as he was in life. The attentive faces in the funeral crowd are echoed in heaven, the attendance of the Church is resonated in heavenly dignitaries, both sets of which prepare him to meet Christ. This is echoed further by the role of angels in heaven which is linked with that of the small acolyte in the left foreground, bearing light in his hour of darkness. Similarly, the flow of vestments in the immediate foreground is matched in the shapes of clouds, forming the barrier between life and death, heaven and earth.

The anatomy of the structure of the work reveals that this is truly a painting of two halves, split between earth and heaven. The earthly portion is full of life, that is, it is compressed. Humanity is stacked in flat ranks of claustrophobic quality, enhanced by the boxed effect of the paintings edge, while heaven is light, spacious and airy under the arching dome of infinity. This is further emphasised by the dark hues used below and their opposites above. The earth is limited and dominated by men, while heaven is boundless and open to all.

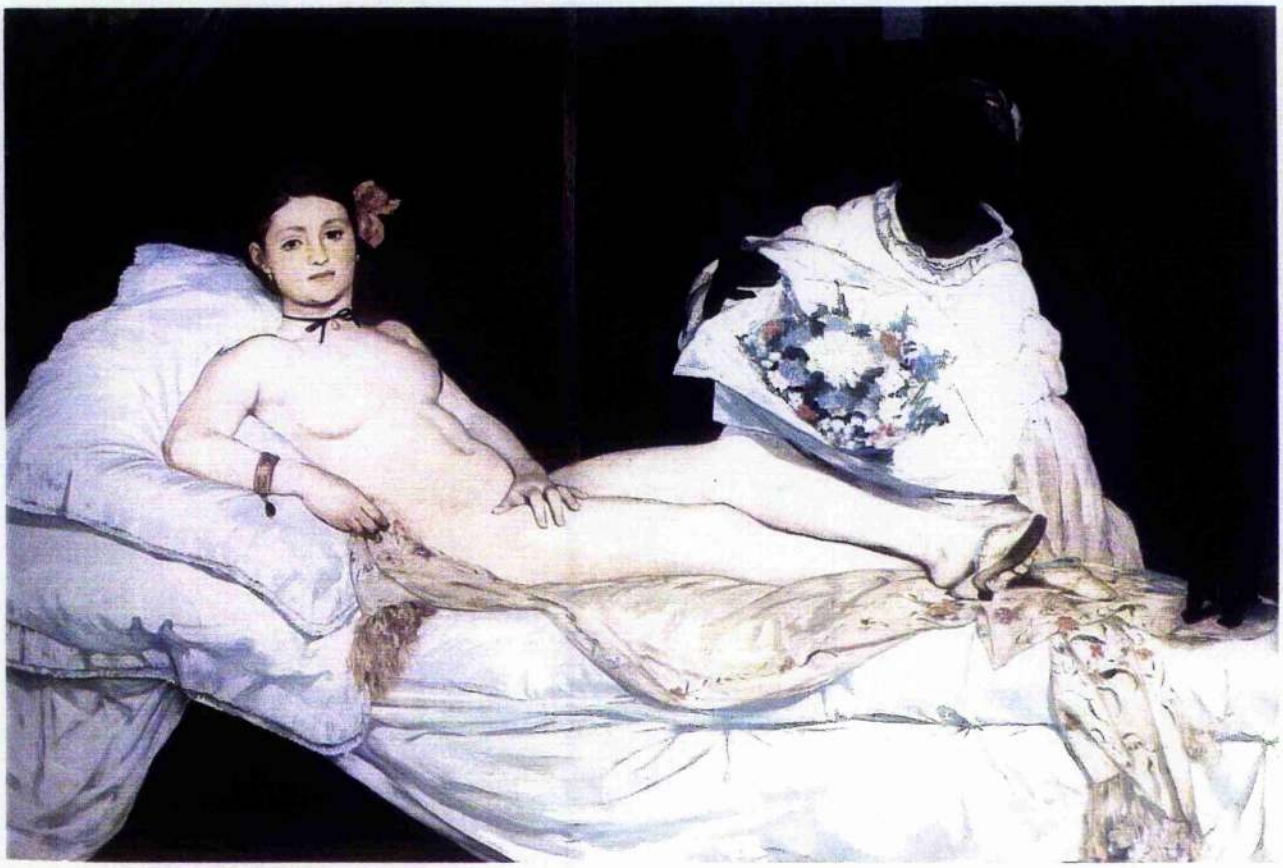
With the small acolyte pointing inwards and the priest with his back to us indicating both ways, the artist has attempted to break up the flatness of the foreground composition with a ripple effect. Similarly the attitudes of the bishop (St. Augustine) and the vested priest (St. Stephen), with the body of Count Orgaz, cause a similar movement in the otherwise flat crowd. The flatness of the aristocratic party is not accidental. They form a black fence, and their lost companion is very much within the pale, whereas their backs are turned to all: they bar all who are not eligible to take part. We, as viewers, are allowed into the scene as within the pale, and at the invitation of priest and acolyte. The darkness above their heads is indicative of the *Dies Irae,* and their uniform, sombre dress accentuates this, while the light of

heaven allows colour and individuality.
The Virgin sits at the edge of heaven, waiting to welcome and backed by St. Peter, who holds the keys of the Kingdom. Opposite her is the Baptist, symbolising the new birth into the Kingdom, born of water and the spirit (Jn. 3:5-6), and beside him is Andrew, facing his brother, a fitting place for a fisher of men (Mt. 4:19). The massed ranks of the saints sit at their ease in a diagonal formation, as there is always room in heaven.
At the central line of the painting, the vertical axis, is the action. The body of the Count, supported by the Church and watched by nobles, is transformed into the soul and assisted by an angel into the narrow passage into Heaven. On emerging , blessed by the Virgin and Baptist, it will rise to meet Christ. The vaginal/ uterine nature of this passage, the symbolism of the child as the soul, and the Virgin midwife (and immediate Baptism) all combine to create the birth/rebirth process of the new life into Christ, to whom the Count is drawn (Jn. 6:44). He is surrounded by the lightest part of the work, echoing Jn. 8:12, and he 'will have the light of life'.

> "The Christian must show by his life, his words, his action,
> his creativity what God really intended them to be."[144]

It is interesting to note that, starting from the foreground, the formal linear composition is not only enhanced by the colour structure but that the latter is also utilised symbolically to emphasise aspects of the Count's, the Church's and the aristocrats' status.
The decoration on the Count's armour is a direct echo of the needlework on the vestments of the clergy. The dark/silver background of the armour relates to the colour iconography of the laity/aristocracy and links to the light/silver background of the vestments. As the surpliced priest on the right prays, we are aware of the white over his black cassock. Similarly Count Orgaz, in his dark armour is about to be draped in white to become 'holy' and take his ordained place in heaven.
The immediate wave of light colour, from the cope of the priest on the right to the figure in monastic habit on the left, creates a degree of recession before the wall of the noblemen. The symbolism of their closed ranks has been discussed above, but the contrast between their blackness and the white ruffs and faces, between the dark wall of bodies and the whiteness of heaven should be seen as one of El Greco's finest subtleties.
Black and white are absolutes. One cannot mix dark black. Thus these men are

144 Rookmaaker. P. 38.



Eduoard Manet 1832-1883
Olympia

shadowless and impenetrable; the strength of their power as national statesmen and supporters of the Church cannot be broken. No background light shows through. They are seen as guardians of the State and the Church. They defend without having to brandish weapons or symbols of power; their massed ranks declare their status and might.

Immediately above is a range of clear, well-painted, recognisable portraits in a ripple of light - the human face of authority. Above them hang the doom laden clouds of the time. This is the only area of unsettled colour, indicating that under heaven is a region of chaos held in check by the Spanish aristocracy and Catholic Church. This single strip of disturbed tone has a degree of immediacy lacking in the staged format of the piece and differing from El Greco's usual use of colour, which is "often eerie and strident, with sharp contrasts of blue, yellow, shrill green."[145] Similarly, the elongated limbs and nervous tension of his figures is absent, as is the haunted quality, where drapery can seem to have a life of its own. Nothing here is random or chance. This is a view of a well-ordered society that acknowledges the hierarchy of State and Church - a clear message that the divine order is reflected on earth in Spain.

The sombre colour structure of the lower half gives way to the light of heavenly airy spaces. The Virgin's blue robe is shadowed so that it fits into the overall frame of the colour structure. Some blocks of red echo the flashes below and, generally much the same colour scheme operates, but here set against the white of infinity. With black and white being extremes of tone, rather than hues, they are contiguous on the picture plane. This was an incredible concept for the time and one that was never taken to a modern conclusion until Manet's 'Olympia', where an essentially black and white picture flattened the painting space at a time when his contemporary Impressionists were trying to deepen it through colour. Where most artists had used image as a key to the parabolic in painting, and colour had been illustrative or informative, Manet's use of tone is a unique portal to the parabolic narrative in art. Manet's 'Olympia' of 1863[146] is a search for modernity in the concealed aspects of Parisian society. His stance, like that of Pollock and Louis a century later, was to establish a cool, impersonal reaction distancing his audience. The vague stare of the model in 'Olympia' ignores the viewers, yet, it draws them into the truth of France's colonial history and contemporary attitudes to black French people, as the American Civil War rages across the Atlantic. In a scene

145 Murray. P. 141.

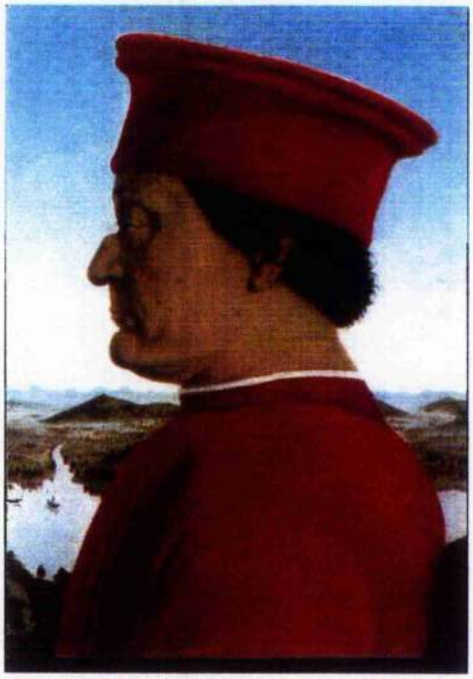
146 'Olympia,' Oil on Canvas, 1863. 130 X 190 cms. Louvre, Paris.

where the contiguity of tone relates the black woman to the background but technically, in terms of tone values, equates her with the white woman, a parity is established. At the same time the juxtaposition of the black woman's modesty and the white girl's nudity, which bears all the emblems of harlotry, provokes the viewer into moral judgments they would otherwise avoid.
Ultimately it was another sixty years until Jackson Pollock dealt with the problems of contiguity, large scale paintings, and shallow space in the Abstract Expressionism of New York. The relationship between 'The Burial of Count Orgaz" and 'Blue Poles' (1956) is only apparent in their use of colour structures. Both create a space between the viewer and the viewed, where an interaction can take place and where space as illusion and space as form overlap. It is within this 'gap' that the parabolic reality can take over and allow a view of the infinite to be held; where the contemplative may sense the influence of the divine.
While this is only true within abstract principles, it does operate within El Greco's painting, as what he is saying in using this device is that heaven and earth are contiguous. Paradise and Roman Catholic Spain are on the same plane, in the same orbit - so close as to be almost touching.This is a didactic statement about the nature of the Roman Catholic Church, and its Reformation in Spain, entirely formulated by the interrelationships within the work and their relationship in reality.

The Viewer as Interpreter.

Parables are often an approach to areas of taboo. The mechanics of our response are prompted by the text/painting, and the parabolic interchange is a result of this response. They can place us in areas of cross-cultural, cross-gender and cross-taboo concerns that are sensed as acts of transgression; states where the change of reality can be seen as transgression. Breaking social constraints could be rationalised by Jesus' contemporaries, but transgressing the Mosaic Law was taboo. Jesus' actions fill them with awe (Mk.4:41) and make them afraid (Mk.5:15, 16:8) and his advice to 'not fear, only believe' (Mk.5:36) is often insufficient for them to abandon their faith in the Law. Often 'their hearts are hardened' (Mk.6:52), and he himself 'marvelled because of their unbelief' (Mk.6:6), but to become involved in the parabolic was to be transgressive. Parables drive us to the frontier of being, challenging assumptions and social conventions and by their light create an environment of perception and judgment that is, in turn, a judgment of us. They

James McNeill Whistler 1834-1903
"The Artist's Mother"



Piero Della Francesca 1410/20-92
"Frederigo Da Montefletro

possess their own reality and raise questions about ours. They are complete in themselves; intact in their movement from alpha to omega. The cultural protection of art exists in that it is framed and thereby denoted as special. It is on the wall; it is safe for public consumption, but only if we relate to it within suggested limits. The task of theology is to carry us from context to context, and the language of theology can take on the terms and implications of pornography, where "the central symbol of Christianity is the figure of a tortured man."[147] Parables are about breaking down the norm, and the safety draped over public art is a transparent veneer. In Whistler's "Mother" some may see an aging Madonna, and some a sex object; both disturb the safe notion of 'mother'.

The Case of Whistler's Mother.

James McNeill Whistler (1834-1903) had exhibited his 'White Girl', also known as 'Symphony in White No. 1', in the infamous Salon des Refuses of 1863, along with Manet and his 'Dejeuner sur l'Herbe'. "Had Whistler remained in France his art might have been strengthened by Manet's naturalist vision"[148], but his art always held a melancholy pallor that related to an interest in the Pre-Raphaelite movement. In the latter years of the 19th Century, his art became an integral part of the modern movement in England. His 'The Artist's Mother' and 'Thomas Carlyle' formally entitled the 'Arrangements in Grey and Black', while full of shallow spaces, simplified profiles and carefully adjusted proportions, have an aura of elegant restraint in the muted tonal values that are the key to their content.
While the form of 'The Artist's Mother' is an arrangement in grey and black and the linear structure verges on the abstract and is supported by the tonal paintwork, the key to this portrait is the fact that Whistler's mother is to remain unknown. This anonymity was in stark contrast to his normal partially draped figures, who tended to be clad in the light, clinging garment that the French refer to as *draperie mouillee.* This device renders "a form both more mysterious and more comprehensible,"[149] revealing by partly concealing the figure, and allows awkward transitions to be made by the smooth flow of line. This treatment of semi-naked girls swathed in diaphanous material in the dance related poses endorsed by Isadora Duncan may have been popular with MacNeill and his public, but his mother was

147 Moore. S. God's Gym. Routledge. London. 1996. P. 4.
148 Hamilton. G. Painting and Sculpture in Europe 1880-1940. Penguin, London. 1967. P. 31.
149 Clark. P. 68.

not a suitable case for treatment. Her whole identity is now problematic and has to be handled in a sensitively specific way that still maintains the artist's impetus in modern art and status within the movement: an arrangement is made.
His mother's face is in profile; half of it is hidden. This is at once concealing and purely stylistic, enhancing the idea of privacy in the sense of neutrality, and his own notion of aesthetic design. There is no practical application of this device in Whistler's work, as in Piero della Francesca's portrait of the Duke of Urbino, produced in profile, as Federigo da Montefeltro "had received a serious and very disfiguring facial injury which involved his right eye and had distorted his nose."[150] The position of a footstool extends her legs and hence the material of her dress, which conceals even more from our potential judgment, but, in turn, that question of the hidden and the nature of the subject matter judges us. Here is the step into voyeurism provoked by an extended area of black cloth, and a concern for, or wonder about, the woman's legs. Compounded by the fact that they are deliberately hidden, we enter into a taboo area regarding the sexuality of elderly women, and, it is the artist's mother. This latter aspect is a socially restricted area for the viewer but begs the question as to what prohibition Whistler may have been toying with when he made the arrangement in grey and black.
It is this deliberate extension of material which relates the work back to the Baroque and the need for the depiction of drapery to be exact. The reality lies in the sections of material and in their tonal properties. There is more life and reality in the folds and contours of the drapery on the left of the canvas. Its dark grey, creased with black shadows, reveals careful folding to exhibit the white spotted and swirled pattern that effects the one piece of vitality in the presentation of a life that is well boxed in. Mrs. Whistler was to remain as she had always been seen by her son - a dark grey shape concealing her body and her life. The secret language of the parable deliberately hides the story of this woman.
What we are presented with is deliberately limited and can be seen as a form of administrative invisibility. Whether by physical or colour symbolism, iconography or concealment, we are presented with an image containing a narrative that is not immediately decipherable but that must be scanned and remembered. Flowing drapery, "by suggesting lines of force, indicates for each action a past and a possible future."[151] This may be formalised as suggested movement of the figure or expressive of mood or spirit, but often some expression of energy depends on this

150 Murray. P.& L. The Art of the Renaissance. Thames & Hudson, London. 1972. P. 130.
151 Clark. P. 171.

artificial device, and "it tends to degenerate into mere space filling".[152] This places the viewer in the role of interpreter, interpreting more than that witnessed, more than what they see and know. This is not the whole story, not the full picture, and the relationship of perception to content goes much further, into the realm of interpretation and deconstruction, into areas of art history and technique, and into the social taboos of western culture. The parabolic arc of Whistler's 'Mother' relates a simple narrative that spirals into areas of taboo and voyeurism where we again are judged by what we think and questioned as to our attentions.

Painting as Parabolic.

The following examples function as parabolic paintings in that they conform to the format of narrative parables. They relate an easily assimilated story that leads the viewers into other areas of concern where the original narrative is only a reference. The central significance awakens the viewers to a parallel awareness which forces them to examine that which they may normally have avoided socially or sexually. They are coerced into judging a situation which judges them and their own attitudes.

The immediacy of the next level of awareness erodes the initial simplicity of the story, promoting confusion and placing the viewers in a different light, while making demands on their being. Both parable and painting call us to examine our existing standpoint, to consider that which we would rather avoid, and to formulate our own new stance. Nothing is as it seems; space that appeared to open up is closed down and we find ourselves in radically different circumstances, provoked into actions we would happily evade. We are forced to arbitrate and mediate in a parallel narrative, whose limits are not registered, whose approach is problematic, and whose indelicacies invite and embarrass. The product of this process is our own evaluation; a statement of our own worth, an assessment wrung from us under duress and which hangs over us in admonition.

152 Clark. P. 172.

Caravaggio - The Sower and The Sowed.

Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1573-1610) was so called after his birthplace near Milan. In 1584, he was apprenticed for four years to Peterzano, who claimed to have been a pupil of Titian, after which he moved to Rome. His vivid realism, use of contemporary costumes and settings, and his rejection of the ideal figure, as expressed in Mannerism and Baroque painting, clashed with the Christian iconography of the time, but the immediacy and simplicity of his approach, and the introduction of strong chiaroscuro effects with a wealth of detail found him buyers amongst the noblemen and cardinals of Rome.
His violent temper brought his career to an end. "During a game of tennis he quarrelled with his opponent and stabbed him."[153] He fled to Naples in 1606 and went on to Malta in 1607. Assaulting a Justice of the Peace he was jailed, escaped, fled to Sicily in 1608 and finally to Naples in 1609, where he died a year later at the age of 37 from a fever brought on by a rage.
Amongst his followers were Orazio Gentileschi and his daughter Artemisia, but his influence had a European stature affecting the realism of Velasquez and Murillo in Spain, La Tour and Le Nain in France. While Rubens and Rembrandt are both highly individualistic, they too exhibit an indirect awareness of the light and subtlety that Caravaggio brought to public notice.

Any artwork is dependent, not only on history generally, but on the history of art specifically. Painting involves a constant reworking of older images and ideas where chronology may have little to do with order. Any innovation developed by an individual artist is adopted, stylised and rerouted by the next generation of painters. "Perhaps we can learn something useful for our own re-visioning from looking at that practice."[154] Not only does re-visioning allow Baroque art to be relevant today, but it also reveals the interpretive process that integrates the past with the present. The iconic facet of Baroque art was its use of drapery. The depiction of cloth and clothing created a certainty between time spans when the notions of artistic perfection became mannered and theatrical. Textiles provided an aspect of realism

153 Murray. P. 47.
154 Bal. M. Quoting Caravaggio. University of Chicago. 1999. P. 3.

Michelangelo Caravaggio 1573-1610
"The Cardsharps"

and subtlety in painting, in illusory quality, capacity to disguise, cover and deceive, it restricted perception of the core object, while depicting it openly. The fine, ultra-realistic depictions of brocade and silk became part of the narrative. Clothing dictated status, identity and role in the scene, but also, primarily concealed the content and object of the works. Drapery took over and dominated the immediate view; drapery became structure. The endless folds and recesses, shadows and textures often form the bulk of the illusory depth, and simple drawing and overlapping figures are added to complete the dimensional illusion of the image. By this process, we are trained to accept the presentation of depth within the illustrated narrative without ever touching on the notion of meaning, interpretation or integration. The discrepancy between texture and image is sometimes developed to the ludicrous, where overdressed figures would be incapable of movement in actuality. This emphasises the gap between the notions of image and painting. This gap is not a void, rather it is an area of interaction, forcing us to process the complementary aspects on the surface of the image with the concealed narrative behind it. "A vision that can be characterised as a vacillation between the subject and object of that vision which changes the status of both."[155] What Caravaggio resonates is an aesthetic, a concept of representation within a timeless frame, and an epistemological view which is skeptical of validity, and critical of method and society. Within his work, image and meaning operate along the same porous boundary as vision and narrative. This is continued in the movement between two dimensional patterning, that flattens the picture space, and three dimensional illusion that balances the seemingly incongruous details and visual gaps in the narrative: a motif that is also typical of Gospel parables.

This alteration of the status of visual elements effects the movement between the viewer and the viewed and sets up the parallel of the contemporary hermeneutic of the Gospel parables and the historical subjects of Caravaggio's paintings. The concept of clearly representing what is invariably hidden is the key element in Caravaggio's work, and the process of perception and discernment, a tool to the interpretation of the parable. The rendered features of folds and contours flow as a translation of the substructure; a reverberation between image and meaning.

It is in gauging the relative importance of unpresuming elements, as a scale of involvement, that these works hold successive generations in wonder and perplexity. The articulation of their engagement, a process of decipherment and understanding, reveals how we may react in the gap between ourselves and

[155] Bal. P. 7.

Caravaggio's mirror. "The detail that works in this way sets in motion the process, or performance, of the painting that entangles the viewer across time."[156] Within the time this takes there is a redoubling of the temporality of the image and the examination of it. The importance of 'quoting' previous artistic traits then resonates with the parables of Jesus, as both demand re-examination, re-consideration, and their own uniqueness in turn, makes them 'quotable'.

This detailed, multi-narrative process can be seen in 'The Cardsharps' and 'The Fortune Teller.' "These two works, whose brilliant colour was quite unlike anything in Roman Art..... were deliberately provocative."[157]

The vivacity of Caravaggio's early work is clearly seen, and the subtlety of his use of space within figure groups is masterful, while his adoption of contemporary dress in his scenes and depiction of the then current concerns of authority - women and cards - place him at the forefront of his art. His direct use of the parabolic as a means of recounting one story while intimating another was unique and encouraged by his patrons, who saw themselves as insiders in these metaphorical encounters. Outwardly "the theme of both paintings is the same - deception and the snares that beset innocent youth."[158]

"The Cardsharps".[159]

"The Cardsharps" is a visual narrative about vision, time, and identity information; about beauty and desire"[160] but it is also a highly charged sexual anecdote coded in the Baroque language of textiles alongside the conventions of figure composition. The language of the reality of this parable is hidden in the folds of drapery, the pattern of textiles, and the soft subtleties of cloth.

"The cards evoke Narcissus' mirror, and the youth looking into the cards is accordingly totally self absorbed."[161] His skin is the smoothest and whitest; his hands are neat and clean, compared to the dirty finger nails of the youth in the foreground. His clothes are the richest; velvet, fur and lace compared to the damaged gloves and repaired clothing of the others. His structure is curvilinear, as

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156 Bal. P. 31.

157 Langdon. H. Caravaggio: A Life. Chatto & Windus, London. 1998. P. 85.

158 Langdon. P. 85.

159 The Cardsharps ("I Bari") Oil on Canvas. 99x107 cms. (Ca. 1594-95) The Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, Texas.

160 Bal. P. 77.

161 Bal. P. 77.

Michelangelo Caravaggio 1573-1610
"The Fortune Teller"

the lines of his neck, jaw, hair and those of his eyebrows set up a rhythm that rounds on itself and on his general shape, enhancing the notion of introspection and self-absorption.

The disposition of the other two is angular, stiff, full of signals and demands. Their clothing is a contrast; striped material as opposed to the smooth roundness of the velvet. "Both the young cheat and the older man wear a form of military dress."[162] The torn sleeve of the foreground youth is badly sewn, revealing loose threads and his generally poorer appearance sets him apart from the timeless identity of the other youth. The older figure in the background dominates the scene as he manipulates the game and his interest in these youths. His vertically striped sleeves jar against the pale curves of the wealthy boy. His skin is coarser; his vision concentrated.

The colouration and texturisation of the figures is a further indication of their identity. The rich youth in his dark velvet is compact, warm, secure and soft. The stripes of the other two reveal their broken nature; the youth, in wider stripes, not as corrupt as the older man. Similarly, the colour of their clothing is significant as yellow is traditionally the colour of deceit; although the warmer tones of the youth's jacket suggests that there is still some warmth in his nature, as is reflected in his gaze. This gaze is lost on the older man who has professionally stationed himself to observe the cards and indicate their value. He is solely interested in the money they will make as is indicated by the signals of his fingers in ripped gloves; a trick of the trade to detect marked cards.

The relationship between the two youths is a subplot; the richer is engaged in a narcissistic dream where the cards act as mirror, and one of admiration of him by the poorer. His downy upper lip and poor clothing, torn at the shoulder and creased at the neck, could indicate an innocence and it is within this relationship that a facet of the parable is related. His forward leaning stance, yearning eyes and open mouth intimate his concerns are not about the money but about the individual.

The clothing not only denotes rank and wealth of the individual but also connotes the outlines of their desires. The rich and beautiful youth is wrapped in dark velvet and is as impenetrable as his downward gaze. Nothing can be discerned about his body and we are invited to wonder about it also, along with the poorer youth, whose hand is thrust towards him and whose eyes, ignoring the hand signals of his partner, cannot leave the object of his desire. His torn and threadbare clothes predict a loss of innocence and as the satin stripes delineate the structure of his

[162] Puglisi. C. Caravaggio. Phaidon, London. 1998. P. 75.

back, so the parting of the stripes at this rear may indicate the nature of their relationship. The phallic hilt of his dagger, like his eyes and hand, is the directed at the beautiful youth, but further movement is blocked by the gloved fingers of his partner hand which guards that angle, denoting their relationship and the roles they have within it.

The parabolic aspect moves from cards and the desire for wealth, to the desire for love and affection, to the control of affection, and to the patrons who control all. We are taken through the narrative, invited to view voyeuristically the nature of concerns, and left contemplating the element controlling the process; supply relates to demand and creativity is rooted within the narrative, and financial constraints. We are drawn into the scene, placed behind lost innocence, where we can view all the details and are forced to reconsider our own 'reality'. The gaps in the painting are equivalences of the gaps in our own knowledge, but the pressure is on us, nonetheless, to determine our attitude to events, or remain a voyeur. Our judgment, or lack of it, will in turn judge us.

"The Fortune Teller".[163]

Despite the simplicity of this scene this is a narrative of secrets about secrets. Outwardly it is about the concern for young men being approached by Gypsy women, who were a relatively new phenomenon at that time. The young woman's turbanned head and cloak tied at the shoulder denote her background. One can surmise that her gentle touch, soft voice, and warm eyes hold the other's gaze and "only the attentive viewer can spot her surreptitious theft of the young man's ring as she smilingly foretells his future."[164] How we see this picture is completely interwoven in the secrets of how they see themselves and each other. As in 'The Cardsharps', the use of the half-length portrait creates intimacy, not merely within the scene depicted, but for the viewer also. We are thus part of the scene, invited into the picture space by design and familiarity with our 'companions' - as opposed to the formal grandeur of a full-length scene, where the viewer may look on, at a respectful distance.

Here again we deal with deceptive appearances and identity information. The youth, a victim of theft, apparently embodies "the tender, still vulnerable and

[163] The Fortune Teller. Oil on Canvas. 99x131 cms. (Ca. 1594-95). Louvre, Paris.
[164] Puglisi. P. 78.

unstable, yet growing in self confidence .... body who dares to respond"[165] to the invitation to touch and look and listen. He is the innocent abroad, and the disposition of his clothing, the open neck of the shirt, cloak worn off one shoulder, jacket partly open, indicates his calm assurance. "The clothing thus denotes a present time while evoking what we might call a "Platonic" past." [166] She is the one whose garments are tied at neck and shoulder defensively.
As her secret is enacted, his is found, not in the lines of his hand, but in his gaze "as if she were nothing more than an accident, or a punctuation, in some larger indefinite space."[167] There is an arrogance and complacency in the youthful, rounded features, in the tilt of the head and feathers, and in the general stance of the young man. The pommel of his sword is directed away from the girl; there is no sense of ill ease, and his assurance is furthered in the loose laces of his shirt and partly open jacket as if he saw "her as an occasion for formal extensions of his own physical presence."[168]
What are we looking at? How should we respond? The paintings, like parables, take us in and judge us; we are part of the drama. We look, and Behold! are drawn in and implicated. The viewer is forced to read the lines and minds of both characters, and question their own. In the gaps between the lines further questions arise; in her smile is there more than professional interest? The hand that reads his lines could easily rise and release the single knot that holds her cloak.

Within these paintings reality becomes increasingly difficult to ascertain, and they are "characterised by a calculated, even sly, air of sophistication."[169] The concern for youth's delusions and the surprises and dangers of life is apparent but "Caravaggio's youths do not merely address themselves to the spectator - they solicit"[170] a response, provoke a reaction. The narrative they relate reflects the past within the present, has the capacity to distort but the potential to magnify our interaction with it, and sharply focuses our minds on the question of what we are looking at and the reality that it offers.
Ultimately, the existence that these works refer to is far from the surface narrative and is concerned with wealth and status, sexual politics and power. The view of

165 Bal. P. 94.
166 Posner. D. 'Caravaggio's Homo-Erotic Early Works'. Art Quarterly. Autumn 1971. P. 306.
167 Bersani. L. & Dutoit. U. Caravaggio's Secrets. MIT, Cambridge, Massachusetts. 1998. P. 18.
168 Bersani & Dutoit. P. 18.
169 Posner. P. 307.
170 Posner. P. 302.

this alternative reality is a chiasmus of Christ's parables. It is a reversal of the movement from the secular to the sacred seen in the 'Sower', as what is posited as valuable is wealth and status; what is advised, is how to maintain it by whatever means come along. The values are earthly and human and the acceptance of them not as daunting nor dangerous, nor as alienating as that of the kingdom of God.

Friedrich - The Sower and The Sowing.

Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840) was born in Greifswald, Pomerania. The son of a prosperous soap and candle maker, he studied Art in Copenhagen (1794-98) and on leaving, settled in Dresden where he was elected to the Dresden Academy in 1816, and married in 1818, and where he lived, with several prolonged visits to Pomerania, until his death.
He was the most purely Romantic painter of Germany and Europe. His precise drawing and technical mastery of colour could produce an almost photographic likeness of the landscape around him. This integration of the artist and his subject was a definitive aspect of Romanticism that saw in the depiction of the exterior, objective landscape "a transcription of the images which dwell in the consciousness and subconsciousness of the painter."[171]
It was Friedrich who presented an image of theomimesis. He made his viewers witnesses, forever rooted 'outside' the picture frame; the source of wonder hidden from their gaze. Where artists of his time sought to communicate "limitless sensations through the finite means of the material world" [172] Friedrich painted precisely the paradox that his contemporary Runge wished to resolve: "man's yearning for the infinite and his perpetual separation from it."[173] In his greatest works, he abandoned the conventional spatial arrangement of landscape, minimising foreground introduction and leading abruptly "to the central image [blocking] any further recession, throwing up instead a contrast"[174] to the background detail.
Kierkegaard, like Hegel, saw Romanticism as an absolute of the aesthetic

171 Brion. M. Art of the Romantic Era. Thames & Hudson, London. 1966. P. 114.
172 Vaughan. W. Romantic Art. Thames & Hudson, London. 1978. P. 142.
173 Vaughan. P. 142.
174 Vaughan. P. 146.

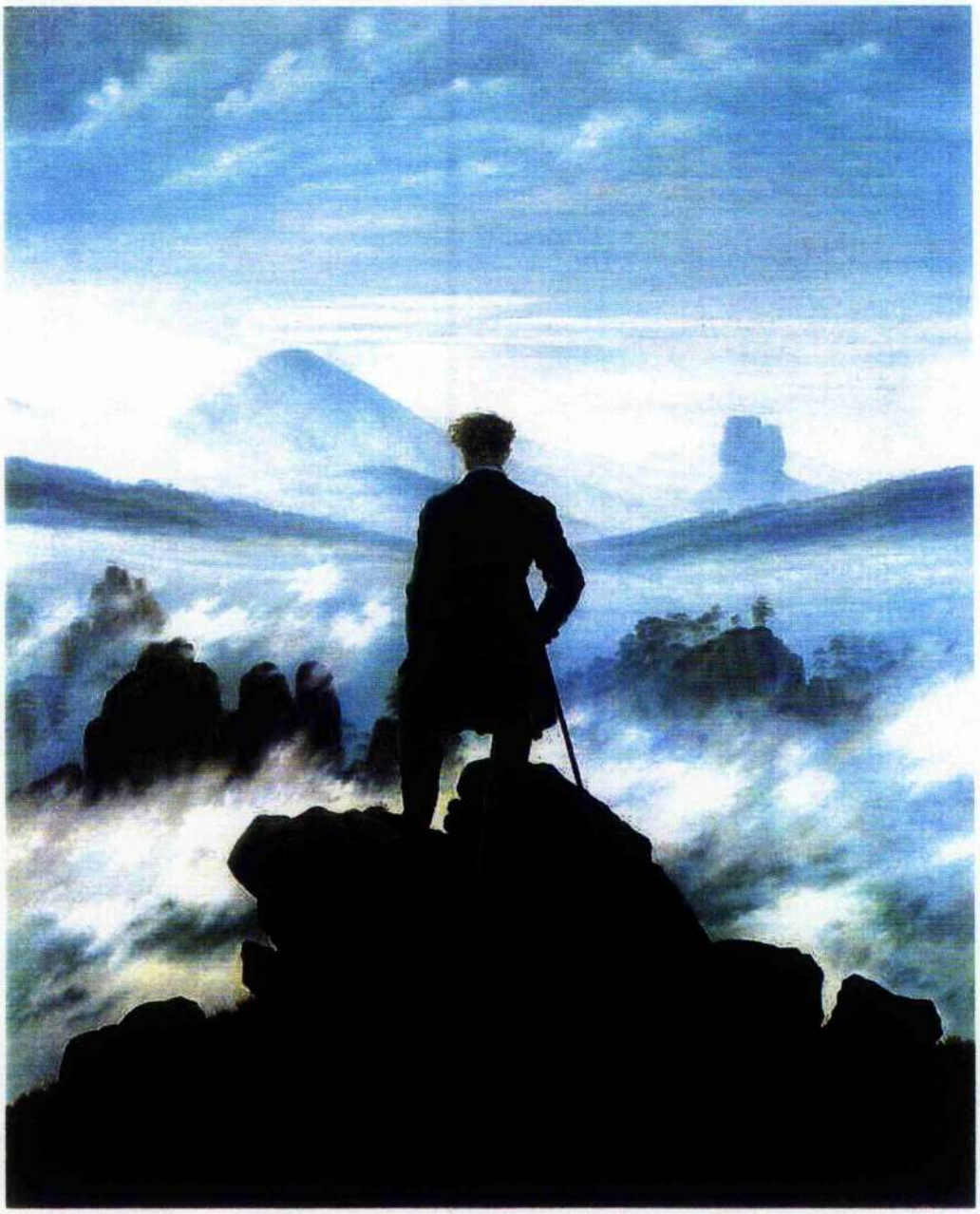
standpoint, but both understood that within Romantic painting "the dialectics of art point beyond themselves, requiring a shift into another sphere or dimension of consciousness."[175]

Romanticism was seen by painters as an arena where clear distinctions could emerge between inner and outer concerns, between ideas and form. This created a quality of depiction that embodied "a conception of life as struggle, as a constantly self-surpassing striving."[176] The elusive content of these works became a hallmark where no single image could dominate the Romantic consciousness. The notion of the expression of the inner sphere as an art object could not be contained in an actual expression. According to Kierkegaard to attempt to do this was merely to delineate the shadows, but it did, in a very specific sense, represent "the second 'movement' of the Hegelian dialectic, in which reality reveals itself in irreducibly dualistic forms."[177]

Positive expression brought the subjective aspect into prominence, and this was invariably bound to a yearning or longing that resonated between presence and absence. This could induce a quality of premonition in works that could be seen as apprehending a serenity or holy unity in the world, but Kierkegaard saw it as "a more ambiguous light, relating to evil as well as good."[178] Premonition was seen as relating to melancholy, defined as the consciousness of absence, incompleteness or loss, inherent in Romanticism. This questing, inner awareness acts as the bridge over the psychological space into the parabolic experience of the canvas. If we are to interact in this space, we must face the question of belief in an absolute meaning, a total value, an ultimate reality and truth.

Pattison feels that art "pre-empts the actual requirement laid on the self to pierce the mystery of nothingness in which the secret of human life lies hidden"[179] but the work of the parabolic in art does embrace the "vision of the void" and seeks to reveal and concentrate the vision as an interpretive methodology. Rather than a "flight from freedom, an almost irresistible mechanism of repressing the consciousness of what we are called to be"[180] parabolic painting forces the viewer to participate, question and judge, and, in turn, be questioned and judged by their judgments. If, as for Kierkegaard, the meaning of art is the void, angst and

175 Pattison. G. Kierkegaard: The Aesthetic and The Religious. Macmillan, London. 1992. P. 43.
176 Pattison. P. 49.
177 Pattison. P. 50.
178 Pattison. P. 51.
179 Pattison. P. 61.
180 Pattison. P. 61.



Caspar David Friedreich 1774-1840
"Wanderer Above a Sea of Fog"

nothingness; a radical deception, it is the comment contextualised in his own time as he felt that this was precisely what art was unable to realise or express. This also pre-supposes that a formal answer to the contemporary problem is feasible. There are limits to human expression and, while "art has an almost unparalleled power to express the human situation and to raise questions as to the meaning and coherence of existence as a whole"[181], humanity cannot create a definitive answer but can, in its fullness, approach levels of experience that through symbolism in painting or sculpture it may attain clarification.

Koerner's definitions of the *Ruckenfigur,*[182] a figure with his back to the viewer, has a history in Western Art starting with the inclusion of the viewer as part of the scene, where they are acknowledged from within the painting; or the paintings themselves are structured in such a way as to accommodate the viewer as an integral aspect of the work. Van Eyck's 'Madonna of Chancellor Rolin' from 1435 illustrates this box-like convention where the viewer is invited to become the last side of the cube containing the scene and also views a *Ruckenfigur* in the background. In Romantic Art *Ruckenfiguren* were deployed as artists capturing the scene, inviting the viewer to enter the frame and watch the work in progress, which enhanced the notion of immediacy and the contemporary aspect.

Friedrich's *Ruckenfiguren* "dominate the natural scene with their presence."[183] They people, almost obsessively, his landscapes, leading the viewer into the vista, yet blocking off the total perspective. These are not the marginal figures included for the sake of human interest that ornamented much of landscape art; they convey very specific messages.

The *Ruckenfiguren* stand as guides to the parabolic. They indicate the flaws and faults, the reason and realities of the story. It is not a matter of meeting or overtaking these half-known, half-remembered figures. The point is not to be in the market place with the unemployed labourers, nor in the wine shop the prodigal favoured, nor to lean on the wall and criticise the sower's technique as he plods uphill, but to follow quietly behind and let him reveal why the harvest was so important, how poor and thin the soil was, and what drove him away from home,

In approaching the *Ruckenfiguren* we become aware of the half-memory, the

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181 Pattison. G. Art, Modernity and Faith. SCM, London. 1998. P. 110.

182 Koerner. J. Casper David Friedrich and the Subject of Landscape. Reaktion,London.1995. P. 162

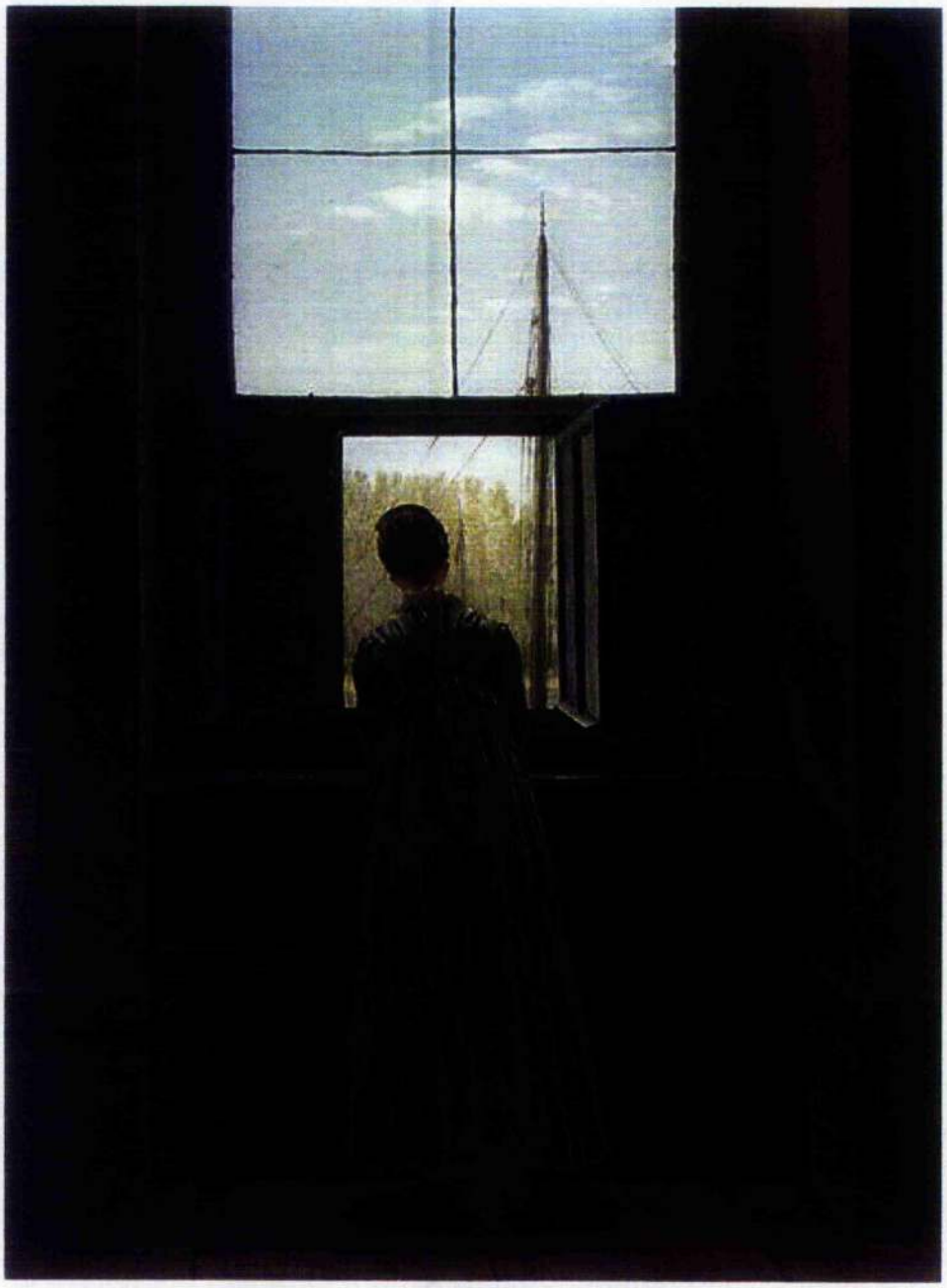
183 Koerner. P. 163.

element of deja vu that confuses and comforts us. There will always only be partial recognition, and this is their strength, as it is what they indicate in the narrative that supplies us with answers. Their role is to guide through the voids and hollows of the text/canvas, to lead us past the gulfs of silence and the unsaid, to allow us to bridge these chasms with our own context.
Their capacity to guide us and reveal the inner truth of text or vision places them as strangers on the road to Emmaus. It is their message that is important to us, not they themselves. What they desire is our considered, loving response to the problems that beset us, not our companionship. They will always be three yards in front of us, always vaguely recognisable, always gently pausing and indicating the aspect that has eluded us.

'Wanderer Above a Sea of Fog'.[184]

The figure so dominates the scene that the flanking hills and fogbanks appear to be extensions of his person. "Upon him, rather than on some constructed vanishing point in the distance, all lines of sight converge, as if landscape were the mapping of world to body."[185] It is in this subtle anonymity that the figure is universalised as our guide, and we are permanently held in check while he secures the area for us. We can share in the substance of his vision, but not his vision. His presence renders the landscape insubstantial, and what elements of the environment we can see are held together by imagination. Yet the reality is that the figure can distinguish no more than we can due to the sea of fog; the same question of obscurity that filled the Baroque with drapery enters the Romantic as mist.
Technically, Friedrich creates a murky overall pattern whereby the substance of the landscape, isolated as islands in the sea of fog, becomes mingled with the mist. Depth ceases to be a progressive recession, nor is it represented as a gulf between foreground and background. Friedrich implies depth by a series of overlaps - rocky cliffs, forested ridges, banks of cloud - while removing the intervening connective landscape. There is no direct line of sight to lead us to the horizon and we are left contemplating a series of chasms and abysses separated by ridges rising from and enframing the void.
Details are supplied but their scale is the same. The tuft of grass by his foot has no more importance than the trees above the cliff or the wood on the ridge. This

184 'Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog'. Oil on Canvas. 94.8 x 74.8 cms. 1818. Kunsthalle, Hamburg.
185 Koerner. P. 179.



Caspar David Friedreich 1774-1840
"Woman at the Window

telescopic view renders detail as patterned equivalences on the canvas surface and creates an ambiguity of scale within the painting. The only safe place for the viewer to look is now the *Ruckenfigur,* as he is now the central aspect, parallel to the picture plane, dominating the scene's convergence.
The parable can now commence; it is the *Ruckenfigur* who will relate to us the nature of the geography, the depths of the void. Since the structure of the land is insubstantial and spatially unstable, we are forced into making decisions about what we see, about what is safe. Reality beyond the *Ruckenfigur* is a misty mirage and we can only be informed "through the creative imagination of the beholder."[186] The world becomes a strange place, recognisable but unsafe, and the viewers are made to question their standpoint, where and who they are, as the recognition of the scenario places them in a situation no more stable than the beholder's. Our own notion of where solid ground exists is brought into question. The narrative can be seen and seeing the familiar invites us forward, then dupes us as the ground shifts. We rely on the *Ruckenfigur* as our guide, as proper behaviour becomes questionable and action becomes hesitant the reality of what we sense as real merges with the actuality of the alternative.The distant landscape features, partially obscured, offer no help, as it is their "obscurity, their presence and absence as objects of the viewer's gaze that endows them with their power."[187]
The *Ruckenfigur* is solidly placed, the last substantial thing between us and the void. He is a continuation of the foreground pyramid that rises from the lower edge and becomes the apex of our ascent. He mediates our lack of experience and relates the scene from the landscape's disparate fragments. His prominence is a centralising and concealing presence, revealing and at the same time hiding the landscape. The new world that is before him can only be narrated to us through him; "the world appears to be an emanation from his gaze"[188] and we await to hear and judge his words, and turn that judgment on ourselves.

What is constantly about to be revealed on the summit is not the glory of the heavens, but rather scenes of the earth as if viewed from heaven. The removal of the fog would clarify the picture, would allow us to perceive the majesty of the landscape, would reveal a kingdom. The notion of whorls within worlds whereby the same story is related by differing elements was common to the Romantic

186 Koerner. P. 180.
187 Koerner. P. 181.
188 Koerner. P. 181.

movement: "But there's a Tree, of many, one,
A single Field which I have looked upon,
Both of them speak of something that is gone:
The Pansy at my feet
Doth the same tale repeat...."[189]

The pansy at one's feet is capable of narrating wonder and glory. The natural world is capable of expansion through our interaction and contemplation whereby we can enter the natural scene not yet emerged from the fog, not within the painting, but as part of the life of the landscape itself.

'Woman at the Window'.[190]

The subject of this painting is rendered subtly anonymous, camouflaged in her interior. We, as viewers, cannot see her face but are encouraged to share her vision.
This example of a *Ruckenfigur* , the artist's wife at the studio window, is painted in the same tones as the walls of the room, utilising the same textures and brushstrokes. She is inherently of this room, part of the fabric of existence and we have to approach her to realise the view beyond. She is not in the way, but is 'the way' to the view that "extends over the River Elbe to the opposite shore, which symbolises paradise."[191] The dull, close interior, sparse and uninteresting represents the ordinary world, where the cross panes above her become a heavily Christianised symbol and the source of light we are drawn to is external.
In this encounter between interior and exterior the window is backlit enhancing the dramatic effect and creating a dematerialised space beyond "punctuated only by boat masts and a row of poplars."[192] The boats may indicate the passage across the river - the movement from life to death - and this notion can be endorsed by the poplars on the far bank, which hold an ancient symbolism relating to the underworld, suffering and sacrifice.
More than ever, we are drawn to the vision of the infinite within the image but are held by the narrative seemingly about to unfold in the studio, or perhaps, more

189 Wordsworth. W. 'Intimations of Immortality From Recollections of Early Childhood.' The Poetical Works of Wordsworth. Hutchinson. T. (Ed.) OUP, London. 1965. P. 460.
190 'Woman at the Window'. Oil on Canvas. 44 x 37 cms. 1822. National Gallery, Berlin.
191 Vaughan. W., Borsch-Supan. H. & Neidhardt. H. Caspar David Friedrich 1774-1840. The Tate Gallery, London. 1972. P. 77.
192 Sala. C. Caspar David Friedrich the Spirit of Romantic Painting. Terrail, Paris. 1994. P. 193.

accurately, just ended, as the gloom of the studio contrasts with the light beyond. This elicits within us the notion of our own lateness, the loss of contact within ourselves and the infinite. In the *Ruckenfigur's* evocation of desire and anxiety we acknowledge that, alongside the wish to view the panorama and that aspect of theomimesis that holds her spellbound, we also want to see her face and its security, as the parabolic reality starts to slide from under our feet.
Again we are drawn but held in check. This is the parable, and the reality it offers is accessible to us, if we wish to take it. The sight of the *Ruckenfigur's* face would turn the painting inside out. The stare of the *Ruckenfigur* would reflect our own voyeurism, cast an evil eye on us, or like Lot's wife or the gaze of the Medusa reduce us to part of the painting. The *Ruckenfigur* is not aware of our gaze, has no sense of exposure. It takes on the exposure of the landscape for us, and reads to us the awesomeness of infinity. It parabolically relates to us that, within the frame of the experience, "we are neither the centre nor the origin of our vision, and that what we see has already been formed by a gaze prior to our act of seeing."[193]
The immediacy and shock of Christ's parables is echoed in these shielded contemplations on the infinite, as our knowledge is only the landscape of memory and our experience is constituted retrospectively. The view of the kingdom is through the window, or below that mountain, and the *Ruckenfigur* stems the flood of the new reality and allows us that time for contemplation that we think we need. It filters the awesome reality indicated by Christ in the parables as it is a single individual or event that is the centre of the story. Part of the role of the *Ruckenfigur* is to affect others but the emphasis on the individual is the realisation the kingdom - once there the individual is beyond the needs or concerns of family or social life. The *Ruckenfigur* helps us attain that. It looks out to the glory of God, to the infinity that Koerner has described as theomimesis. Ultimately, it is where we think we want to be, but it allows us time to reflect on the nature of our involvement with the infinite and that "infinity, literally meaning the condition of being without end, has acquired great complexity in maths and an unmathematical grandeur in more general usage."[194]

In both Caravaggio and Friedrich the recognisable world becomes distorted. These paintings, like parables, force the viewer to break the accepted rules and examine the infinite within the image. These paintings demand re-viewing, just as the

193 Koerner. P. 239/240.
194 Kermode. F. 'Keep on Tracking.' Guardian. 18/10/03. P. 14.

parables demand re-reading, and the demands of both are equivalent. We are at once an insider and an outsider. We are aware of the endless permutations of meaning but would prefer there to be only one. We can consider infinity but block our own view to establish a safe reality, and indecision judges us also.
We accept the invitation to view, then wince as the parabolic triumphs and we are implicated by our voyeurism. Social conditioning demands that we stop. Do we abandon our gaze, or go beyond voyeurism and watch the unwatchable? Do we attempt to go beyond the notion of good and evil? We are judged by our own indecision.
With the parable, all there is, is the text; with painting, all we have, is surface. We are given the recognisable and the obvious. The unmistakable and evident are in front of us - given, and judging our reactions, or lack of them.

Conclusion.

The Biblical parable gives rise to thought, to contemplation of an alternative reality. "Pure reflection makes no appeal to any myth or symbol."[195] It is the style of the narrative, the combination of the elements, that holds the concentration and releases the imagination, giving occasion for thought of a separate existence that establishes an end programme; "the beginning is not what one finds first; the point of departure must be reached."[196] The parable provides an image of the way to the end, but, if the beginning is attained, it is first necessary for the thoughts provoked by the parable to blossom in the fullness of language. What Christ was doing was declaring as well as denying the delivered narrative. This, in painting, is seen in the important Cubist work of Georges Braque where he "discovered that *trompe-l'oeil* could be used to undeceive as well as deceive the eye." [197] The difficulty is often not one of acceptance of the message but of the struggle to recreate a language that can voice the thoughts generated by the parable. It is the articulation of thought encompassing parable that becomes the critical point of the exercise. "The more realistic the art of the Old Masters became, the more they raised internal safeguards against illusion."[198] This relates to the difficulty of the shock waves of immediacy in a parable being held in the serenity of the meditation of the new

195 Ricoeur. P. The Symbolism of Evil. Beacon Press, Boston. 1969. P. 347.
196 Ricoeur. P. 348.
197 Steinberg. L. Other Criteria. OUP, London. 1975. P. 72.
198 Steinberg. P. 72.

thought, wherein we attempt to rescue feelings and fears from silence and confusion. This demands a critical awareness "that is no longer reductive but restorative."[199] It is only by engaging in critical interpretation that our ears, if we have them, may hear. The hermeneutic key to deciphering the parable's meaning, and the perseverance to understand, become inextricably mixed for "we can believe only by interpreting."[200]

The parabolic actuality is not a tranquil base from which to operate. Its symbols and language demand struggle, insist on participation in the dynamics of the process to "reach the strictly critical dimension of exegesis and become a hermeneutic."[201] The new status is that of a close, committed interpreter exiled from his pre-parable existence, as every parable is a manifestation of the bond between man and the divine. (The loss of the original context of the parable is not an obstacle as "meaning arises from a kind of conversation between the interpreter and the text"[202]) but we are never inside this essence. We are blinded briefly by glory, by "some radiant intimation of the source of all these senses."[203] Mark uses the word 'mystery' as a synonym for 'parable' and parables are about the revelation of reality and, at the same time, its concealment in mystery.

The parabolic narrative can be seen as a translation of being. The notion of making a difference to those at a loss predominates, in or out of the language used and the actuality expressed. The nature of the translation is not that of an altered truth, but that of a new authenticity. Since it is new and translated is it flawed? The listeners wait to respond to the translation but they still require the separate skill of interpretation.

The impact of parabolic translation demands the construction of another cultural reality. To accept this and the move out to the frontier, to be out there 'in' the parable where we are asked to be, is to operate alone on the periphery of humanity, on the margins of the kingdom. This is social exile from the kingdom, not just in the physical terms of Columba's exile from Ireland, but also mentally. For mortals struggling to keep sane, the borders of the kingdom could be a dangerous place to be. Exposure to the stress of the apocalyptic might be similar to that of a war zone, without the company of comrades.

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199 Ricoeur. P. 350.

200 Ricoeur. P. 352.

201 Ricoeur. P. 354.

202 Kermode. F. The Genesis of Secrecy. Harvard UP, Cambridge , Massachusetts. 1980. P. 44.

203 Kermode. P. 45.

Tropes, Parables and Paintings.

The distinctive feature of parables, is the realism of the narrative. They are stories set in human experience, in situations that are known and understood domestically or within the rural community. Their rhetoric is not one of mere contrivance or ornamentation, nor does it pretend to have significance lacking true meaning. In Matthew 13:34-5, secrets that had been kept since the start of creation, that had never been revealed, were now related to all in parables. That is, the everyday aspects of the narrative were accessible to all, but the greater meanings were only evident to those with spiritual insight. The parable operates as a mode of figurative language which involves an indirect indication of a state that cannot be approached indirectly. The difference between its origin and its end spans the void, and by this the parable "transcends altogether direct presentation"[204] but, without explanation, interpretation or commentary, the meaning may evade the reader altogether. The narratives are in fact simple, easily assimilated stories of rural existence that are only important because of the comparisons with the kingdom of heaven; comparisons that can only be delivered indirectly, as their "rhetoric is obsessed with persuasion and power."[205]

In addition, "parable tends to be orientated towards the past, toward last things, toward the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven and how to get there."[206] The revelation of the mystery occurring sometime later (Rom. 16:25-6) was strongly linked to the Parousia and revealed the parable as having "at least this in common with apocalypse: it too is an act of unveiling."[207]

Part of the rhetorical technique in the use of effective language is that one is immediately drawn into the argument and made fully aware of the facts; that "ultimately tends to leave you no options, for one must either believe or be damned."[208]

The conclusions of parables are never explicit, though their structures "are inductive in method, sometimes listing several examples from which a conclusion can be drawn."[209] The readers are left to their own devices, provoked into decision-

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204 Hillis Miller. J. Tropes, Parables, Performatives. Harvester Wheatsheaf, Hemel Hempstead.1990. P. 136.

205 Jasper. D. Rhetoric, Power and Community. Macmillan, London. 1993. P. 2.

206 Hillis Miller. P. 181.

207 Hillis Miller. P. 181.

208 Jasper. P. 11.

209 Kennedy. P. 16.

making and judged by those decisions, as "rhetoric is merely a necessary instrument of deception to achieve a greater end."[210]

Metaphor is one of several devices known as tropes, or turnings, employed in the rhetoric of the parables. "The trope is a conceptual sport, a game about meaning."[211] The principle aspect of metaphor is one of substitution or transference, and it is located within the framework of the sentence, where it may be extended but still only operate within the linguistic pattern set by the locus; a particular verbal aspect that activates the trope. Any type of form-word category can be the semantic locus.

The notion of transference of meaning, the displacement of details of the kingdom of God by a story about sowing grain, and the qualities needed for success, have the potential to create confusion. Is all the seed of equal quality? Is the sower at fault? Are we given an example of best practice? It could be surmised that "metaphor's main purpose or, at least, inevitable result is confusion and obfuscation."[212]

Yet metaphor also has a decorative role - ornamenting and adorning prose, adding to its impact and enhancing its illustrative capacity. In this aspect we receive the metaphor in the Markan Sower. We neither invent it nor choose it, but learn from it, and "when metaphor illustrates information one graduates from metaphor."[213] Metaphor at its fullest demands participation, as it can articulate the novel and alien concept that can only be understood within the framework of the metaphor. The new insight is only fully comprehended after participation in the metaphor and its strange, unfamiliar world. In this context, one does not graduate from the metaphor; the metaphor is graduation itself. It supplies the new vision and imparts no details or information until the hearer has entered into the framework and experienced the alternative involvement from within. The initial reaction may well be an attempt to translate the metaphor into a normalised, recognisable aspect of the known existence rather than plunge into the totally other. The provocation by metaphor into the unknown and unfamiliar will "always be radically new and one can experience it only within"[214] the framework of the narrative. This can be likened, not to reconstructing one's imagination, but to deconstructing it and assembling a new

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[210] Jasper. P. 129.

[211] Nash. W. Rhetoric. Blackwell, Oxford. 1989. P. 117.

[212] Crossan. P. 11.

[213] Crossan. P. 12.

[214] Crossan. P. 13.

Pierre Bonnard 1867-1947
"Nu a Contre-Jour ou l'eau de Cologne"

format of imagination.
The illustrative metaphors provide valuable images, but the metaphors that create participation in the narrative and leave the hearer shocked, disorientated, questioning and unsettled. They reform consciousness and alter perception. They are never forgotten and are frequently returned to, as their imaginary descriptions have a reality within them that disturbs and excites us.
The confusion that can result from Caravaggio's or Friedrich's work is the product of a series of sudden changes in perception, the influence of which effects both the content and the formal structure.
The Gypsy girl of 'The Fortune Teller' is an innocent in this world. What she reveals is herself, but her figure also contains a worldly symbiosis. The art of harlotry lies on the axis of this doubling of roles, where terms like 'role reversal' are barely adequate. The characters in parabolic painting are involved in more than multi-role depiction. It is a kind of cohabitation that is revealed within a frame, where the ground has gone from under one's feet and reality is ambiguous. Shadowy figures emerge from a dark mirror, marginalised as if in a dream, but capturing the sense of the transience of the moment, where the individual is at once remote but somehow trapped in their role.
This is the quality revealed in the work of Caravaggio and Friedrich. Narratives that will relate more and more each time we go back to them. Parabolic paintings are not merely illustrative; they disturb and dislocate our references as to what paintings are, involve us in the process of decipherment, and make us participate in the vision within the framework. They are not safely hung on the wall, inert and pictographic, for us to scan for interest or pleasure. They operate swirling vortices at different levels of communication and varying intensities of attraction that draw the viewer into the composition and demand comment and commitment. Before this is concluded, primacy of participation over the narrative re-aligns sources and alludes to that wholly other that can only be experienced within their metaphors.
This experience is not limited to the work of the painters discussed. The vast bulk of Goya's work exhibits a parabolic effect, where he omits "the tight concentration, the unifying focus, the common denominator of a single view. Instead we come up against strategies of codification."[215] The various possibilities of ambiguity revealed in these works endorse the notion that every story belongs to another.
Within Twentieth Century art the movement from the Nude to the naked gathered momentum. Typical of this style which provoked the viewer into a voyeuristic role is

[215] Hofmann. W. Goya. Thames & Hudson, London. 2003. P. 34.

"Nu a Contre Jour ou L'Eau de Cologne" by Pierre Bonnard, where the intimacy of the naked woman with her back to the viewer, in a private, curtained room, tips the balance from over-inquisitiveness to indelicacy. Her stance before her mirror in undisturbed self-contemplation, compounded by the knowledge that she is Marthe, the artist's wife, pushes the viewer from voyeurism into the realm of pornography. The viewer is forced to move from reflections on colour to the idea of vulnerability, and on into judgments of suitability, where they themselves are accountable.
The interrelationships Jackson Pollock sought to convey in purely abstract painting, by blurring the hierarchical relationship between foreground and background, dissolved these roles and made them interchangeable. By eliminating the traditional opacity of the Cubist plane in his large Abstract Expressionist canvas "Blue Poles", he left the drawing 'around' it to form a net-like configuration with intense integration across the surface. This linear weave was open, covering without concealing, while the totality of the nature of its character resolved the relationship to the edge of the picture plane. There was no sense of an arbitrary expanse of flatness or destructive feeling of randomness about this. "I can control the flow of paint; there is no accident, just as there is no beginning and no end." [216] The dark ground is seen in small sections which only appear as a deeper tone of the blue, and the overall effect is one of carnival unity. This is a celebratory piece that displays the control he had over the material and the innovative power that he could unleash in the viewer, who had to participate in the circus atmosphere, or walk away from it, judged by their own actions. His were the "most embryonic of parabolic figures of speech"[217] such as "You are the light of the world" which Pollock could be said to have translated as "You are the carnival of the world."

"Irony says what it does not mean and means what it does not say."[218] Irony does not rely on a clear locus; no key word or linguistic focus is necessary to announce irony. While the *tropos* or turning in metaphor is a re-arrangement of linguistic items, of particular words or elements, in irony it is a rotation of attitude towards a topic in discourse. "Irony, inherently unstable and destabilising, happily works against its own narrative discourse."[219]
The Markan parable of the Sower contains a significant use of this trope. "Irony is

[216] Chipp. H.(Ed.) Theories of Modern Art. University of California, Berkeley. 1968. P. 548. quoting Pollock from the narration of the film "Jackson Pollock" 1951, by Namuth, H. and Falkenberg, P.
[217] Jones. G. The Art and Truth of the Parables. SPCK, London.1964. P. 83.
[218] Nash. P. 118.
[219] Jasper. P. 128/9.

the attendant of hope, and the fuel of hope is innocence"[220] and one reason why the parable of the Sower is more ironic than any other is that its beginning is more innocent. In the words 'lest they should turn again, and be forgiven'(4:12) there is an example of the destabilising aspect of irony. The use of the phrase appears to be delivered "ironically, and not earnestly, that Jesus would say of his teaching that it was intended to prevent the forgiveness and the conversion of the people."[221] Irony creates in us a disposition to act in a certain way, to inquire and be sure, to perceive, through the words the truth it is trying to conceal. "Any rhetorical means will justify its end"[222] and irony can counter words of persuasion, triggering a questioning response whereby we catch ourselves and reflect on the text, seemingly breaking free and considering independently; but this too is part of irony's power as it "engages in a perpetual redescription of established beliefs and assumptions"[223] in order to be detached.

Irony's core concern is always apart from the ostensible theme of the text, striving to conceal the *omphalos* of the parable. This sets up "a text within a text deconstructively meeting its opposite."[224] This cohabitation of texts - the symbiosis of intratextuality wherein textual strata can mirror darkly and distortedly their arguments - acts as a mental lever, easing momentarily out of the layers the notion that becomes its own opposite.

Irony causes us to question the text, "but all too often ineffectually against the powerful rhetoric of the initial proposal"[225], whereby we must choose to believe the main proposition; as failure to do so condemns us. This, in turn, ushers in tragedy as "a narrative recounting the life of some..., personage who suffered a decline of fortune toward a disastrous end."[226] It is the reader/listener who suffers the ironic and incongruous reversals inherent in the nature of parables, as the shift of focus of the narrative moves from delivery to reception. Just as Caravaggio's half-size figures and Friedrich's *Ruckenfiguren* invite the viewer into the scene, so these ironic reversals include the reader as an insider invited from the crowd at the margins. The fact that we feel we know the Sower, recognise the vision of the *Ruckenfigur,* understand the dynamics of 'The Fortune Teller', comprehend the

220 Fussell, P. The Great War and Modern Memory. OUP, London, 1977. P. 18.
221 Jones. P. 226.
222 Jasper. P. 123.
223 Jasper. P. 126.
224 Jasper. P. 127.
225 Jasper. P. 129.
226 Steiner, G. The Death of Tragedy. Faber, London, 1961. P. 11.

significance of the parable, is a rhetorical device inducing in us the sense of the insider; while in not acting on the information provided, we are ranked with the outsiders. Our only advantage is the fact that we can continue to confront the medium and the message in the hope of coming closer to the meaning of the parabolic.

The tragedy of the parabolic envelopes the outsider. The case of Caravaggio's poor youth and Friedrich's woman at the window echo the case of the viewer. The tragic narrative takes us parabolically to the kingdom. The irony of opposing Jesus' teaching of the crowd, to the disciples inability to understand, allows Mark's text to be evaluated afresh, while our failure to respond to the moment of revelation displays the tragedy of loss. We are left to simply get on with it which ultimately is the desired effect. Parables close in on the individual, while the tragedy of our inability to react to the parabolic opens up the possibilities for change and development.

Theology wants to form dogma - living theology demands shifts and changes. Parables are fiction, provoking reaction. The images they project are a transformative source. They may allow us to be foolish or philosophical but, ultimately they demand a choice, as they are centred on judgment, and their provocation is aimed at making us think for ourselves. Theology labours with this because it is inextricably linked with Jesus' teaching methods, but thinking for oneself is not a core concern of theology. The parable is about seeing ourselves as others see us - which would from many a blunder free us, and foolish notion - but any attempt to enter the parabolic reality "demands living with a heavy irony and a recognition of an absolute self-reflexivity which is prepared to face its own opposite fair and square."[227] The parable does not merely demonstrate the parabolic, it contains the parabolic. The reality indicated, the theomimetic implied, demands a level of attention that can differentiate and appreciate the realisation that, in the merging of designation and alienation, the kingdom reality is only an event when the kingdom is not being the kingdom. This forced self-redescription is the chiasmic aspect demanded in the parabolic that returns to us the shock of the old in our supposedly modern lives.

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[227] Jasper. P. 132.

Francisco Goya 1746-1828
"The Crockery Seller"

Francisco Goya 1746-1828
"The Wedding"

The Chiasmic Response.

Viewing is bound to feeling - not merely the feeling of recognition nor the discovery of something familiar made strange and compelling, but the apprehension of an almost indefinable melancholy, a soft sadness engendered by the theomimetic. This is a space scraped of actualities; bare rooms containing no furniture, stripped of human contact, and fogbound mountains where the view opens and closes denying us access to landscape and orientation. These are scenes framed by the sense of the posthumous whose guidelines are already receding into the infinite. Life and beauty are there in these scenes and they are hung on the wall for our safety because if it is painted on it is also painted over.

The parabolic aspects of Goya's work are chiasmatic; a reversal of the story, where servants are dignified and self-confident, "peripheral figures who have taken on a powerful individuality of their own"[228] Art enters the parabolic in this area of provocation, by inducing a sense of alienation where the refusal to see is blurred by the inability to distinguish. By depicting the question rather than the object paintings can prompt the exercise of re-evaluation via chiasmus.

Concealing is part of revealing. The question of irony is part of the rhetoric of the parabolic painting. The images on view are the start of the process not the conclusion. They are a reminder of situations in our relationships that continue, that have never been resolved, where we can only exist if we stay alert and questioning in the matrix of the now. Parabolic paintings have grasped the basic and deliberate sense of indecency in the Gospels and brought it into the domestic environment to make the individual examination feel comfortable without the sense of guilt. In the indecency of looking, we move easily from voyeurism to pornography.

Reality has been questioned and no surreal or hyperreal substitute is entirely satisfactory. The parabolic painting changes the notion of the individual's reality, by allowing a glimpse of alternatives, whereby the ordinary is translated and there is no way back to the reality once enjoyed; or if there is, it is taken in the dark light of rejection and judgment.

What is depicted within this unconsidered genre of parabolic painting is that dislocated, alienating experience that attracts and repels simultaneously - a provocative depiction that asks questions of the viewer rather than providing answers. Scenes, recognised as full of personal intensity and privacy, are granted

[228] Hofmann. P. 32.

licence through the medium of painting for examination of that which should not be examined, for the consideration and reconsideration of the aspects viewed. The experience of the parabolic translated into painting deals with aspects of the ongoing human condition relevant from formulation to the post modern era, whose concepts of nonmeaning and dislocation, dissociation and destabilisation are the building blocks of the parabolic. A sense of loss is rendered as hard fact in such a way as to lift it from the description of a mood into a presentation of human existence.

This is partly enhanced by the use of metonymy and synecdoche which are related "and not always clearly distinguishable tropes (which) exploit the relationship of larger entities with lesser."[229]

Synecdoche substitutes a part for the whole and its terms of reference are concrete. A 'hand' may be used to describe a worker or employee in the same way as a 'head' can be taken for the whole body. Synecdoche is a favourite device in colloquial language and slang and is visually evident in much of Caravaggio's work, where patterns of dress denote status, role and attitude. Similarly, Goya employs this device, provoking the viewer to question, what exactly is on sale in 'The Crockery Vendor' and, in 'The Wedding'[230], where the procession, with its odd collection of followers, will lead.

Metonymy is a much subtler and more productive trope, substituting a token for a type. The replacement term refers to "a particular instance, property, characteristic or association, for the general principle or function."[231] The law can thus be referred to as 'the bench' or democracy read as 'the ballot box'. These terms of reference are capable of spanning the abstract and the concrete and are demonstrated in Friedrich's 'views' of landscape which are obstructed by individuals, clouds and seas of fog, rendering the landscape as a token. Similarly, in Pollock's abstract 'Blue Poles', the tokenism of the totemic blue 'poles' dominates the area of linear development flooding the canvas. In Ken Currie's 'Standing Figure' series, the figures themselves reveal only the characteristics of the figure and disturbingly allude to a great deal more.

The Markan Sower is flooded with such subtleties, where 'seed' falls among 'thorns' or on 'rocky ground'. These tropes are assisted by the ambiguity of

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229 Nash. P. 122.

230 The Crockery Vendor, 1779, Oil on Canvas, 259x220cms. Prado, Madrid.
The Wedding, 1791/92, Oil on canvas, 269x393cms. Prado, Madrid.

231 Nash. P. 122.

agricultural language, where yield can be positive or negative, and where the positive notion of 'soil' can be offset by unseen shallowness or a stony constitution. In Friedrich's work, the empty room or fogged landscape stands for the world we inhabit, the reality we operate in. Similarly, in Caravaggio's paintings we are held in blank rooms, fascinated by the interaction in front of us, unconscious of the levels of interpretation possible. It is our slow awareness of these tropes operating before us that allows us to see playing cards as narrative, or as a mirror, to see the open window as vision and fog as a state of mind. The chiasmic movement into another 'reality' is demanded and enhanced by these devices.

Legacy.

The history of Christian ideology has not fostered any ironic possibilities by developing its assertion that God and man should be in the essential harmony of a familial relationship where conflict cannot exist.
The inheritance of the Medieval Church's institutionalised authority is our inability to critically approach the ambiguity of texts in our scriptural tradition; to seriously examine the relationship we have with the divine, our environment, and with ourselves.
Western civilisation contains a deep sense of alienation and embarrassment as we acknowledge our voyeurism, demand war be live on television, and thirst for exposure of human frailty and degradation. We have "learnt the rhetorical necessity of being acceptable, or using morality as a cloak for deception."[232] The Parables deny acceptability. They demand change and movement, endorse fragmentation and dismemberment, and we are defenceless and disorientated by their narratives, yet it is that cathartic effect which may allow the development of theological resurgence. The theological response to the paintings discussed must have a practical application, as the more mundane the subject matter the deeper the symbolism that can be employed. What parabolic painting offers is a method of deconstructing systematic aspects of theology, whereby we may achieve a revisioning of the Law as the parables "will continue to throw light on both the realities and the possibilities in men's relations with each other."[233] The examination of parabolic painting can be a major route towards this redevelopment, as specific to painting is its lack of interest in the non-immediate,

232 Jasper. P. 158.
233 Macquarrie. J. Studies in Christian Existentialism. SCM, London.1966. P. 100.

lengthy, tangled mass of the textual. Its narrative "can only be traduced by all those moves of deconstruction to reduce the irreducible visualness of the pictorial"[234] that defer the immediate and repeat the unique. The 'now' of painting is related to the geometry of limit; the geography of the frontier. It is concerned with irreducible minimums of colour, indivisible brevity of form, and the unassimilable chronology of the now.

"There is no way to concentrate on the threshold of a vision, to capture something"[235] without siting the vision in the mind, and the mind absorbing the vision in interest. Vision, then, is never substitution but a reference and point of identification for a lost source that we continue to seek. The vision will be interpreted and "the act of interpretation lies at the heart of any theology, unsettled, unsettling and provoking, always resisting metaphysical illusion."[236] As we explore qualities of language and translation to refine our theological understanding, visual language provides an existential approach to theology that calls "for some radical reappraisals of matters that have been taken for granted in the past."[237] Theology is legitimately present in any encounter we may have. The narratives of parables and the nature of the parabolic expand the arena of the theological, and a meeting with Pollock's 'Blue Poles' can be as engaging an encounter as that with Scripture. The provocation of Friedrich's work exposes theological process and demands an anatomical analysis of theological praxis.

It is theology that makes highly stable claims, while the Jesus of the Gospels is an emphatic deconstructionist. Similarly, the language of Jesus' parables is familiar and civil but conceals chaos, in the same way that the paintings of Caravaggio and Friedrich appear full of sensible and polite dialogue, concealing madness on the other side of the door. What they make us do is confront the blurred damage carried inside us. The damage of scars and flaws that we have difficulty in translating, that make us different and at the same time ordinary and human.

> "One of the things we look for when we read is just that level of commitment, that totality. We seek out the full realisation of a unique presence, a voice other than our own."[238]

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234 Krauss. R. 'The Blink of an Eye.' The States of "Theory". Carroll. D. (Ed.) Stanford U.P., California. 1994. P. 175.

235 Krauss. P. 197.

236 Jasper. P. 139.

237 Macquarrie. P. 112.

238 Kennedy. A.L. 'Where the Geese Are.' Guardian Review. 8.11.03.

The image of the person who told these parables remains blurred, but there is a special narratological energy leaking out of these texts that are neither inevitable nor spontaneous, but still perplexing and provocative.
We desire the precise narration of experience in our lives that is beyond us, and this should be related or depicted by someone in no way like ourselves. The lasting legacy of Jesus Christ is a further two miracles; the gift of information of a world beyond ours, details of a parabolic kingdom we may yet inhabit; and the spirit of his company - his vision in the parables.

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