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Jane Gardam: Religious Writer

Nicola James BA, DipC, MTh

Submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for
the Degree of PhD

School of Critical Studies

College of Arts

University of Glasgow

Abstract

This thesis examines the work of the award-winning contemporary English short story and novel writer Jane Gardam. It proposes that much of her achievement and craft stems from her engagement with religion. It draws on Gardam's published works from 1971 to 2014 including children's books and adult novels.

While Gardam has been reviewed widely, there is little serious critical appreciation of her fiction and there are misreadings of the influence of religion in her work. I therefore analyse the religious dimensions of her stories: the language, stylistics and hermeneutic of Gardam's three religious influences, namely the Anglo-Catholic, Benedictine and Quaker movements and how she sites them within her work. The thesis proposes *lectio divina*, arguably an ancient form of contemporary reader-response criticism, as a framework to describe the Word's religious agency when embedded or alluded to in fiction. It also considers and applies critical discussion on the medieval concept of the *aevum*, a literary religious space. Finally, I suggest that religious writing such as Gardam's has a place in the as yet unexplored 'poetic' strand of Receptive Ecumenism, a new movement that seeks to address reception of the Word between members of different faith communities. Having examined many aspects of Gardam's writing, its history and potential, I conclude that her achievement owes much to her engagement with particular and divergent forms of religious life and practice.

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Abbreviations

The Oxford English Dictionary	OED
The King James Bible	KJV
The Benedictine Rule	Rule
Quaker Faith and Practice	QFP
The Book of Common Prayer	BCP

Common Terms and their Definitions in this Thesis

‘Anglican’	Of or relating to the Church of England as constituted by the Reformation or any Church in communion with this (OED, 2016)
‘Anglo-Catholic’	Of or relating to the movement for the revival of Catholic doctrine and observance in the Church of England, which began at Oxford University in 1833 ...characterized by High Church principles (OED, 2016)
‘Benedictine’	One of the order of monks, also known, from the colour of their dress as ‘Black Monks,’ founded by St. Benedict about the year 529 (OED 2016)
‘ <i>lectio divina</i> ’	The ancient practice of prayerful reading of the Word

‘movement’	A term used by all three of Gardam’s faiths of influence, Anglo-Catholic, Benedictine and Quaker, to describe their community of faith
‘Quaker’	A member of the Religious Society of Friends, a religious movement founded by the Christian preacher George Fox in 1648-50, and distinguished by its emphasis on the direct relationship of the individual with the divine, and its rejection of sacraments, ordained ministry, and set forms of worship. The Society is also noted for pacifist principles and an emphasis on simplicity of life, formerly particularly associated with plainness of dress and speech (OED, 2016)
‘religion’	A particular system of faith and worship. In this thesis I deal generally with religions within the Christian tradition, but of course the word may apply to all systems of faith and worship
‘religious’	Exhibiting the spiritual or practical effects of religion
‘scripture’	The Bible
‘the Word’	The Bible or some part or passage of it considered to be divinely inspired, as distinct from ‘word’ meaning a unit of speech

Preface

I

The theologian Heather Walton has described the autobiographical process of ‘life writing’ in the context of her discipline as ‘trying to understand how experiences of the past have shaped me to the kind of theologian I seem called to be’ (Walton, 2014, p.101). As such the process might be of value in offering an initial autobiographical insight as to the motivations of this thesis writer. As a Quaker my understanding of religious autobiographical writing is that it is necessarily based on the writer’s personal experience of God and so it is largely shaped by immersion in that religious practice.

Quaker women’s spiritual life writing began with Margaret Fell and the contemporary Quaker women writers as described by researchers such as Gill Skidmore in her book *Strength in Weakness: Writings of Eighteenth-century Quaker Women* (Skidmore, 2003). It is still an important and growing area, developed today for instance by the Quaker doctor and reflective practitioner, Dr Gillie Bolton in her book *Reflective Practice* (Bolton, 2010).

Fiction, in which authors such as Jane Gardam encourage the reader to enter into the ‘lives speaking’ of her characters, helps us engage imaginatively with other people’s experience and beliefs. We also learn through these stories about aspects of our own personality. Gardam develops this theme throughout her work - in Polly Flint’s own life writing in the novel *Crusoe’s Daughter*, for example. It is in Polly’s final and sublime conversation with Crusoe himself that we understand that his disappearance marks the integration of both her

psychological animus and the religious spirit of Christ in her. Crusoe is her 'bread' not because he consumes her, but precisely because she integrates his Spirit within her. One does not have to look too far to see the parallel of the passion story in which the leaving of Christ in body left us both male and female with his Spirit.

Jane Speedy expresses this theory of lives speaking within negotiable borders in her book *Narrative Inquiry & Psychotherapy*. Speedy's book centres on the poetic in Life Writing and describes unexpected or 'found moments' that transfix us in our reading and which I develop later in this thesis, in examining the relationship between such moments in poetry, fiction and contemplative reading as *lectio divina*. Speedy assures us that to find such found moments we are best not to enter reading or conversation as if we have already arrived (for example at a binary or an exclusive *idée fixe* of faith expression). She urges readers to open to the text, to be porous to its negotiable meanings: 'Opening up the space between us is a process actively supported by the cultivation of multiple forms of listening, listening with 'another ear', or what I would describe as 'poetic mindedness...remaining as "speaking subjects in process"' (Speedy, 2008, p.92). The points of most interesting negotiation are at the borders between apparent opposites. This idea is not hers alone, of course. It draws on the work of other writers as Cixous who, as Speedy says, are 'writing into the fissures where they appear between privilege and oppression' (Speedy, 2008, p.92).

My experience, both as a Quaker and as a therapist, has made me aware of those 'found moments' in ministry during meeting and in openings during

therapy, and thus wary of the hazards of dividing the world into binary oppositions, into male and female. The Quaker Margaret Fell in her paper *Women's Speaking Justified* said that 'God hath put no such difference between the Male and Female, as Men would make' (Fell, 1666). This refusal of the binary perhaps explains the Quaker reluctance to categorise or to label; certainly it explains the importance that Friends have historically given in their testimonies to tolerance and equality. In the therapeutic consulting room where I work this is now expressed by some clients as 'gender fluidity.' Its causes are too complex to describe here, but they echo Jung's theory of the necessary male *animus* in the female and the female *anima* in the male. Sublimating these parts of ourselves, Jung contends, can lead to neurosis. Unless we are prepared to consider fluidity, that of I in you and you in me, we run the risk of becoming trapped - trapped, not only in the unnatural binaries of our own making, but in rejecting those parts of ourselves that are gifts from God - masculine or feminine. Most especially we may presuppose conflict between the two binaries where there is none and this leads to violence not only to each other, but within ourselves.

Speedy's writing encouraged me to think about Gardam's natural humility in these matters, and her Christian spirituality. Gardam never lets her characters simply arrive finished - they are in the process of arriving and forming, inadvertently or not. They tell and show the reader the attendant tension, chaos and confusion that result with the dissolution of social and religious norms as they arrive. Protagonists such as Gardam's Jessica Vye might be plain speaking and 'not quite normal', but they are plainly on a quest during which they are changing or beginning to 'think it possible they might [have

been] mistaken' (QFP 1.02). As a result they have, paradoxically, arrived, but they are also arriving, much as several of Gardam's characters arrive at the end of an emotional journey signified by a station platform or a church. Further, they are arriving or coming of age in both an emotional and a religious sense. Such immanence is theological; but it is also a function of literary technique; and for those of us who pause to think about the relations between the theological and the critical, it prompts reflection of our own lives, their own immanence and the way that we narrativise such meaning. Christ's arrival in body also signalled his immanent departure and the beginning of the extraordinarily complex Christian movement's journey.

Another way of learning about how experience shapes character is through a metabiography. Rupke defines metabiography as 'primarily concerned with the relational nature of a biographical account - the relation it has to the biographer's location.' Metabiography is thus 'a hermeneutic of biography that understands the biographee as a composite construct of many different memory cultures' (Rupke, 2008, p.214). It is the method used by Lucasta Miller in her literary metabiography *The Brontë Myth* (Miller, 2002). Metabiography, as will be seen later in this thesis's introduction, is the method I have used to tell the story of Gardam's religious life. It is also the method I shall use here to describe the nature of reflexivity that led me to Gardam and to the discussion of her as a religious writer. For the purposes of this exercise I have highlighted the 'relational nature' of the 'many different [religious] memory cultures' that have made up the 'composite structure' of my own life. I have divided the account into two parts: it begins with a religious autobiography and then moves on to a

specific and local account of one year when I was twenty-five that became the focus of my future thinking whose expression is this thesis.

I was born in 1960 in the flat ‘above the shop’ of Oxford Quaker Meeting House where my mother was warden. Both my parents were part of the life of the meeting and in my earliest years I became so also. In 1962 we moved to London. Our family went to Golders Green and Ealing Quaker meetings still attended by post war pacifists including Germans, Jews and a Sikh whose finely plaited beard I surreptitiously observed in the quiet before leaving worship early to join the children’s meeting. Mid-sixties London was a gathering of West Indian and Cypriot school friends and neighbours. I warmed to their vibrancy and coveted their gold crosses and bright communion dresses. In 1968 we moved to a suburb just outside Glasgow. My parents lost their faith and we exchanged London multi- and interfaith culture for our Church of Scotland primary school. We learned the *so-fah* and tunes of the hymnary for the school’s weekly services and became familiar with the concept of the sermon. The placing was educative but awkward since I was neither Protestant nor Catholic and furthermore, in this straitened world of binaries, I no longer had any religious self-identity. In the summer before secondary school, I made friends with the only Jewess in my year whose father was a communist and who taught Sociology at the still-new Strathclyde University.

In secondary school life improved: I read and read and sang and talked and debated. Religion only touched me in matters musical in the choir’s ecstatic seasonal performances in which I inadvertently learned passages of the Bible (*The Messiah*), or more purposefully experienced spiritual transcendence in

those Wordsworthian ‘spots of time’ associated with English Literature classes (*Sunset Song* and Edwin Morgan’s poetry) and other ‘found moments’ in the disparate reading material gleaned from the library and local jumble sales (Penguin and Pelican editions of books by Margaret Drabble, L.P. Hartley, Stevie Smith and Shelley amongst many others). I ate, read and cycled fast.

During these times my family of origin paid regular visits to the homes of my grandparents. My paternal grandfather was a Congregational Minister from a long line of what had originally been Welsh ‘chapel’ preachers *via* Bristol and so he moved from parish to parish according to where he was placed. His wife, though born into a Christian Socialist Congregational solicitor’s family, was quite ‘Bloomsbury’ and Quaker by ‘convincement’ (QFP 11.01), a term still used by Quakers today to describe their being convinced of faith through experience. She was part of a small group of Quakers who wrote what was then a bold and groundbreaking book, *Towards a Quaker View of Sex* published in 1963. Her absolute advice to me was that if you had to become a minister’s wife never lose your own identity. At one time the same grandparents ran an ecumenical retreat centre based on the model of the Iona Community and the Friends Fellowship of Reconciliation. We stayed there on our visits to them and attended the community’s Christmas and Easter services conducted by my grandfather.

Meanwhile, my maternal grandparents, I learned much later, had their only surviving child, my mother, christened, according to her baptismal certificate, ‘beloved child of Christ’ in the ‘Very High’ St Cyprian’s Church, which had been designed by Sir Ninian Comper of the Oxford Movement for the benefit of ‘the poor people of London’. My grandfather had been altar boy

there. However, he became a conscientious objector and, after my mother was evacuated to Somerset, the family followed her there and began attending the local Quaker Meeting where, as my mother said, my grandfather had already ‘discovered that their ideas were what was on his mind.’ My mother had never liked the three-hour masses of the Anglo-Catholic church her landlady forced her to attend in Taunton (no breakfast and overwhelmed by the oils of holy unction). Cycling the five miles with her father along the West Country roads after a full breakfast to Quaker meeting was a release and a blessing of its own. She enjoyed Gardam’s book *The Flight of the Maidens* when I gave it to her recently, telling my own sons that she was like one of them. It was as if all those masses had never been in her life, and I never learned of them until my own children had left home.

Despite their very different backgrounds both sets of grandparents met, bound by their post war pacifism and enjoyed each other’s company and consolation occasionally. When my sometime Quaker grandfather died it was my Congregational grandfather who crossed the border from Wiltshire to conduct his funeral in Somerset.

In 1977 I matriculated at Edinburgh University to study English. On The Bridges in the Penguin Classics section of James Thin’s Bookshop I found *Revelations of Divine Love* (Julian, 1998). It read like a mixture of the passion of *The Messiah* and the poetry I loved and was delivered by a woman called Julian with a plainness of Quaker speech that was good, so I spent my book token on that. In 1980 I left the student house of which I was Assistant Warden and took a job as kitchen help where the cook (a young widow and a Devonian Catholic)

took me into her Inveresk home and under her wing. Several months later under the recommendation of an ex-army Quaker uncle, I began the job of general help at Glenthorne Quaker Guesthouse in Grasmere. It was a difficult time. I had lost my voice after an assault and then because of laryngitis. It wasn't so much that I had lost my faith, but that I had never had that consolation.

However, one day during a kitchen break I went outside and stood beside the hedgerow: house in front, Helvellyn behind. I never saw the bird in the hedge, but I heard its lone voice distinctly and the note was one of a full-throated and unabashed declaration that, in Julian's words, 'all shall be well.' I was, as Quakers say, 'convinced'. In 1981, after returning to university, I graduated with a BA in English as quickly as possible and later moved to Glasgow where I worked as Assistant to the Director of The National Book League. It was my job to catalogue our rotating library of newly published children's books. This is where I first discovered Jane Gardam's work.

By 1985, after only occasional childhood visits with my cousins to Muswell Hill Quaker Meeting, I began attending Glasgow Quaker Meeting regularly. It happened one lunch-time when, driven to distraction by an ill-fated relationship, I took the last resort, went round the corner from the office, fell through the door of the Quaker Meeting House, and asked to sit in the meeting room. This time it wasn't bird song, but an inner voice that said quite clearly that I was 'loved beyond measure.' This was not my usual turn of phrase, so I knew it must be from somewhere else and it was a great relief. The relationship ended that week. My next boyfriend (to whom I took this good news) joined me from the Catholic Chaplaincy and we both became members of West Scotland

Monthly Quaker Meeting. In short we had, as the BBC religious correspondent and Quaker Gerald Priestland put it, ‘come home.’ This was the religious community where we married. It was also the one in which our children were welcomed into meeting (not baptised) and the village in which they were raised. I served in turn as the community’s Librarian, Overseer, Elder, Clerk, facilitator and latterly University Quaker Chaplain and took part in the Friends Fellowship of Healing and also Creative Listening groups. The Quaker ministry of listening and non-violence led me to re-train as a Counsellor, an occupation I have continued both in the NHS and Higher Education for the last twenty-five years. My parents, who were divorced by then, never returned to Quaker meeting.

In 2010, following a leading I had persistently ignored and was finally encouraged to follow by Heather Walton, I completed a Masters Thesis on the loss of the Bible as central text and tenet in the Quaker movement of the twentieth century.¹ I began attending retreats and workshops in the monasteries of The English Benedictine Congregation. In 2013 I took the train to Redcar on the Yorkshire coast to interview Jane Gardam, author of *A Long Way From Verona*, in the place of her baptism, the Anglo-Catholic, Coatham Church. In 2016 I submitted my thesis on Jane Gardam: Religious Writer. Then, after six years working, volunteering and studying at Glasgow University I resigned as University Counsellor and Honorary University Chaplain.

The year I want to focus on is 1985, because, as I say in the introduction, this particular year was the one that shaped the beginnings of this thesis’s

¹ James, N. (2009). *Alexandrian or Antiochene?: A re-Interpretation of the Quaker tradition*. University of Glasgow: Glasgow.

thoughts on literature and religion. It was inspired by my first reading of Gardam's coming-of-age novel *A Long Way From Verona*. Part of my remit in The National Book League, under the catch-all designation of 'Administrative Assistant', was to catalogue each newly-published children's book produced in the UK (which it was still possible to do without benefit of digital catalogues in 1985) before adding it to the shelves of the League's public reference library.²

The cataloguing process was well organized by the then Scottish Director Mary Baxter MBE. I was to write either 'F' for fiction or the relevant Dewey decimal code for nonfiction on the spines of each book as it arrived. The cataloguing process made it irresistible to savour the contents of the covers that passed before me and I grew again to love reading, a facility that a degree in English Literature had all but extinguished. It was good to begin with children's books. I opened Gardam, Jane. *A Long Way From Verona*. Part One. The Maniac. Chapter 1. First sentence: 'I ought to tell you at the beginning that I am not quite normal having had a violent experience at the age of nine' (Gardam, 1982, p. 9). Its effect was immediate. In 'I ought to tell you' Gardam had at once made Jessica's speech both bold and considerate. One senses Jessica's inbred politeness wrestling with an over-arching desire to tell herself authentically. The complex and correct grammar gives away her concern with correct form, but belies the authenticity of her confession and, as with more than one of

² The National Book League was established between the two world wars in order to promote children's reading and literature. Its motto was 'the greatest threat to liberty is ignorance.' Historically the National Book League (now The Book Trust) is of interest because not only did it administer a large number of book awards and prizes including the Booker Prize, but the NBL, The Scottish Arts Council and The Federation of Children's Book Groups were the main drivers for and organisers of The Edinburgh Book Festival.

Gardam's heroines, her motivation for truth telling (a classically Quaker concern).

Concurrent with discovering Gardam I had also, as recounted above, returned to Quaker meeting regularly for the first time since I was eight years old. I began reading the texts I had only ever absorbed through hearing their words as a child. The Bible stories of Moses and Zacchaeus however were now supplemented by reading the Word that formed them as well as the stories of Ruth and Job amongst others. George Fox's letters, familiar from my parents' bookshelves with the memorable title *No More But My Love: The Letters of George Fox 1624-91* (Sharmon, 1980), were now augmented by reading from *The Journal of George Fox* (Nickalls, 1952). Fox seemed to have routinely spent many months in various dungeons and prisons during his 'travelling in the ministry' and evidently had a tough constitution. His wife, Margaret Fell, known for 'speaking truth to power' to current royalty and further afield, once prevailing upon the Sultan of Turkey, displayed an equally tough intellect. Known as the great housekeeper of Friends and largely responsible for the business system that saw their survival through the early turbulent years, examples of her household accounts and letters were collected in *Margaret Fell Mother of Quakerism* (Ross, 1984).

The historical and current Quaker writings I read in the Quaker 'rule' were recognisable almost as musical phrases from spoken ministry formed in the memory before I could write. Such Quaker plain speech was this time supplemented by my reading of the generationally-revised books of our particular religious interpretive community (Quakers), namely *Church*

Government and Christian Faith and Practice. Quakers also like to read about personal internal conflict which unresolved can be the seed of war, so as a young woman I eagerly absorbed *Jung and the Quaker Way* (Wallis, 1999) as well as the writings of the Quaker General Practitioner Rachel Pinney on *Creative Listening* (Pinney, 1970).

Quaker meeting was full of people like myself and Gardam's fictional character Jessica Vye, who were 'not quite normal' but articulate and eager to be in community. Within this creedless 'Religious Society of Friends' its members were in the constant process of resorting to the guidance of the Spirit, and thus renegotiating its religious community's text and language, for example in our practice of communal writing of minutes and testimonies. The Quaker Business Method drew on the same contemplative silence as our meetings for worship, except that during business meetings we considered items from a pre-agreed agenda for business. Any number from three in small preparative meetings to over one thousand Friends in Yearly Meeting might gather, but in each meeting for business the process was the same. Together, we sought a way forward in the Spirit. The Clerk read the minute to the meeting. It was accepted only when all those present agreed that the minute faithfully recorded 'the sense of the meeting.' We worked, as the Jesuit Michael Sheeran described it in his book, *'Beyond Majority Rule'* (Sheeran, 1986) and indeed beyond consensus. Often in the silence between spoken ministries a third solution made itself known, stealing an unexpected stillness over a previously tense or conflicted meeting. If however the 'way' was not 'made clear' the matter was 'laid aside' for consideration until the next time. We were questing the Bible's Word and Spirit, its seepage into our words expressed in our religious ministry, testimony

and minutes and thus we discerned how to ‘let our lives speak’ in the world. Word and world formed a circular motion as their fit was tested in our meetings and expressed in our interpretive text or minutes. For us the sense of the meeting moved by the Spirit was a motion, a living, breathing dynamic. The Spirit and The Word dwelt among us.

Though I did not know it then, Gardam was a self-declared cradle Anglo-Catholic who still attended mass; and at the same time had become an attender at Quaker meetings and occasional Benedictine retreats. One of her friends was the Quaker educated non-believer and author Margaret Drabble. Perhaps the synchronous absorption in 1985 of Gardam’s fiction and Quaker literature opened a way into the beginnings of an enquiry concerning ecumenism in fiction that this thesis in Literature and Theology now represents. Certainly it has made me uncharacteristically bold in my description of the arrival of *Verona* on my desk. Its coming was in retrospect the hand of God in that it both held me safe in its palm, and yet at the same time, as a loving parent does, nudged me into previously unknown lands, crossing borders into ecumenism and interdisciplinary studies such as those of literature and theology.

My response to Gardam’s writing sprang from the same place as the ministry that emerged from the gathered silence of a Quaker meeting for worship. Such meeting rooms became imbued with a stillness that passes understanding: the original seventeenth century Lancashire meeting house of which Gardam writes in her short story *The Meeting House* and her novel *The Flight of the Maidens* still exists and is in use today. Quakers themselves perhaps undervalue their qualities of accumulated worship. One such example, Sawley

Meeting, overlooks Pendle Hill in Lancashire, and is not unlike Gardam's 'oldest Quaker meeting house in England' in her short story *The Meeting House* where: 'George Fox himself is said to have preached ... shortly after his vision of angels settling like flocks of birds on Pendle Hill' (Gardam, 1995, p.50). With the reasoning that presence is less about buildings than the Spirit and that earth's resources should not be squandered, Friends have sold Sawley Meeting House on the open property market, and the new owners have applied for Planning Consent for its Change of Use to that of a 'single residence'. Thus well over two hundred years of sacred presence and a potential Quaker retreat and outreach has been lost in a matter of days. Perhaps, seeing themselves increasingly more humanist than spiritual, Friends also perceive less the value in the ecumenical community's inheritance of accumulated prayer and that not only worshippers but buildings can be 'seasoned' too.

However, such a religious space is also offered in the reading of the Quaker community's interpretive texts and the Biblical Word as described above. It is found too in the ecumenical and ancient practice of *lectio divina*, a practice that I came to know through Benedictine retreats. *Lectio divina* is contemplative reading of a short passage of the Bible or sacred text as if it were a form of spiritual poetry addressed directly to the reader. I can only describe all these processes as the reader's contemplative consideration of the Word in relation to her condition and that it holds a divine potential that is both dynamic and redemptive. In the thirty years since returning to Quaker meeting, I have experienced such moments at other times of gathered worship such as in the Anglo-Catholic Mass at St Bride's Church, Glasgow and the Benedictine Masses at Worth and Douai Abbeys. To be gathered in the Word is not limited to one

faith's particular form, though it seems important that whatever the form is, it is considerate of the Word that is its substance and gives life. Such still places and gathered moments are, as Gardam describes in her short story *The Meeting House*, 'like hanging in clear water'.

This thesis is a quest, the beginnings of an enquiry into what a community of readers gathered in fiction written by a religious author might be. It asks amidst the selling-off of our prayer houses whether or not it is possible for readers to be gathered as religious interpretive communities, reading 'alone together' in a community that is ecumenical. Can readers, whilst yet anchored in their own faith foregrounds, extend themselves, through the experience of fiction such as Gardam's, to that shared ecumenical horizon, an horizon that has its own common root in the Word, a Word which after all is shared by all Christian faiths. For instance, it seemed to me that I chose Gardam's fiction; but also that her fiction chose me, though neither Gardam nor I were aware that a choice was being made, or indeed that a choice was necessary. But it gradually became clear to me that in her fictional texts there was a common and yet also sacred ground where sharing of our commonality in the Word meant that ecumenical dialogue and understanding were possible: that in Heaney's terms there was a redress of sorts for a number of religious issues I had experienced in my own life.

This thesis focuses on Jane Gardam; it is not exclusively about her, but the reasons why I have chosen the writers with which to compare her needs comment. As I point out in my discussion below of reader-response theory, narratives exclude as much as they include; indeed the act of inclusion is a

necessary form of exclusion. The critical literature on Gardam is relatively undeveloped, and therefore the extent to which she has been viewed as one of a community of writers concerned with religion also remains undeveloped. I wanted to consider her work within a not-often recognized group of contemporary English women authors who write about aspects of Christianity expressed from within English culture and landscape at the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty first century. I felt that their work had been somewhat overshadowed by the sense of what is to be spiritual and feminist in the Western world, when it seemed to me that, whatever else they contributed to a spiritual and feminist view of narrative and the world, they also had a lot to say about what it is to be a contemporary Christian woman in England. These authors stand at the border of a new kind of dialogue between Christian faiths and indeed between all faiths.

Gardam herself writes experientially from within these ecclesial traditions. Her personal faith results in a deeply reflexive description of her characters' own experiences and she is thus better able to engage the reader in that same experience and its consequences. When I first read Gardam's work it seemed, to someone of my Quaker background, that she was dealing with matters that were overtly Quaker in subject-matter and tone. Later, when I had had more acquaintance with other religious traditions, notably Anglo-Catholicism and the Benedictine movement, their traditions also began to emerge from her narratives. More recent discussions at interview with her have affirmed this ecumenism that had formed her writing style. I was fascinated by the complexity and the interplay of such religious textualities, and was drawn to a brief critique of them in my Masters dissertation, writing an essay on her short story *Missing*

the Midnight. This thesis is a much more developed argument about such textualities.

II

Given the personal context that I have outlined above, and before the thesis proper begins in Chapter 1, it may be helpful to provide a brief summary of the thesis argument. In Chapter 1 I outline the central claim of my argument: that whichever other genres Gardam writes within, and regardless of the many different audiences she writes for, she is a powerful religious writer, and that this has received insufficient critical attention. The rest of the thesis makes the case for this claim. Thus in Chapter 2, in order to help illuminate what is involved in religious writing, I examine aspects of twentieth-century reader response theory and show that there are, as Stanley Fish suggests, readerships that can be described as religious interpretive communities. Each community shares an agreed interpretation of a communal text such as the Bible. Such interpretations are formalised as a community ‘rule’ or guide. I observe that Fish spends little time exploring what it means to be a reader of fiction in a religious interpretive community. Therefore in Chapter 3 I turn to the ancient practice of *lectio divina* and extend Duncan Robertson’s claim that this approach to reading could be regarded as a form of religious reader response theory, one currently enjoying a revival in both specific and ecumenical religious communities. Those who participate in *lectio divina* seek to understand how ‘the Book’ (the Bible or other Christian sacred writing) speaks to their particular life story or ‘Book of experience’ (Robertson, 2011, p.231). I claim that *lectio divina* as a form of

reader response theory might be applied to fiction such as Gardam's in which the Word dwells amongst the words of the novel. In chapter 4 I widen my approach to religious fiction, applying the theoretical approaches to poetry taken by Seamus Heaney and others. I use these approaches as a form of 'redress' to this absence in reader response theory. I explore the role of the Word in poetry and move on to consider the importance of some aspects of *lectio divina* that might be applied in our readings of fiction. I conclude that two important elements of medieval literary response theory, namely *lectio divina* and the *aevum*, may be re-appraised in their application to contemporary religious literary theory.

In Chapter 5 I begin to explore how the Word seeds itself in Gardam's fiction. Partly through a form of my own process of *lectio divina* applied as a form of reader response to Gardam's novels, I explore Gardam's particular religious languages: Anglo-Catholic, Quaker and Benedictine.

In Chapter 6 I compare Gardam to other female English contemporary novelists. I argue that Gardam writes directly from personal experience of worship and explore the effects that this has upon her *oeuvre*. Thus she writes directly from her ecclesial experience, so that we read of religion *in* her characters, rather than religion as a context for character. I then discuss Gardam in relation to the idea of the 'origami' - a way of writing used to simultaneously collapse and open time. This writing method is in fact a concept familiar from Kermode's literary extension of Thomas Aquinas's religious concept of the *aevum*.

In Chapter 7 I suggest that Gardam is not only a ‘coming of age’ novelist, but also what I newly term a ‘religious coming of age’ writer. I apply Paul Murray’s theory of ecumenical religious community, Receptive Ecumenism (explored in chapter 2) as a ‘religious coming of age’ for religious communities. I observe that a literary ‘religious coming of age’ in Receptive Ecumenism has so far not been explored in coming of age novels such as Gardam’s. I argue that *Crusoe’s Daughter* describes a ‘religious coming of age’ and its mark is the fruits it bears in both individual *and* community. Gardam’s writing thus demonstrates both ‘the spiritual’ and ‘the practical effects of religion’, and in this respect as well as others could be regarded as the start of a new religious literary direction. I suggest that Gardam is thus not only re-positioning the Word in our present age, but that she also offers a literary contribution to the Receptive Ecumenism movement. This contribution is thus part of what Murray has called ‘prophecy’.

Gardam has, if not a mission, then certainly a vocation for the religious formation of her readers. She does this - just as her fifteenth century forebear Julian of Norwich still does - through a poetic literature that comes to us in the form of her short stories and novels, writing that speaks unabashedly of the truth of religious experience. She reveals this truth to us, the readers’ interpretive community, despite the present demands of individualism and our ever-fracturing communities, and demonstrates that the foundation and fruits of Christianity lie in the ecumenical movement, and in its source that remains in our shared experience of the Word.

Part 1

Chapter 1. Jane Gardam: A Brief Literary Metabiography and Literature Review

Introduction

Jane Gardam OBE FRSL is an award-winning contemporary English author who has published novels and short stories for children and adults since 1971. She has been recognised amongst her peers and readers, but as we shall see, there has been little critical writing about her work. Reviews comment mostly on her short stories and novels as having acuity, particularly with regard to such British themes as the end of Empire, coming of age and old age (for example at the Institute of Germanic and Romance Studies, University of London, 2014). She is recognised as an author's author who herself has a well-informed knowledge of literature. However, the religious aspect of her writing has in the main eluded critical comment. Gardam herself observed, 'I knew I had a lot to say. Not politically - politics have always confused me - but perhaps spiritually' (Rees, 2004). In our many conversations and correspondences in the course of the writing of this thesis, she has also expressed delight that 'at last somebody has spotted what keeps me going' (Gardam, 2016c). Now that Gardam is eighty six, the same age as Polly Flint at the end of Gardam's novel *Crusoe's Daughter* (1986), it is time to do as Polly did and discuss the relevance of fiction, this time Gardam's fiction, from a religious point of view and enquire further as to whether and how the statement that 'Gardam is a religious writer' is true.

We can start by considering not religious writing, but from the other side of the page - how do we read text? One body of twentieth-century textual

theory (which owes much to earlier nineteenth century models of theological reading and textual criticism) is reader response theory. It constructs the aesthetic experience of reading literary theory and other texts and gives us valuable insight into individual reading practices, social and community practices and how we interpret textual meaning and different types of authorship such as religious authorship. A critic such as Stanley Fish, while not explicitly addressing religious reading and authorship in the late twentieth-century, is aware from his work on Milton and seventeenth century prose, of the ways that religious texts were read. Given his interest in reader response theory generally, and his concept of a community of interpretive readers, there may be aspects of his theories that are helpful for our understanding of Gardam as a religious writer. Would Fish's theories support the proposal that Gardam is a religious writer or describe how this is so?

Religious, contemplative, reading of the Bible and sacred scriptures out loud to oneself was described by Augustine (Augustine, 1961) and has been practised at least since the third century using the ancient method known as *lectio divina*. Text is considered prayerfully in the light of a person's 'book of experience' (Robertson, 2011, p.231). The manner and time devoted to *lectio divina* was described in the sixth century Benedictine *Rule* in a chapter headed 'Daily Manual Labour' (*Rule*, p.117). The four steps of *lectio divina* were described in further detail by medievalists such as Guigo II. Contemporary Benedictine writers such as Michael Casey have commented on *lectio divina*'s history, approach and hermeneutics (Casey, 2005). Since Gardam's writing often contains direct citing of, if not reference to, the Word, is it possible that the ancient form of *lectio divina* might illuminate how we could read Gardam today?

Furthermore, if in its dwelling upon a reader's experience of text *lectio divina* could be regarded as an ancient form of reader response theory and practice, could this address the gaps or indeterminacies of Fish's treatment of religious interpretive communities?

However, the question remains as to whether there are any applications of *lectio divina* currently used as methods of reading fiction in general such as Gardam's. Might there be hints and signs, aspects of *lectio divina's* recent resurgence in religious readership communities that have been adopted in other areas, for instance, in education? Do other writers and critics, for instance of poetry, say anything about religious writing and how Word works in the context of words in poetry, short stories or novels? Gardam regards the form of the short story as being close to poetry: 'Short stories are nearer poetry than anything. They are like a conversation, a dialogue' (Kean, 2015). Poets and critics such as Seamus Heaney, whom Gardam admires (Gardam, 2016c), have insights at once theoretical and practical on the subject of religious writing. In terms of literary criticism in general, critics such as Frank Kermode, whose work has at least in part dealt with Biblical texts and exegesis, help to construct our concept of the reader's literary religious space.

Having explored these critical and literary theories it is important to examine how they might work in practice in Gardam's writing. What are her faiths of influence, their history, language and stylistics and what are their characteristics? What is their religious effect on her writing? It would be important to discern what they are and demonstrate how they work in the context of her fiction.

Gardam's writing is embedded in the late twentieth century: she draws upon social concerns and is acutely aware not just of English history, but also of her contemporaries, in the field. I therefore compare Gardam to other English women authors who write about or have emerged from one of Gardam's religious backgrounds. Such a comparison is always helpful in that it can throw into relief the lineaments of Gardam's approach to subjects such as religious life and writing. In this way I hope to better define by differentiation how a religious writer differs from a non-religious writer of our time.

Finally I ask the question, 'If Gardam is known as a 'coming of age novelist', is there such a writer as a 'coming of *religious* age novelist?' Is this possible where a writer is influenced, as they increasingly are, by more than one religion? We have numerous studies on the theory and practice of ecumenism in community (Eck, 2003), but how would that be expressed in the pragmatic realisation and resolution of the short story or novel? Drawing upon a movement entitled Receptive Ecumenism, a movement that seeks to enquire as to how different faiths might receive Word from each other (Murray, 2010), I inquire if it might be possible that literary illustration of such ecumenical reception is possible, for example within Gardam's fiction. If this is so then Gardam would not only be a 'religious writer' and a 'coming of religious age writer', but also one who is describing an era of 'coming of religious age'; one who writes not only about old age and the end of Empire, but through her fiction gives a voice to the beginning of a new era, that of the ecumenical readers' interpretive community.

Jane Gardam: a brief literary metabiography

‘I knew I had a lot to say. Not politically - politics have always confused me - but perhaps spiritually’ (Rees, 2004. Gardam, *loq.*)

Jane Gardam: Religious Writer

This thesis begins with a brief outline of the work and life of its main subject, Jane Gardam. What follows is a form of literary biography where, for our purposes in this thesis, the literature is at least as important as the events of Gardam’s life. Events are sited in a person’s biographical timeline. However, what is more important for our understanding of Gardam’s art, are the spaces she inhabits, and the spaces she creates in her narrative art. This chapter therefore - indeed this whole thesis - is part of the emerging genre of metabiography, described by Nicolaas Rupke. In the conclusion of his metabiography of the scientist, Alexander von Humboldt, he acknowledges Lucasta Miller’s metabiography of the Brontës. Rupke defines metabiography as being ‘primarily concerned with the relational nature of a biographical account - the relation it has to the biographer’s location’ (Rupke, 2008). He continues that metabiography is thus ‘a hermeneutic of biography that understands the biographee as a composite construct of many different memory cultures’ (Rupke, 2008, p.214). That is part of the approach taken in this thesis. For this meta-biographical section I have consulted literary sources, biographical dictionaries and interviewed Gardam.

Jane Gardam, born 1928, is a contemporary English author. She did not start writing novels and short stories until her forties 'when the children had gone to school', but since 1971 has written prolifically and for a wide range of readership - eight adult novels and ten collections of short stories. In addition she has published twelve children's books for age six upwards. An additional three 'teenage novels' novels: *Bilgewater*, *A Long Way From Verona* and *The Summer After the Funeral* are also read by adults. Her only non-fiction book, a co-authored project on *The Iron Coast* (Gardam, Burton & Walshaw, 1994) describes her native North East Coast of England, the setting for much of her work. In addition Gardam is a reviewer and occasional short story writer for *The Spectator* and *The Telegraph*.

Included in Gardam's Cumbrian family were farming grandparents, a schoolmaster father and a mother who was always writing letters and sermons. Gardam herself has contributed a chapter about her own writing in *Landscape into Literature: A Writers' Anthology* edited by Kay Dunbar in a short piece, *Babbling o' Green Fields*. In this Gardam writes vividly of her grandparents' farm in West Cumbria remarking that, despite the harsh life, 'there was a sort of poetry in it' (Gardam, 2005a, p.52).

In another anthology *The Pleasure of Reading* (Fraser, 2015) Gardam contributes thoughts on her parents' bookshelves, providing a helpful booklist of early influences. The three bookshelves housed in order: first shelf, her school teacher father's text books; the second shelf, Shakespeare and Creasey's *The Fifteen Decisive Battles of the World*; and the third shelf held 'my mother's

books, which were nearly all holy, for she was an Anglo-Catholic and convert to the Oxford Movement' (Gardam, 2015, pp.118-119).

Miller describes Gardam's mother thus:

Gardam's mother was the daughter of a sea captain and she grew up with a voracious love of language but no formal education. "She could write. Wonderful letters of the kind you hardly ever get now and they were compulsive. She wrote all the time, endlessly. She'd just say to any child in the street, excuse me could you just take this letter to the post. And she was always writing sermons." (Miller, 2005)

It is not surprising then that the influence of the epistolary form emerges in Gardam's fiction (Manhire, 1996). It occurs in the genre of the epistolary novel, *The Summer After the Funeral* (1992), in which Mrs Price writes to, or rather billets, all her children until the family are reunited, with the immediacy of tone that acts like a letter to the reader about the condition of the writer. In *A Long Way From Verona* thirteen-year old Jessica addresses the reader in the first person (Wylie, 2001). The epistolary form is not just secular of course; it is a genre of religious writings, about which religious writers (e.g. those writing with some forms of religious intent) have made a meta-commentary. As we shall see, Gardam's characters that use or are described within the epistolary form can be interpreted as Paul says, as 'a letter from Christ' (1 Cor.3: 2). Just as many of Paul's epistles attempted to bring about *metanoia* and revelation, so too occurs the tragi-comic setting of the everyday lives in Gardam's work.

Gardam was educated at Saltburn School for Girls. Having obtained a scholarship, she read for a degree in English Literature at Bedford College, London where she then began a PhD on the eighteenth century traveller and letter-writer Lady Mary Wortley Montague (Miller, 2005). Just over a year later her research was abandoned due to lack of funds. Gardam found work as a Red

Cross Travelling Librarian and in editorial posts on the literary review magazines *The Weldon Literary Review Magazine* and *Time and Tide*. Gardam was thus immersed in the literary world. According to Gardam her PhD tutor Kathleen Tillotson later said she always knew Gardam would be a novelist (something Gardam says she wishes Tillotson had mentioned earlier). Gardam is now eighty-six.

Although less well known than some other contemporary female writers such as Anglican-raised Rose Tremain and the Quaker-educated Margaret Drabble, the Alumni page on the website of her *alma mater*, Bedford College, describes her as having won nine literary awards and prizes for her novels and short story collections as well as being nominated for the Folio, Orange and Booker Prizes (Royal Holloway, 2012). She is a member of the writer's association PEN International and a Fellow of The Royal Society of Literature. Her novels *The Flight of the Maidens* (2001) and *The Man in The Wooden Hat* (2009c), and five of her short stories have been broadcast on Radio 4 (Gardam, 2016d).

Despite this prolific and highly regarded record there is remarkably little published biographical literature on Gardam. She receives a mention in various biographical dictionaries. *The Oxford Companion to Children's Literature* (Hahn et al, 2015), despite references to Gardam's substantial literary frame of reference, notes that 'the only aspect of her work to attract adverse criticism has been the elitism of her frequent literary references, though it has to be accepted that these are integral to her plots' (Hahn, 2015, p.196). However, the biographies are slight and take a superficial view of the relationship between

her life and her art. Thus the omission of comment on her obvious religious interests is remarkable, possibly a reflection of the status of religious faith in contemporary literature, that leads to misinterpretation of Gardam's work. The entry on Gardam in *The Oxford Companion to Children's Literature* refers to the fact that Athene in *A Long Way From Verona* (2009) has an 'eccentrically religious father' (Hahn, 2015). It does not mention that his eccentricity exudes an extraordinarily effective absent-minded benevolence, which makes Athene's loss all the greater when her father, the curate, dies. With reference to the omission of comment on the religious aspect of her writing, Gardam wrote to me regarding this thesis that 'at last somebody has spotted what keeps me going' (Gardam, 2016c).

The fact of scant biographical literature made this thesis at once more difficult and yet potentially, and this was its hazard, free ranging. There remain considerable areas for potential research, including the influences on her of the North East landscape, the tradition of women's letter writing, earlier eighteenth and nineteenth century fiction writers such as Dickens, Kipling, Brontë and Austen, as well as British archaeology and postcolonial history. But it is to her religious influences, in particular the Anglo-Catholic, Quaker and Benedictine spaces and traditions that we must now turn.

Gardam is in fact a deeply religious writer. She is still an Anglo-Catholic. Lately however, she has also attended Quaker meeting for worship (Canterbury, Kent) and continues her association with the Benedictines. This last is a monastic movement the origins of which lie in the sixth century and, I argue, embodies a code still hermeneutically sound for the future of Christianity. Its

guide or the *Rule* (Benedict, 2004) is rooted in biblical text and its profusion of silence in the English Benedictine Congregation's everyday life recalls the Quietist tradition of the Religious Society of Friends in Britain (James, 2009). Gardam herself has said that she wishes she had 'the courage to be a Quaker' (Gardam, 2013b). However, her work would suggest that her decision to remain acquainted with both the biblical and liturgical textual traditions of a range of Christian movements has enriched the narrative and technical structure of her writing.

Gardam was baptised in the Anglo-Catholic Christ Church, Coatham on the North East Coast of England. She says in her only non-fiction book, *The Iron Coast*, 'In Cardinal Newman tradition the church became known for the length of its solemn services' (Gardam, 1994, p.12). Coatham was also the site of the Quaker Edward Pease's workers' estate and the new industrial railway that carried the coal from the local mines to the steel works. The house of the Sisterhood of the Holy Rood and the Catholic Church were not far away. Further along the coast St Hilda, Abbess of Whitby had provided the first sister house to its neighbouring monastery. From the beginning then Gardam's landscape was truly ecumenical - dominated as it was by the Anglo-Catholic Coatham Church Spire with the Quaker estate and railway behind.

Gardam describes the formidable Hilda of Whitby in a recent article, *Give Us a Bishop in High Heels* (Gardam, 2014f). Hilda's twenty-first century descendants at the new Stanbrook Abbey, Yorkshire, are no less resilient:

And yet in Yorkshire for a thousand years we had formidable female saints who could eat any number of male bishops for breakfast with their flagons of ale, including the glorious Hilda, abbess of Whitby, a unisex

establishment of both monks and nuns. Whitby Abbey, more than 1,350 years old, stands now roofless and looks on the cliff-top rather like a rotten tooth. But even roofless, to this day it is said you'll never see birds fly over its grassy nave. It is too holy. They fall down dead...It was one of her labourers [Caedmon] whose lovely "Hymn to Creation" is known as the first written English poem. Often, tending his cattle on the cliff-top, he must have seen the dawn, the sun rising above the sea like the first day of the world. She made him a monk. (Gardam, 2014f)

Gardam's early relationship with current religion and its historic horizons is described in an interview for *The Guardian*:

Religion was the centre of Gardam's mother's life, and it crops up in most of Gardam's novels in some form or another. "Mum was a tremendous Anglo-Catholic. Very impressive, actually. She made me go to church for years - I still don't want to because of that" ... She still values her mother's influence: "I had the prayer book instilled into me without trying - a great present to give a child." Nowadays, Gardam says, "I veer between being a Quaker and my ingrained Anglo-Catholicism." (Miller 2005)

In time the young Jean Mary Pearson, as she was called then, married the lawyer, eventually to be QC in Hong Kong, David Gardam. They moved to Wimbledon and had two sons and a daughter. Both her husband and daughter (a gifted botanical artist) have pre-deceased her, as has a daughter-in-law. She now lives in Sandwich, Kent though still visits the North East and indeed Christ Church, Coatham where I met her in 2013. Gardam is acquainted with grief, but her writing is not submerged by it. It is sustained, like Redcar's new pier: the story held above the North Sea by its inherent structure - in Gardam's case, influenced by the form of the Anglo-Catholic liturgy and King James Bible (KJV), this text itself in turn freed up by poetic expression not unfamiliar to the aforementioned monk and poet, Caedmon. Lucasta Miller quotes Gardam's 'long-standing editor Penelope Hoare' who hints at a Caedmon-like quality in

Gardam: “‘She’s not one of those writers who’s into publicity. She prefers long walks. She genuinely leads the life of the writer, an interior life’” (Miller, 2005).

Exuberance or poetic ecstasy, which Gardam’s characters often exhibit, was a quality attributed to the young Gardam by her mother and not with approval. She quotes her mother in the introduction to her latest collection *The Stories*, ‘Jane has always had her ecstatic side,’ my mother used to say, ‘and ecstasy is all very well, but -’ (Gardam, 2014c). Thus the ecstatic quality which might have been too zealous, overworked at the cost of the story itself, is tempered, restrained within the confines of many characters’ self-concepts, as well as the society in which the characters find themselves, and Gardam’s cool, sometimes ironic style of narrative.

Gardam’s female protagonists such as Jessica Vye in *A Long Way From Verona* are reminiscent of other fictional women characters candid in their immediacy. Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (2006), like Gardam’s *Verona*, is written in the first person. The candid voice persists also in the third person as in Austen’s *Emma* (2003), who is truthful, and indeed Forster’s Lucy in *A Room With a View* (2006), who in the end cannot help but be truthful. For Jane, Emma and Lucy, ecstasy is gradually grounded within the normal confined space of everyday duty, familial constraints, custom and prose formal or conversational. If one adds, as Gardam does, the religious language, rhythm and metaphor of the King James Bible, the space that the reader occupies between herself and the text is one into which she can move, occupy and grow through experientially and even religiously. Religion may be part of the structure against which Gardam’s

characters fight, but it is also the transformative space through which they eventually recover themselves.

However, there are vexed questions not only of ‘which religion?’ but ‘why religion at all?’ Born between the wars and at the time of fading empire, Gardam captures the landscape of a civilisation changing course and, if not the prophetic, she is at least offering us in the poetic, the chance to experience what is changed utterly. What she offers is not only a psychological solution, but also an ecumenical solution at the end of more than one of her novels. Always this ecumenism is based on a great levelling out of position amongst the characters. This is the case with Dulcie and Fiscal Smith in *Last Friends* (2013b) and Pamela in *Faith Fox* (2003) for instance. In good gospel tradition the meek inherit an instrumental part in the final procession.

These larger questions, springing from change in the processes of religion, politics, culture and empire, are signaled by the characters and the interplay between each other. In the earlier novels of Charlotte Brontë, E. M. Forster and Jane Austen cited above, such interplay often revolves around a central character or characters (such as Jane, Emma and Lucy cited above) where readers sense the difference between their narrative positions and those of minor characters. Gardam, however, deliberately avoids such hierarchy in many of her narratives, with the result that the spaces between characters become closer and uncertain, and where what is normally conventional narrative focus splinters light into different planes or perspectives. Gardam indicated this when speaking at a recent reading of *Last Friends* for the British Library:

One thing I've learned in writing these books is that there are no minor characters...I don't think there are any minor characters in life and there should not be any minor characters in a real book, in a real work of fiction. You've got to care about them, got to be like God, got to love everybody - very hard when it's a man like Fiscal- Smith, but you have to love him, well in the end you know I rather did. (Gardam, n.d.)

Here, as in her fiction, Gardam is giving testimony to equality - a religious belief that is quite akin to her 'veering towards Quakers', whose writings are particularly sensitive to matters of equality. For example, this statement is a Quaker response to government cuts of welfare benefits in 2014:

Our vision of equality springs from our profound sense of the worth of every human being. Every person's life is sacred and in this we are all equal. Neither money nor status can serve as a true measure of the value of any individual or group. Nor can wealth be true riches if it is based on unlimited personal enrichment and not shared for the good of all.³

All Gardam's work exhibits profound interest in religious and spiritual communities. Whilst many of her novels are evidently not mono-faith some, such as *Faith Fox*, describe a more deliberate attempt at forming an ecumenical community of place. This is not only a description of those ecumenical communities such as The Iona Community and many others that sprang up in the 1960's. I would argue that it is evidence of a more profound imagining by Gardam of what such theological spaces might actually be, and how they might function, socially and creatively. In this way Gardam is representative of a new and most optimistic ecumenical movement and exceptionally the beginnings of a fictional movement that accompanies it; and central to this movement is the author's concern for the theological space between reader and work of fiction, which we shall explore briefly in the next section.

³ Statement adopted by Meeting for Sufferings on behalf of Britain Yearly Meeting - April 2014, minute MfS 2014 04 07 <http://www.quaker.org.uk/statement-equality>. Retrieved 25.2.16.

Gardam and the Reader's Theological Space

Religion features in most of Gardam's novels. The main characters usually belong to the Anglican, Catholic, Quaker or Jewish faiths, but it does not necessarily mean that the novels are religious, or indeed that the plot pivots on the fact of a person's religion.

Gardam's first book, *A Few Fair Days* (1998a), was written for children in 1971. It begins with a young girl seeking warmth, after a dip in the sea, in the un-named but recognisable Anglo-Catholic Christ Church, Coatham. Her latest novel for adults, *Last Friends*, was written more than forty years later, and ends in a similar church scene, this time in Devon. Between these first and last publications religious spaces feature in Gardam's work, some identifiable, others not. Gardam's fascination lies not just in landscape and vernacular architecture, but in religious architecture too (Hill, 2007). It includes church graveyards: in *The Flight of the Maidens*, where the sixth formers 'Una and Hetty had come for over a year... to lie on the grass to do their revision'; in *Last Friends* the gravestones which Fiscal complains are 'a disgrace...Tipping about' and of which Dulcie says she 'likes ...tipping about' (Gardam, 2001 p.205).

Quaker religious spaces, Friends meeting houses, feature in several of her stories. In *The Flight of the Maidens* there are two - one possibly Briggflats Meeting House. There is a Quaker meeting house high on the Cumbrian hills in the short story *The Meeting House*. Then there are the religious spaces of the disused Benedictine priories: Ellerby Priors, re-founded for the new-age ecumenical community in *Faith Fox*, and visited by the Anglican Pammie ('I am a

religious woman too and all the way here I've been wanting to ask you if you can't stop for a moment before we get there to say some prayers' (Gardam, 2003, p.59)), and, in *The Flight of the Maidens* again, the remains of a Priory, the seat of the young Rupert's old border Catholic family: "My rose-red ruin...half as old as time. The Romans built it, the Normans pulled it down and tried again. People have been trying to get rid of it ever since, or improve it...I shall present it to the Order," he said, "Though they'd be fools to take it" (Gardam, 2001a, p.230). It is a typical Gardam passage - Rupert (perhaps thorough whom Gardam is speaking) is well aware of the historical dimensions of class and of the ruins of its history in English society. He displays a pragmatic commonsense about its trappings in the form of this expensive ruin ("they'd be fools to take it"). Throughout there is an appreciation of how religion has shaped the landscape, class, life and character of English society.

Within the landscape above Gardam often fuses the spaces between those who are conventionally foregrounded because they are major characters or backgrounded because they are minor characters. Instead of writing with the conventional narrative focus, she illuminates this or that character in his or her personal landscape regardless of status or class. The same fusing occurs with Gardam's handling of narrative time which often defies chronological linear time, creating cycles and circlings more akin to theological time patterns. Gardam thus liberates characters so that they are free to move between time and narrative, between object and its linguistic signifier, as if on earth there are glimpses of light as 'in the resurrection [where] they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven' (Matt 22: 30).

The question remains though, does that make her work religious? The process is more complex and subtle than that. The presence of such religious props is not necessarily evidence of profound religious writing. They are the veneer of religious fiction. Gardam's writing engages much more seriously with what might be called the deep grammar of religious fiction. If we were to define what constitutes religious writing in the abstract, we would almost certainly fail: expression of social or spiritual writing depends on cultural context. But if we were to define what makes a writer of fiction a *religious* writer of fiction, it has to do with a novel's deeper grammar of linguistic reference, character, narrative time and objects - an interpretive framework that is focused on how we come to religious experience not purely as a form of aesthetic pleasure, but as a potentially life-changing aesthetic.

As we shall see, twentieth-century reader response criticism describes well how a reader's response occurs when she moves imaginatively forward into the space between herself and the text. The critical space is one the reader chooses to enter and engage with the potentiality of the narrative's power to affect her life. Such openness is crucial to religious fiction, I would argue, for it changes the very nature of language from merely describing reality to constructing that reality. Tompkins put it well:

The insistence that language is constitutive of reality rather than merely reflective of it suggests that contemporary critical theory has come to occupy a position very similar to, if not the same as, that of Greek rhetoricians for whom mastery of language meant mastery of state...in the common perception of language as a form of power...It is this perception...that promises the most for criticism's future. (Tompkins, 1980, p.226)

Far from a trajectory away from the idea of language as reflective of reality, Gardam is returning her readership through her writing to a Christian version of the view that it is constitutive of reality. The reader is moved by her art: emotions are heightened and resolved in a form of Aristotelian catharsis. It is a response powerful in religious terms because Gardam involves the reader within a fictional world that appears at first glance rather conventional, but which displaces character, time, object and much else around a pivot of religious imagining. Thus if the characters are undergoing a religious experience, the narrative opens up to the reader the possibility that the reader's experience is revelatory also. It embodies Tompkins' description of language as a form of 'power': and in the case of Gardam's narratives, it is often a redemptive power.

Versions of such power occur in religious literature. We are familiar for instance with Augustine's fourth century experience of conversion that resulted from reading holy text. In *Confessions* (1961) he describes hearing the distant, but insistent voice of a child telling him to pick up and read the gospel that lies on the bench beside him. He does so, and as his eyes alight at random on Romans 13:11-14 he moves from 'weeping in the most bitter contrition of my heart' to 'tranquil countenance'. He says, 'Immediately my countenance was changed...No further would I read, nor did I need; for instantly, as the sentence ended, - by a light, as it were, of security infused into my heart, - all the gloom of doubt vanished away' (Augustine, 2001, pp.177-178).

It is interesting that the religious aspect of Gardam's novels remains unrecognized. The novels have inherent within them not only the language of philosophers such as Aristotle (whom Gardam read), but also holy texts (which

has recited in the rituals and mass of the Anglo-Catholic church) and further centuries of succeeding commentaries such as Augustine's (the legacy of which she came to know ever more deeply through both her literary studies and the Benedictine retreats she attended). This misreading extends to the way Gardam's texts were first marketed by publishers. Thus the 1998 Abacus edition of *Faith Fox* with its glossy scarlet cover complete with a sprig of green leaves across it, speaks more of a dated romantic novel than a novel concerned with religious identity and transformation. The production of Gardam's earlier book covers has been disappointing in that it has most often belied the quality of the writing within. This incongruity in marketing and design may be partly responsible for the lack of recognition of her work by critics.

Gardam's 'coming of age' novels, *A Long Way From Verona* (published in 1971), *The Summer After the Funeral* (published in 1973) and *Bilgewater* (published in 1977), carry some of the insistent voice of the child Augustine heard in the garden. The protagonist Jessica Vye in *A Long Way From Verona* has an 'experience [that] changed me utterly, like Heaven, "in the twinkling of an eye"(Gardam, 1982b, p.14). That the experience is more overtly vocational than religious does not prevent it from also being theological. This time the text concerned is from a famous writer to the young girl, Jessica. It is a letter, a statement following receipt of her writing and simply says, in block capitals for emphasis, 'JESSICA VYE YOU ARE A WRITER/BEYOND ALL POSSIBLE DOUBT!' (Gardam, 1982b, p.14). This vocative voice appeared in Gardam's own life when as a student she sent the writer L.A.G. Strong 'a (very) short story called *The Woman Who Lost a Thought*. I have it still. He wrote back a fortnight later, in

bright blue ink, the words “Jane, you are a writer beyond all possible doubt”” (Gardam, 2015b).

The vocative form, in whichever age it is used, is commanding in its specificity and echoes other uncompromising stories of conversion, not least George Fox the founder of Quakers who heard the voice that said ‘there is one even Christ Jesus who can speak to thy condition’ (Fox, 1952, p.11). Quakers, whose ministry springs from God, were in the seventeenth century very often considered blasphemous or mad and imprisoned for it. Because of this experience they adopted social treatment of madness as a concern for mental health that continues today. Thus for instance:

The Retreat York was opened in 1797 by William Tuke. Some years earlier, a Leeds Quaker, Hannah Mills, had died in the squalid and inhumane conditions that then prevailed in the York Asylum, and appalled at this Tuke and his family vowed that never again should any Quaker be forced to endure such treatment (The Retreat York, 2016).

Quakers are not the only religious group who are so certain of that voice and the compelling impetus that arises from it that that they might seem to teeter on the border of madness. These and others are a subject for Gardam. It is no coincidence that the first section of three in *Verona* is named after Jessica’s next encounter with ‘The Maniac’ (Gardam, 1982b, p.9) - a man she comes across alone in the park who is outspoken, frightening and very probably mad. Jessica says, ‘a look came into his eyes that I had absolutely never seen before, or not in faces looking at me. It was a liking-sort of look but a queer liking-look. It was sort of excited, as if he had found something. I suddenly felt very cold and we were in the shadows’ (Gardam, 1982b, p.54). There is a weighing-up

here in the adolescent mind about which examples of the vocative are Quakerly plain speaking, sexually predatory or mad. In a sense Gardam's 'coming of age novels' are describing the constant process of religious discernment that life requires of us. It is no surprise then that her teenage books have sometimes been re-classified as 'adult fiction'.

Gardam's rhetoric has the potential to be formative to all our born or as yet unborn theologies. There is a native ecumenism in her writing that is specific yet accessible. It identifies the 'still small voice'⁴ as not belonging to any one church. Perhaps we see in her fiction Gardam the Quaker who has become practised in hearing and possibly even delivering and writing text out of liturgical context, as happens in ministry during Quaker meeting for worship.

Augustine heard and obeyed the child's voice to 'pick up the book and read' and he also recorded the religious event in *Confessions*. To launch into that space as writer or reader is an act of faith. Going into this literary theological space of the response requires not only Coleridge's literary 'willing suspension of disbelief' concerning both acts of reading and writing, but also Newman's theological 'assent of faith'. Newman's text, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (Newman & Ker 1985), in this context becomes a synchronous pun. For a writer concerned with grammar, as Gardam is, writing, picking up not merely the Bible but also the pen is indeed an 'assent of faith' within both disciplines of literature and theology. Newman describes this

⁴ 'And after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice' (1 Kings.19: 12).

instinctive faith as ‘illative’: it is not built in the same way as the earlier Aristotle’s logical progression of pity and fear that leads by narrative logic to catharsis. That there is a God is a given. The illative sense also builds on itself, rather in the way a repeated and contemplative reading of a gospel does in *lectio divina*. The text holds the same root in that it is divinely inspired, but it shows the reader different leadings according to her circumstance. At one reading God speaks to her of something specific; at another God speaks in quite a different way ‘according to our condition’, as Quakers might say.

The reader’s space created by Gardam thus holds within it all possible human responses, including the religious. It is also a space into which readers of all faiths and none are welcome. It is hospitable in the best monastic tradition of the Word, described fully in the *Rule* in the chapter entitled ‘The Reception of Guests’ (*Rule*, p.123). To ‘receive [the guest] just as we would receive Christ himself’ (*Rule*, p.123) is potentially transformative for both host and guest. The process of integrating the Word and words is a circular and hermeneutical one of constant revisiting and revision.

Welcoming the reader as guest works best when both writer and reader practise that other Benedictine quality described in the *Rule* - humility. Humility, as Casey points out (Casey, 2001) is not the same as a humble rolling over, but an approach to text in Truth: knowing what is true about ourselves and our faith and, in holding these two facts together, faithful in the constant re-visioning of our manner, acknowledging the possibility that we the readers can as Quakers offer the tentative advice, ‘think it possible you may be mistaken’

(QFP.1:02). Much like the monastic traditional reading aloud to self of holy text, *lectio divina*, Gardam's own writing carries with it the possibility of speaking differently to the reader's condition each time the reader lifts up the book.

Conversatio Morum: the ecumenical life space

Conversatio morum is the name given to one of three vows taken by Benedictine monks and nuns. The Benedictine Cuthbert Butler describes this promise in the gerundive: it is not just a promise to live one's life in the manner of the Benedictine Community, but also the gerundive case implies, to keep returning to the gospels as an example of how to do so. A circular and constant return from life to text and back to life is implied specifically in the way Benedict chose to ascribe this vow (Butler, 1919). Between private reading of the Bible (*lectio divina*) and community reading of the seven daily offices the Benedictine inhabits a composite and practical space: the scriptorium, field, kitchen, infirmary, boiler or guest rooms. As the Benedictine moves between her private and communal readings of the Bible, an inevitable, mutual informing of reading and activity occur. This is not merely a metatextuality for it occurs not just in the comparison between texts, but also in the physical and chronological space between offices and is held in the narrative of the Benedictine. It happens also between the historic and future horizons of each day, with its boundaries in prime and compline. The Great Silence after compline itself becomes fully reflective of this daily round, holding in its depths the implications of the previous day and in the following one that is poised opposite. Text is thus informed by experience and experience by text, as night informs day, acquiring layers of significance and meaning in a classic hermeneutic circle.

The two spaces provided in the theological hermeneutic of *conversatio morum* and the literary hermeneutic of reader response theory have long been inhabited by readers, and yet the possibility of those two phenomena occupying the same space has not been identified. Michael Casey, in his description of a monk's life and development within the hermeneutic of the Benedictine community has hinted at this (Casey, 2012). I would argue that it is one of Gardam's unique qualities as a writer that she weaves biblical text into fiction such that she renews fiction. Indeed, it might not be too much to claim that she is initiating a new canon: for the novel creates a shared space in which the community of readers is invited to inhabit ecumenically with other Christians of different faiths.

It is interesting that such ecumenism sits well in Gardam's writing. Initially it might be hard to see much compatibility between the Anglo-Catholic and Quaker faiths with whom she worships. Historically, however, as well as in matters of moral philosophy and theological values, there are many points of contact. Thus in his paper, *Love and Human Relationships: Readings from Jeremy Taylor* (2015), David Jasper explains that the seventeenth-century Anglican Divine's theology was based on tolerance: Taylor was 'best known for his works on *Holy Living* and *Holy Dying* [1650,1651], both books lucid expressions of Anglican spirituality and ethics, stressing temperance, moderations, and above all tolerance in all things' (Jasper, 2015). Here are found deep theological connections with the testimonies to tolerance and equality of the Quaker movement, itself formed in 1652 within a year of Taylor's publications - though of course both movements, historically, rejected such

connections. Over time this began to change. The nineteenth century Oxford Movement, of which Newman was a key figure, and the resulting Anglo-Catholic church revived these earlier ideals. Gardam worships with both the Quaker and Anglo-Catholic religious communities and finds expression for their testimony to tolerance in her fiction.

It might help to return to Gardam's latest novel, *Last Friends* to illustrate the point of her adroit occupation of both artistic and religious space. In the final chapter, which features a Devonshire Anglican church, the final scene (for it has become like a mystery play) is brought together in an Easter procession of unlikely characters, rather like the more contemporary Stanley Spencer's painting *The Resurrection, Cookham* (Spencer, 1924). At once we have a sense of both past and future horizons held within the contemporary church. One of its processors is the elderly Anglican Dulcie. Dulcie's generalised anxiety appears threaded to life only by a combination of duty towards and belief in regular morning prayers and a belief, too, in the intrinsic worth of that which Gardam describes as 'the wholly unlikeable character of Fiscal-Smith', (who has spent the novel reminding Dulcie that he is Roman Catholic). In the end, as Gardam says, one comes to love the unlikeable characters like Fiscal-Smith, a phenomenon not unknown to the life of church congregations, Quaker meetings and Benedictine communities of which Gardam writes. It appears then that not only the reader in the act of reading about Fiscal-Smith, but also the author in the act of writing about him can be transformed theologically through the story. Furthermore, both the reader and the writer enter an ecumenical Christian community of equals, a readership, unbound by space and time. They are in 'one timeless moment in Eucharistic worship' (Jasper, 2012, p.4) in which they 'run

together to one place' (Jasper, 2012, p.5) As in *Last Friends* 'Time had stopped' (Gardam, 2013b p.200) and we the readers experience an almost heavenly time with 'Doors wide open' (Gardam, 2013b p.205) as they make 'their way towards the Resurrection' (Gardam, 2013b. p.205). That Gardam, who is in her ninth decade, had already said this was her last novel, makes the scene not only poignant for the reader, but also the author herself, an equal and present processor in the Easter scene. How can we but help ourselves then, when in both the Aristotelian and Christian aesthetics, we experience the pity and fear, and the inevitable catharsis of this particular Christian story?

Literature Review

Published Critical Commentary

The purpose of this literature review is to discuss the prior critical literature on the subject of Gardam as a religious writer, which is the focus of this thesis. My date span therefore begins in 1971 with the publication of Gardam's first novel, *A Long Way From Verona* (published in 1971) and concludes, for the purposes of this thesis, with reviews of her latest collection of short stories, *The Stories* (published in 2014), in December 2015.⁵

A search of the Bibliography of British Literary Bibliographies resulted in two relevant bibliographies. I consulted the MLA International Bibliography 1926-present, and Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature 1920-present. I also used Google Scholar as a search engine, and Google more generally. From these searches it would appear that there is a single brief

⁵ For a complete list of Jane Gardam's published books see Appendix B.

biography online. There are no biographical books on Gardam, and no critical books written on Gardam's *oeuvre*.

Table 1 in Appendix 1 sets out the collected results of the literature search on published commentary in all sources other than biographies and monographs.⁶ As this table shows, there were 1671 results for the general search of articles, using the term 'Jane Gardam' all of which were consulted for the purposes of this literature review. These included 989 newspaper articles, 439 book reviews, 286 magazine articles, 64 journals and 5 trade publications. They include articles by other authors that mention Gardam as well as articles by Gardam. The more detailed cross-referenced searches (rows 2–8 in the table) were of more interest, but even here it is striking that the references sourced to 'Christian', 'Anglo-Catholic', 'Quaker' and 'Benedictine' refer briefly to Gardam's biographical details or are brief references to her characters, not extensive comment on her work. There is very little analysis of the influence religion has had on her writing, for example on religious language, tone or affect in her stories.

Most of the serious critical comment consists of literary reviews in *The Guardian*, *The Independent* and *The Telegraph* as well as *The Spectator*, for which Gardam has written regular reviews since the early 1970's. Lucasta Miller, the literary reviewer and metabiographer, has provided one of the most informative newspaper articles for this thesis (Miller, 2005). Her description of Gardam's life and literary influences, as I noted at the start of this chapter, has

⁶ Note that the term 'magazine' refers to a general publication such as *Country Life* while 'journal' refers to an academic publication.

been an invaluable source. Other critics include Danuta Kean, Editor at Large of *The Author*, who, amongst other information, has written a pivotal piece on Gardam's connection between the forms of short story and poetry in a key article (Kean, 2005). The literary reviewer Elizabeth Lowry has written an informative article in *The Times Literary Supplement* on *Last Friends* (Lowry, 2013).

As this overview of the published literature on Gardam as a religious writer demonstrates, then, there is almost no serious consideration of her, as a religious writer, and certainly not extended critique of the place of religion in her work. The few biographical interviews with Gardam herself, for example Miller (2005), as we have seen in this chapter's previous section, refer to Gardam's Anglo-Catholic mother and Gardam's on-going association with the Anglo-Catholic church as well as current attendance at her local Quaker meeting.

Online commentary

There would appear to be no reference to Gardam in online journals, long-form journalism and other genres specific to web-based academic writing. The results deriving from blogs were highly variable, not least because there are no mature search engines that search blog postings. Thus a search for "Jane Gardam" in the search engine 'searchblogspot.com' found 5,890 results, while the more general Twingly (<http://twingly.com>) paradoxically gave a more targeted list of 110 postings. Searches were made more specific by adding qualifiers to the main search term, "Jane Gardam". This gave the results listed in Table 2 in Appendix 1.

Most of the blog postings revealed only the most superficial connections between Jane Gardam and the relevant research qualifier. Those that did express opinions that were not sufficiently analytical to be considered here. For example, the search for “Jane Gardam”, “Anglo-Catholic” revealed a posting on Richard Fossey’s blog responding to Gardam’s article ‘Give Us a Bishop in High Heels’ and was headed, ‘Would we be better Catholics if the bishops wore high heels? St. Margaret Clitherow would probably have said no’ (Fossey, 2014).

Unpublished Critical Commentary

This consists largely of masters and doctoral theses. The following databases were searched: Australian theses (via Trove), DART Europe E-Theses Portal, Dissertations and Theses A and I (Proquest), Dissertations and Theses: UK and Ireland (Proquest), EThoS, Glasgow Theses Service and Theses Canada Portal, and Theses.fr. In addition I used search engines such as Google Scholar in order to search more widely across the Internet. These searches revealed a total of seventeen Masters and PhD theses that refer to Gardam. Of these, five name Gardam as their main subject of research and three reference Gardam in consideration along with other authors. These eight are listed Table 3 in Appendix 1, alphabetically by author. In all but one of these eight theses there is little commentary on Gardam and religious influences or attributes.

The exception is Caroline Guerin’s thesis, which is an insightful analysis of religion and spirituality in contemporary British women’s fiction (Guerin, 1995). Guerin writes in part a feminist critique of this aspect of Gardam’s work. Thus in the section ‘An uneasy reconciliation: Jane Gardam’s *God on the Rocks* and

Crusoe's Daughter' (Guerin, 1995, pp. 11-21), Guerin suggests that in *Crusoe's Daughter* Gardam 'attempts to establish an uneasy reconciliation between women and the Church' (Guerin, 1995. p.11) resulting in a novel that 'presents the lot of woman in Christian culture as extremely problematic' (Guerin, 1995. p.18). While Guerin writes sensitively about *Crusoe's Daughter*, the argument Guerin makes, that 'if Polly is to reject the Christian Church and the image of woman presented by it, she must replace God (and the love offered by God) with some human substitute' (Guerin, 1995.p.18), is in my view a misreading of Gardam's narrative and the function of religious identity within it. In chapter 7 of my thesis, 'Gardam: A Religious Coming of Age Novelist', I show that the introjection of the Christ figure as symbolic of psychological resurrection is not the same as the acceptance of the resurrection on a religious level, a belief Polly clearly holds. Furthermore, the narrative does not end with a binary choice. The novel, as I argue is a religious coming of age novel that takes the present participle very seriously. Polly's development is ongoing and dynamic like the conversation that ends the book.

The remaining seven theses that comment on Gardam and religion contain interpretive errors. For example item seven, Sleisova (2007), agrees with my thesis that the protagonist of *Crusoe's Daughter* Polly Flint, takes her elderly aunt's obsessive attitude to religion as a 'warning'. However, Sleisova, as with most critics, neglects to describe the later integration of Polly into the interpretive community of church, social and family life, while all the while continuing to maintain her independence.

More seriously for the argument of this thesis, a number of commentators misinterpret the religious complexities of Gardam's narratives. Thus, Franková (2001) says that 'not even between the lines does her [Gardam's] own religion become discernible' (Franková, 2001, p.62). As I shall prove in the analysis of the three main religious influences on her writing, this is a highly reductive appraisal of Gardam as a religious writer. Gardam's religious influences are discernible both in the language of the lines and between them and in the poetic resonances of biblical and liturgical language.

Franková's misinterpretation extends to her understanding of Gardam's characters and her personal faith. She states that 'For the most part her [Gardam's] characters are Church of England and it therefore comes as a surprise that Gardam herself is a Catholic' (Franková, 2001, p.62). This conclusion is based on Gardam's alleged remark that, just before writing *The Queen of Tambourine* (1992a), 'My hitherto mostly dependable Catholic faith went numb.' As we have seen in the brief biography of Gardam, her faith and its representation in her novels is a complex matter. 'Catholic' for Gardam is a generic religious term that includes 'Anglo-Catholic', a church that considers itself Catholic in much of its culture and theology. To miss this point is to miss much of the importance of the Anglo-Catholic mass and liturgy that permeates Gardam's short stories

Misinterpretation of religious context and content leads to misinterpretation of style and authorial intent. At one point Franková states 'There is only one point that comes across clearly and that is that she [Gardam] is critical of excess, be it of rigid tradition or fashionable trendiness' (Franková,

2001, p.62). It is hard to recognise Gardam in this description. When, in her introduction to *The Stories* (2014a), Gardam describes the origins of her writer's imagination, she reminds the reader of her mother's concerned comment of the young Gardam that 'Jane has always had her *ecstatic* side and ecstasy is all very well, but -' (Gardam, 2014c, p.14). Gardam's narratives display a relish of these excesses of imagination breaking through as a welcome and ironic contrast to respectable English life. For instance Gardam often uses plain bold language in the mouths of her adolescent female protagonists (Athene in *The Summer After the Funeral* and Jessica in *A Long Way From Verona*). If one omits the possibility of excess, one also omits the infinite possibilities of love hoped for in religious life. The last of these is the Christian love amongst equals, to which Gardam alludes in an interview for the New Yorker Magazine. She says 'If I've got one thing that I really believe about fiction and life, it's that there are no minor characters' (Collins, 2014).

This pastiching of Gardam's religion also occurs in a misreading from one of only two shorter theses on her writing. 'Sometimes it may be religious extremism that Gardam is critical of in her novels... In *Faith Fox* Jack's obsession with God seems to blind him from the truth as he does not notice his wife's unfaithfulness.' (Sleisova, 2007) The point is that Jack *does* notice, he simply withholds action, which is different, either through love of his wife and brother, or through his faith that a greater love will work its way through.

Since publication of her latest novels, an adult trilogy, there have been more literary reviews in the 'quality newspapers', but still no exclusive reviews in either children's or adult literary or theological journals. Of those reviews

that do exist, Lucasta Miller's interview in *The Guardian* exceeds the others in perceptivity and in making plain the roots of Gardam's literary and religious landscape.

Not all critics have misunderstood Gardam's religious context and content. While I would contend Guerin's comment that the novels of 'Jane Gardam, along with 'Edna O'Brien's and Margaret Drabble's novels' are 'examples of the mainstream context' (Guerin, 1995, p.1), I agree with her general view that 'Gardam attempts to find a way in which women can redefine themselves whilst remaining part of the church' (Guerin, 1995, p.10).

This correspondence from Gardam to me, following the Coatham Church celebration and fundraiser day where we met, illustrates Guerin's last point that Gardam remains within religious tradition as well as redefining herself:

...yes, wasn't the Coatham statement wonderful? It was hugely important to me and I was somewhat nervous. Then it was all still there. My brother and I cruised along the promenade and I was humbled, for I thought the despised purple pier was wonderful! Then we slowly drove back to Westerdale in most glorious light. I reached Sandwich a few hours ago, but I am still in the north in spirit. I got to America next week - but we must meet again. Redcar loved you! Jane. (Gardam, 2013c)

However, there is almost no prior reliable and substantial commentary that analyses Gardam as a 'religious writer' or explores Gardam's religious practice and the way this may or may not influence her writing. In the following chapters I hope to explore and illuminate this aspect of Gardam's achievement as a writer.

Part 2

Chapter 2. Reader Response Theory and the Hermeneutic of Religious Readership

‘Last Sunday I took up my Bible in a gloomy state of mind: I began to read - a feeling stole over me such as I have not known for many long years - a sweet, placid sensation, like those, I remember, which used to visit me when I was a little child.’
(Gaskell, 1997, p.115, Brontë *log.*)

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to examine how literary critical theory might contribute to an explanation of the way in which literature is received by both the individual reader and also by readership communities. We shall consider, in some detail, how reader response theories can assist us to understand how Gardam’s stories might be considered the product of a religious writer, a writer who offers the reader or her community the possibility of receiving a religious as well as an artistic experience.

Stanley Fish, Reader Response and the Individual Reader

It may seem almost perverse to co-opt the critical work of Stanley Fish rather than one of the more mainstream reader response theorists such as Iser, Ingarden and the like. However, there are a number of good reasons why we should turn to Fish by preference. First, Gardam is deeply interested in religious texts as evidenced in this thesis. In much of Fish’s early critical work on Milton [whose sometime reader and scribe was the Quaker Thomas Ellwood] and in his writing on seventeenth century prose and poetry we can see an intense interest in the critical context of religious texts. Indeed, of the array of possible reader response critics, Fish is the only one who is interested in the same religious text

and themes that Gardam is interested in. For this reason I am interested in other such critics - Frank Kermode, with his remarkable account of Mark's Gospel, is another example.

Second, Fish is interested not just in an individual reader's response to text, but the interpretive community's response to text as well. This stems largely from his historical work as above; and, as I shall show, Gardam too is interested in how communities of religious interest and practice can be narrativised in novels and short stories. Finally, Fish's ideas on interpretive community are interesting when considering the work and development of a religious writer, because 17th century religious communities are completely different in their response to text compared to twenty-first century writers and readers. This point is important, because in her novels, such as *The Flight of the Maidens*, Gardam constructs and explores different forms of religious interpretive communities. It is also important because, as readers of Gardam, we form an interpretive community, and become part of the tradition of religious reading that Fish explores only briefly, but which is developed much more by the ancient heuristic of *lectio divina*, and its recent revival.

We can begin then with an observation of the literary critic Stanley Fish who became particularly interested in the reader's interpretive process when teaching Milton's *Paradise Lost* to students in the 1970's. Fish noticed that when he encouraged students to describe what the text did to them (rather than analysing what the text should say to them), they wrote and spoke as 'informed readers'. In 'Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics', Fish described his attempt 'to advance the claim that all poems (and novels and plays) were, in

some sense, about ...the experience of the reader [who] was the proper subject of analysis' (Fish, 1980, p.21). Students became aware, not only of their own reaction, but how that affected their interpretation of the text. It was as if, in situating the text and responding to it from within their own frame of reference, students were then able to reflect on what text did to them as an 'event' rather than what they were *expected* to do. Students were 'oriented away from evaluation and toward description' (Fish, 1980, p.22). Fish observes of this approach that, 'More than any other way of teaching I know, it breaks down the barriers between students and the knowledge they must acquire, first by identifying that knowledge with something that they themselves are already doing, and then by asking them to become self-conscious about what they do in the hope that they can learn to do it better' (Fish, 1980, p.22).

One can begin to appreciate from the emphasis laid on the reader's response, rather than the page itself, that the text begins to recede from the foreground. In fact at one point Fish proposed that there was no text except at the very time it was being read, and even then it existed not on the page, but only in the reader herself. The text came into existence in the reader just as the previous text receded and ceased to exist. It was as if the reader having become available for the 'event' of reading (Fish, 1980, p.48) was entirely responsible for the interpretation that took place within her. Further, no single reading event was the same as another even if it were the same reader of the same text.

Fish asks us to consider the weight or status we give text when he warns that, 'The objectivity of the text is an illusion and moreover, a dangerous illusion, because it is so physically convincing...A line of print or a page is so

obviously there...that it seems to be the sole repository of whatever value and meaning we associate with it' (Fish, 1980, p.43). Thus, in his essay 'Interpreting the Variorum' Fish described 'two "facts" of reading: (1) The same reader will perform differently when reading two "different"...texts: and (2) different readers will perform similarly when reading the "same"...text' (Fish, 1980, p.167). Here Fish goes to the heart of the reader response critical initiative - that the reader's experience is paramount, that it is highly variable through time, and variegated through multiple types of culture, history and many other factors. We see the same in the work of Wolfgang Iser, Hans-Robert Jauss and others.⁷ Much of reader response theory deals with the origin of the reader's experience, the way that experience interacts with text, and the extent to which an individual's response to text is predictably variable, as opposed to highly subjective and unique.

The following close reading of Gardam's short story *Missing the Midnight* (1997a) is an example of the way in which Fish's interpretation of reader response theory, emphasising reader response over the objectivity of text, contributes to a religious reading of Gardam. Fish's theory that there is no text could be said to mimic the religious experience known as *via negativa*, a process by which a person finds where her faith is by experiencing where, and in what, God is absent. The *via negativa* is defined by the OED as 'the approach to God in which his nature is held so to transcend man's understanding that no positive

⁷ These and many other critics who might be included under the general term of reader-response critics all have different views on what constitutes text and the act of reading. What unites them is their attention to what Roman Ingarden called the art of *realizing* the text whereby, as Iser put it, the 'convergence of text and reader brings the literary work into existence.' [Iser, *The Implied Reader*, pp.274-5]

statements can be made about it; the way to union with God in which the soul leaves behind the perceptions of the senses and the reasoning of the intellect.’

Fish proposes that what exists in the reader is an interpretation of text: a word disappears when it is read and just as the next appears on the page. As she reads a passage the reader finds that Biblical Word by non-Biblical word texts accumulate layers of meaning within her. In this way the reader’s anticipation gathers along with her remembered impressions: memory and anticipation thus work together to create meaning. However, sentences can also unexpectedly ‘close’ down or ‘confound the reader’s expectations.’ The effect of disappointing the reader’s anticipation, in not providing expected the text ahead, is to stop the reader’s ‘flow’. The reader meets the text’s absence of continuity. Something she had expected to take place is missing. It makes her question her sequencing of events. Further it turns the reader’s attention back to the text that has just disappeared. The text the reader may well have previously skimmed is emphasised in the following absence of a connecting text. When the reader is made to stop and reflect in this way through cognitive dissonance, says Fish, ‘ “events” one does not notice in normal time, are brought before our analytical attention’ (Fish, 1980, p.28). Gardam comments on this as a literary device, saying that James Joyce’s *The Dubliners* showed her how the short story can ‘have the power to burn up the chaff, to harden the steel without comment or embellishment’ (Kent, 2014). Such a device works almost like a literary scorched earth policy and holds our attention very much in the present.

In Gardam’s story *Missing the Midnight* we find just such a passage. As Esther sits in the train compartment returning home from university, mournful

at the break-up of her engagement, her interior monologue develops into a dirge-like speech. Esther describes sitting in the train compartment, having been joined by three people ‘who looked as if they were there by right.’ As she does, the end of one sentence is repeated at the beginning of the following and so on:

I kept my face turned away from them, but I could see them reflected in the window against the cold, black night. I had my hand up against my face. I had my hand up against my face because I was weeping. The tears welled and welled. (Gardam, 1998b, p.4)

The doubling back not only emphasises the circular, ruminative mood, but also slows down our reading in the way Fish describes. The effect of doubling back is that the reader is continually and paradoxically both borne along by the rhythm and flow of the words and simultaneously thrown back into the already consumed text, finding the space as empty as Esther the rejected lover might. Here the flow, or rather its interruption, becomes more important than the meaning of the actual words. In terms of a religious reading, the redoubling provides the reader no spiritual direction at all. It is as if, in the manner of the *via negativa*, all the reader knows is that the way forward through the text and the story’s narrative, is not that way.

This rhetorical device in a religious context is not new. *Anadiplosis*, (defined by the OED as ‘reduplication; the beginning of a sentence, line, or clause with the concluding, or any prominent, word of the one preceding’), was also used by Paul in his epistle to the Romans: ‘We glory in tribulations also, knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope, and hope maketh man not ashamed’ (Rom. 5:3). Given this

religious context it is possible that two effects occur. First, and least likely, is that the reader retains echoes of Paul's epistle on 'tribulations' in her memory from previous readings, thus bringing associations that emphasise Esther's own 'tribulation' and that perhaps hint at the religious event (incarnation) that is the story's denouement. The second is that the reader's emptying herself of text, especially where it has biblical connotations, is akin to the process of *kenosis*. Certainly this would seem likely in Esther's case. The OED defines *kenosis* in Christian theology as, 'the renunciation of the divine nature, at least in part, by Christ at the Incarnation'. *Kenosis* accurately describes how Esther is emptying herself of her misery and perhaps anything to do with her divine nature, so hopeless does she feel. Thus the reader can respond to this story simply with sympathy for Esther's desolation or she might also consider the consolation, a religious element hinted at in Esther's Pauline form of expression, and indeed uncovered in the final scene. The story, however, is not yet finished.

If reader response criticism has at its heart the primacy of the reader's experience, it is in the exploration of how that experience is created and mediated that the theory produces powerful insight. Esther is like many of Gardam's heroines, particularly the daughters: plain and straightforward in her expression, at times almost Quakerly in her emphasis on the experiential. We learn of her dislike of her mother's liturgical routine. Esther will not settle for religion if it is merely the comfort she (mistakenly) thinks it is for her mother. Esther is plain speaking, so it stands to reason that if she has a religious change of heart, the reader can believe it.

Gardam thus sets up a binary expectation for the reader, of plain speaking as truth-telling and liturgy as superficial assent to truth: the trustworthy voice and the untrustworthy voice. The reader makes this decision based on her reading of the voices. It is a conscious choice. Fish also considers the choice between the reader making a conscious attempt at being an experientially - informed reader or working within the confines of suppressing that experience. Fish concludes 'I would rather have an acknowledged and controlled subjectivity than an objectivity which is finally an illusion' (Fish, 1980, p.49).

Gardam is acute on religious observance and uses Esther's still evident disenchantment as comic opportunity to introduce us to her mother's obsession with ritual attendance:

All she had seemed to be thinking about the previous night when I rang her was that if I was catching this late train I would miss the Midnight. 'But that means you'll be missing the Midnight,' she said. I'd have thought the least you could do is come with me to the Midnight.' (Gardam, 1998b, p.4)

However, Esther cannot seem to escape religious observance either in her internal monologue or her external circumstances. In the compartment is a young man, his fiancée with 'red lips' and his father, an Anglican priest. The young man and his wife to be are 'enchanted with each other' (Gardam, 1998b, p.7). Esther observes the priest who, unsolicited and with helpful demonstration, explains the use of the pyx and oil in the last rites of the Anglo-Catholic church and, as they extend the discussion, the couple's forthcoming marriage. This is not comforting to hear for a woman who has just been rejected

by her fiancé. Religion seems even further from Esther's experience than it ever has been.

In contrast to this beaming couple, she fecund with her red coat and lipstick, Esther has her own ordinary, but not insubstantial family difficulties:

My father drank. He drank in the greenhouse at the end of our long narrow garden in Watford. The greenhouse was packed ... Under its benches, all the year round, stood several pairs of wellingtons, and in every wellington stood a bottle. The bottles were never mentioned. (Gardam, 1998b, p.5)

Esther continues to use up text as the train consumes the track, just as Fish describes text being used up by the reader's movement through reading:

we comprehend not in terms of the deep structure alone, but in terms of a *relationship* between the unfolding, in time, of the surface structure and a continual checking of it against our projection (always in terms of the surface structure) of what the deep structure will reveal itself to be. (Fish, 1980, p.48)

Esther mourns the fact that her lover is lost to her and that her family are incomprehensible. Yet all the while both the train and textual track that Esther and the reader move through are reversing the perceived facts. Paradoxically it is Esther's family who are in the end comprehensible in love and the sometime lover incomprehensible without it.

It is Christmas Eve however and, during the course of the train journey, the reader is offered the opportunity to consider the promise of better possibilities than Esther's dirge of desertion: the pregnancy of Our Lady for instance, which the priest refers to, might also promise the imminent birth of a

comfort more enduring in love than the one Esther has lost (with the arrival of the Christ child).

In the end if it is not Christ, His mercy at least, arrives in the form of the unexpectedly welcome sight of Esther's impossible family waiting on the station platform to greet her. Gardam gives no expression of Esther's *metanoia* other than to have her end, after long thought about how to get home with all her luggage, with the words 'I didn't need a taxi, though, or a train, or anything else. Both my parents and my brother were gathered at the platform gate' (Gardam, 1998b, p.13). The early binary that Esther had originally believed (family incomprehensible, ex lover a truth lost) is reversed. Typically of Gardam, it seems truth is in fact love where-ever or whomsoever it is: a Christian message about reception that both Esther's mother and Esther herself have come to experience together at the reunion of the family on the station platform.

Fish describes Plato's *Phaedrus* in which each question Socrates asks dismantles an assumption until only the truth remains. The effect of reading the text for Gardam's reader has been similar to Fish's description of reading *Phaedrus*: 'to use it up; for the value of any point in it is that it gets *you* ...to the next point, which is not so much a point (in logical-demonstrative terms) as a level of insight' (Fish, 1980, p.40). Fish does not say 'religious insight', but it seems clear in *Missing the Midnight* that this might well be the case for both Esther and her readers that, in Fish's terms, is less of a self-satisfying text and more of a self-consuming text.

The effect of this ‘using up’ of text as it goes along is that the reader is very close to Esther’s present state. The immediacy of the present moment, this tracking, along with the aforementioned Pauline echoes, means that the reader is so closely bound up with Esther’s condition that she understands something religiously extraordinary *has* occurred. This happens, despite the fact that nothing has outwardly changed, except that people have been entering or leaving the carriage. Esther’s process has been almost entirely internal, any external changes barely hinted at in the priest’s demonstration of the viaticum and the waving of his hand in an ambiguous token of either farewell or blessing.

‘Coming to the point fulfills a need that most literature deliberately frustrates’ Fish says. He continues, saying that coming to a point at all, ‘should be resisted’ (Fish, 1980, p.52). Gardam resists making the religious point; she remains out of the way as text and track of the story use themselves up, and allows both Esther and the reader (by dint of identity with Esther) the grace of being met. There is no competitive rush to the turnstile by Esther or Gardam. Such authorial handling requires literary skill, of course, but also authorial humility. The presence of something Other is allowed in alongside the reader’s experiencing. This quality of implicitly presenced silence is one rarely experienced unless at the silence of the (Anglo-Catholic) Eucharist, the Benedictine nightly ‘Great Silence’ or during a gathered Quaker meeting for worship.

For the author, humility requires a skill in getting out of God’s way. Fish refers to this when he quotes Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress*: ‘Christian asks a

question and receives an answer: *Chr.* Is this the way to the Celestial City? *Shep.* You are just in your way.' Fish says of the pun in the word 'just' that:

The inescapability of the pun reflects backward the question and the world view it supports; and it gestures toward another world view in which spatial configurations have moral inner meanings, and being in the way is independent of the way you happen to be in. That is, if Christian is to be truly in the way, the way must first be in him, and then he will be in it, no matter where - in what merely physical way - he is.' (Fish, 1980, p.41)

Though its effects may be noticed first externally, what has occurred for Esther is both internal and spiritual. It is 'metanoia' that the OED defines as 'the act or process of changing one's mind; *spec.* penitence, repentance; reorientation of one's way of life, spiritual conversion.'

The effect of this, summarises Fish, is three-fold: the story 'refuses to answer or even ask the question, what is the work about'; 'it yields an analysis not of formal features but of the developing responses of the reader in relation to the words as they succeed one another in time'; the 'description of the structure of the response...may have an oblique or even (as in the case of *The Pilgrim's Progress*) a contrasting relationship to the structure of the work as a thing in itself' (Fish, 1980, p.42).

Esther's mourning has thus diminished and what remains in view is grace. Esther and the reader are now as silent to each other as the empty train carriage. The reader slips through the walls of the compartment, off the page and is left reflecting on the event that has taken place. It is a silence that marks the page ahead, another short story, in a text-less event the reader is still

consuming. The text, as Fish says, does not exist. We are thrown back upon ourselves to reflect.

Fish's description of literature in the reader has served us well here in this brief examination of Gardam's short story *Missing the Midnight*. It seems then that as Fish himself says of text, 'There is more to it, that is, to its experience, than meets the casual eye. What is required then is a method...which in its separation makes observable or at least accessible, what goes on below the level of self-conscious response' (Fish, 1980, p.49). Further, although Fish has not given a comprehensive view of a reader response theory that might help explain Gardam as a religious writer if such a thing were possible, he has made significant contributions to our understanding of what happens to the individual religious interpretive reader.

Fish, Reader Response and the Community of Readers

In all the varieties of reader response theory, reader experience is pre-eminently the focus of the critical method and the source of much of its analytical power. But reader experience is almost never experienced alone. We are social creatures, and social milieu, culture, environment, history and much else affect our reading - our intent, our methods, our memory for textual narrative. A significant proportion of reader response critique, therefore, is often devoted to how such social or community reading is formed, how it affects individual reading. In his essay 'Interpreting the Variorum'⁸ Fish goes beyond the

⁸ OED defines Variorum: '(Of an edition of an author's works) having notes by various editors or commentators. Including variant readings from manuscripts or earlier editions.'

interpretations of the individual reader to consider the life of the interpretive community in which he says there is no fixed text, only strategies (guides or rules) for reading it. He makes the point that whilst individual readers may tend to diverge in their interpretation of text, interpretive communities tend to converge towards agreement. The community, in fact, is essential to individual readings:

Interpretive communities are made up of those who share interpretive strategies not for reading (in the conventional sense), for constituting their properties and assigning their intentions. In other words, these strategies exist prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read rather than, as is usually assumed, the other way round...if a community believes in the existence of only one text, its members will boast a repertoire of strategies for making them. (Fish, 1980, p.171)

Fish describes a community of readers whose individuals have in common the discussion and living out of a shared text: in the religious world Fish gives the example of a religious guide or 'rule' such as the Augustinian Rule monks used. He notes that 'Augustine urges just such a strategy for example in *On Christian Doctrine* where he delivers the "rule of faith" which is of course a rule of interpretation' (Fish, 1980, p.170).

Fish takes this type of community as a good model of the rule of interpretation:

It is dazzlingly simple: everything in the Scriptures, and indeed in the world when it is properly read, points to (bears the meaning of) God's love for us and our answering responsibility to love our fellow creatures for His sake. If only you should come upon something which does not at first seem to bear this meaning, that "does not literally pertain, to virtuous behaviour or to the truth of faith," you are then to take it "to be figurative" (Fish, 1980, p.170)

The only proof he says of membership is, ‘fellowship, the nod of recognition from someone in the same community.’

Fish’s note of sarcasm belies the schisms, revolutions, and on-going discussion caused by the religious communities’ need to develop interpretive strategies that he then goes on to describe (Fish, 1980, p.170). Fish observes the religious community’s strategy’s ‘success and ease of execution are attested to by centuries of Christian exegesis’ (Fish, 1980, p.170). He does not explore the strategy’s role and application further within specific religious interpretive communities, however. Having discovered faith as the shared strategy for religious community Fish fails to pursue its complexities as more than the passing ‘nod’ of ‘fellowship’ to each other. In doing so he misses the fruits of these interpretive communities that are the sign of faith’s existence and the Christian strategy of love for one another.⁹ In the following sections of this chapter we shall briefly explore the texts of two such communities important to Gardam’s writing, the Benedictine and Quaker. We shall then further explore their hermeneutical ground, and the possibility of a new ecumenical religious interpretive community, one that may help heal interpretive dissonance in religious communities, and which at the very least is helpful in interpreting Gardam as a religious writer.

⁹ ‘Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?’ (Matt. 7: 20).

Quaker Religious Interpretive Community

There are obvious differences in each community's historical origins - the Benedictine, a sixth-century foundation, and the Quaker a seventeenth-century foundation. There are differences in community structures, with the Benedictines more organised around locus and *regula*, while the Quaker community is a lay movement embedded within the world's secular activities. However, the most striking difference lies less in origins or structure, but in the content and structure of the Rules by which each community guides its life.

Whereas the *Rule* has remained the same since Benedict wrote it in the sixth century, *Quaker Faith and Practice* (QFP), that includes *Advices and Queries* (A&Q), is revised each generation, sometimes substantially. The result is not only that content changes, but its order also. Thus what was termed *Church Government* is currently merged with the miscellaneous writings of Friends, formerly known as *Christian Faith and Practice*. It is more difficult to discern the integral cohesion of the core of Quaker discipline. Further, the Bible has ceased to be Friends' foundational text. There is, as Fish describes, 'slippage' and resultant 'anxiety' about the community's 'alignment' that has gone beyond friendly discussion (Fish, 1980, p.172). The community of Quakers in the United Kingdom (known as Britain Yearly Meeting) is beginning to fissure. Without recourse to faith in prayer, upon which Quaker discipline and 'gospel order' (Mack, 1994 p.292) is founded, the Quaker movement's hermeneutic is collapsing in upon itself.¹⁰

¹⁰ In this sense the Benedictine interpretive community Rule acts similarly to the Quaker guide whose frontispiece of their *Advices and Queries* quotes a postscript from the epistle from the elders at Balby, 1656: 'Dearly Beloved Friends, these things we do not lay upon you as a rule or

We thus have an example of an interpretive community whose rule is sophisticated, stable and supportive of community living (Benedictine); and an example of a community whose foundation has been so misinterpreted, altered radically and generationally in form, that it can no longer support a stable interpretation for its community's guidance. In the next section we shall show how such a comparison of religious interpretive communities, when viewed through the hermeneutic lens, can contribute to our understanding of Gardam's achievement.

The Benedictine Religious Interpretive Community

An example of a contemporary and long-lived religious interpretive community exists in the Benedictine movement. It has existed continuously since its formation in the sixth century. Its congregational communities have in common, in the way Fish describes, their commitment to, 'strategies' around and discussions about the interpretation of the Benedictine *Rule* and the book on which it was founded, the Bible. Their 'intention' alluded to by Fish, could be said to be one of contemplative prayer. The Prologue advises followers of the *Rule* to, 'make prayer the first step in anything worthwhile that you attempt' (*Rule*, 2004, p.45). Thus if the individual reader lived in a Benedictine community she would understand the motivation for the religious interpretive community's work (the Bible or the Word) and how the community works (according to the guidance of the community's interpretative guide or Rule).

The evidence of the community life is more than in a passing ‘nod’ of ‘fellowship’ of which Fish speaks. Fish says text ‘forces you to be aware of “it” as a changing object...and also to be aware of yourself correspondingly changing’ (Fish, 1980, p.43). In this way the religious interpretive community responds to faith as the individual reader does to ‘kinetic art.’

The effect of faith in community is as with the individual reader - it revolves round a shared text and, with the help of its guide or ‘rule’, into action or witness of the Word around that text. Thus the community’s guide or *Rule* sits, as does the community, in *media res*, answerable ultimately to the gospel and sharing Benedict’s interpretation of it. That *Rule* thus allows, as Benedict himself does, those particular variations demanded by a community’s climatic conditions or the ages and health of the individuals within it. Chapter 37 discusses ‘care for the elderly and the young’:

Human nature itself is drawn to tender concern for those in the two extremes of age and youth, but the authority of the Rule should reinforce this natural instinct. Their frailty should always be given consideration so that they should not be strictly bound to the provisions of the Rule in matters of diet. They should receive loving consideration and be allowed to anticipate the regular hours laid down for food and drink (*Rule*, 2004, p.104).

In the Benedictine religious interpretive community (apart from hearing the Word in individual *lectio divina* and community liturgy) Benedictines also extend the reference of their interpretive community through another form of non-religious literature. Evening meals are most often held in silence. However, during this time members of the community might take it in weekly turns to read a complete book aloud, for instance a work of autobiography, poetry or fiction.

In this regular reading the Benedictines extend their religious interpretive community beyond that described by Fish. Their continuing movement between Word in prayer, and liturgy, words at work, and words of fiction helps keep constant the mutual informing of Word, words, page and practice. The religious readership community thus creates meaning, finds the dual habitation in the *kairos* of the Word and in the *chronos* of the world - and includes the imagination in fiction as one of the interpretive community's constituent building blocks.

At this point it might seem that it is extraordinary that a religious community could remain cohesive and withstand literary input of such a variety. However the answer lies in the interpretive community approach to text. Fish says of interpretive communities that 'the truth will be that each perceives the text (or texts) [in the way that] its interpretive strategies demand and call into being' (Fish, 1980, p.171). He continues, 'the alignments will always be there with... just enough stability for the interpretive battles to go on, and just enough shift and slippage to assure they will never be settled' (Fish, 1980, p.172). Again, Fish's tone might be construed as sarcastic. However, as we have seen in the quotation from the *Rule* above, stability and flexibility are critical. They both arise from commitment made in the Benedictine's vow of stability to her specific Abbatial community, as well as the love she bears its other members. This Benedictine harmonious tension between Fish's 'stability' and 'slippage' has in part enabled the Benedictine movement to maintain continuous religious community for over fifteen hundred years, and it is founded upon its community guide, the *Rule*.

Casey describes the third Benedictine vow of stability. He proposes that it there is a ‘dynamic stability’ of the Word expressed through the community members as commitment to and work within community: its life is rooted, adaptable and responsive. Gardam writes about this slippage of interpretation that Fish refers to above. However her own stability in the community of the Word is placed with a modest surety in the moving (kinetic) book of words. Word is always there if not in letter then in spirit. It is that alignment of Word and word that helps her make us aware of the tension between what Fish calls, ‘an impossible ideal and the fear which leads so many to maintain it’ (Fish, 1980, p.172). It makes Gardam’s interpretive community a place of dynamic stability.

It is no surprise then that Benedictine dynamic stability, born of a proven interpretive strategy, the *Rule*, and rooted in the Word, has had its influence on Gardam. We find evidence of the Benedictines not only in her own life - the nuns of Whitby Abbey in her native North East coast (Gardam, 2014b), but also the Benedictines, inspiration for a new ecumenical community in *Faith Fox*, war-time refuge for an evacuee in *The Summer After the Funeral* or a blight of an inheritance and possible holy calling for Rupert in *The Flight of the Maidens*. It is Gardam’s genius to take Fish’s notion of the possibilities of interpreting the religious community’s ‘variorum’ further. In Gardam’s fiction she returns both the reader and perhaps Fish’s theory to that which Fish himself has acknowledged is the most stable of interpretive communities: the “rule of faith” (Fish, 1980, p.170).

What excites me is the quite unexpected similarities between the RCS (Anglo-Catholics - surely the most enlightened idea for five

centuries) and the Methodists. Maybe this is why the Christian church in England is so alive to this day. Though sometimes - as my other used to say - it would be so much easier to be a Roman Catholic. We all hanker - even I among them. (Gardam, 2013c)

Hermeneutics and Landscape

Gardam grew up, as we have seen, on the North East Coast of England and attended Saltburn School for Girls. She regularly walked miles across the fields and along the coast. The Saltburn Cliff Lift was built in 1884. It is a funicular railway running between beach and cliff top and would have been familiar to Gardam as a child. It is still in use today and works by the same principle - the weight of the carriage going down pulls the carriage going up. For the passenger it affords a good sight on the ground of Saltburn Sands and atop the cliff of an horizon that reaches across the North Sea to Denmark from whence vast cargo ships seem as if they could be picked from the sea like small toys. How insignificant are we? As with *lectio divina*, the slow pace of the funicular is essential to the experience. In this carriage we cannot zoom in and out as if with the eye of God or Google Maps. Instead, together within our small and precarious community's carriage, we observe the nearby details of the cliff-side's sand, stone, grass and of its changing locus, from which we gauge our position in relation to the shifting horizon, this whole earth, until we are tipped like Esther onto the shared platform above.¹¹

The hermeneutic of foreground and horizon was part of Gardam's actual as well as metaphorical landscape. Her ability to describe the local ecumenical detail and imply its universality as an application for a wider religious model

¹¹ *Missing the Midnight*

links inextricably with this landscape hermeneutic; and it is to the theory of the hermeneutic circle and its application to Gardam's religious writing that we are now ourselves turning.

Foreground and Horizon

David Jasper sums up the hermeneutic circle thus: 'We begin with the big idea, read the text clearly and in detail in the light of this, and then use the text to substantiate the initial idea' (Jasper, 2004, p.21). Heidegger described how the text within this circle can only be understood if the reader understands and thereby 'situates' themselves in the text. In the on-going circular movement between text and idea the reader's understanding grows phenomenologically. Thus the text is 'laying bare' the text's meaning. 'Truth' is a process of 'unconcealment' (Malpas, 2014).

Gadamer pointed out that such an uncovering of truth revealed our 'prejudices'. Such prejudices might not be 'wrong' or 'bad' and may even be rooted in tradition. Nevertheless it is helpful to be aware of our prejudices, so that we can test them against that which we are continually uncovering as 'truth'. This is how, for instance, a novel's character develops self-awareness and is changed by circumstances manifested by a change or crisis through emotional catharsis or spiritual *metanoia*.

When the reader, for example, a Quaker, stands at the foreground of her text she may see the horizon of what she believes is truth. In reading a novel or a short story such as *Missing the Midnight*, that same Quaker reader might also read how the Anglo-Catholic protagonist's horizons, though different, merge

with hers in a similar religious experience of grace, for example others unexpectedly 'gathered' to meet you after a long journey - see Gardam (1998b, p.13). Such 'fused horizons' of experience or belief provide a common language, a source of dialogue between people of different expressions of the Christian faith, one the reader and the other a novel's character.

Where horizons alter, tilt, expand or contract, it is interesting for the reader to wonder how they differ and test her own prejudices against the character's horizon. It might even be that the site where an interpretation of religious texts differs is a valuable as well as value-laden source for the reader's internal dialogue with a character.

As Jasper says regarding text in *A Short Introduction to Hermeneutics*, 'What is important is not any conclusion we may reach, but the struggle itself, and what Hartmann calls its 'frictionality' (Jasper, 2004, p.27). Thus for most of this short story Esther experiences the friction between her internal narrative about her dysfunctional (and therefore she concludes unloving) family and the one she imagines to be composed of 'the most enviable human beings I had ever seen' (Gardam, 1998b, p.7).

Esther's internal narrative experiences this sustained friction between the two narratives until it is swiftly transformed at the very end of the story. The members of her dysfunctional family have it seems organised themselves (lovingly) enough to be gathered to meet her on the platform. In the manner of Fish's pre-described way, the story closes down the text at this point. The last line throws the reader back onto reconsidering the 'enviable human beings.' If

dysfunctional does not necessarily mean unloving, does functional necessarily mean that the 'enviable' family is loving? Past text and past concepts and prejudices are re-arranged at the appearance of grace for this is what grace does. Paradoxically, as the text closes down, grace opens up Esther's heart, if not her prospects. Dietrich Bonhoeffer describes this phenomenon in his book *The Cost of Discipleship*:

When we are called to follow Christ, we are summoned to an exclusive attachment to his person. The grace of his call bursts all the bonds of legalism. It is a gracious call, a gracious commandment. It transcends the difference between the law and the gospel. Christ calls, the disciple follows: that is grace and commandment in one. "I will walk at liberty, for I seek thy commandments" (PS.119: 45). (Bonhoeffer, 2015, p.59)

Such a phenomenological approach could lead to a reader breaking her own rules formed from previous prejudices. There accumulates a growth of understanding of different religions' various interpretations of biblical text. The reader's internal horizons thus extended, it enhances her ecumenical 'conversation' in the world beyond the novel. Such is the potential of fiction. In *Truth and Method* Gadamer says, 'In a conversation, when we have discovered the other person's standpoint and horizon, his ideas become intelligible without our necessarily having to agree with him' (Gadamer, 2004 p.302).

An example of this might be of a Quaker such as myself reading Gardam's *Missing the Midnight*. Here, the dejected student Esther is sharing a railway compartment with an Anglican priest and his son and fiancée. Part of the journey involves the priest explaining the workings of anointing oil and pyx. It is not until the end of both the story and the journey that both Esther and reader

realise that Esther has been subject to more than a mere explanation of anointing. She has in fact been the subject of a most effective demonstration in which her misery has been reversed to an unexpected source of joy. The ‘conversion’ of sorts, wonderfully understated by Gardam, is ‘something understood’ between reader and Esther.

However, the young Quaker reader, who had never understood the function of a pyx, but did know the transformative power of a gathered Quaker meeting for worship, was able to share Esther’s horizon where their experience of healing in religious interpretive community merged. This enabled the Quaker then to revisit the story’s (Anglo-Catholic) text, reconsider the agency of the priest and pyx, and thereby release some Quakerly prejudice regarding rite and ceremony: the fruits were plainly beneficial to the character Esther and in the Spirit. As Fish has earlier pointed out, the text, if it exists at all, remains absent or unchanged. It is the reader who changes - in this case in a religious and ecumenical sense. The Quaker releases her prejudice and is ‘convinced’ of this other (Anglo-Catholic) source of Christian healing. Through identification with the character’s feelings, the Quaker reader’s horizon has merged and extended with Esther’s and therefore with another faith, albeit Esther says she ‘had also lately lost my faith’ (Gardam, 1998b, p.4).

As well as the above dialogue between reader and character, Gardam has similar exchanges take place between her characters of different faiths, for instance, in *Last Friends*, between ‘Anglican’ Dulcie and ‘Roman Catholic’ Fiscal-Smith. Dulcie initially does seem neurotic, dutiful and, because of the constraints of her neurosis, sometimes ungenerous. However the reader

‘uncovers’ the ‘truth’ of Dulcie as she herself does through the ‘event’ of her friendship with Fiscal Smith. Dulcie ‘uncovers’ herself in friendship as predictably stable. However, Dulcie is now seen to be more faithful than just plain dutiful and more generous of spirit than simply accommodating.

The novel thus opens up an opportunity to explore the effect of personality and circumstance as if through play. The reader can explore by identification the consequences of myriad possibilities of personality and permutations of plot. The novel creates a space between text and reader in which she can extend her horizons, ‘suspend her disbelief’ and play.

Play thus occurs in the space between textual foreground and horizon of belief. According to Gadamer this space or *mitte* is an opportunity for ‘building’ and for ‘play’, a space in which one can lose oneself, between either side of the hermeneutic circle. Malpas describes this well:

The artwork, no matter what its medium, opens up, through its symbolic character, a space in which both the world, and our own being in the world, are brought to light as a single, but inexhaustibly rich totality. In the experience of art, we are not merely given a ‘moment’ of vision, but are able to ‘dwell’ along with the work in a way that takes us out of ordinary time into what Gadamer calls ‘fulfilled’ or ‘autonomous’ time. Thus the artwork has a festive, as well as symbolic and playful character, since the festival similarly takes us out of ordinary time, while also opening us up to the true possibility of community. (Malpas, 2014)

Gardam has her characters lose themselves in the church play within a play. In *Last Friends*, locked up within the cold Anglican Church ‘space,’ Dulcie (Anglican) and Fiscal-Smith (Roman Catholic) demonstrate, by trying them, the

many uses of ‘symbols’ including priestly clothes, cassocks and also communion wine. For a time they and the reader are ‘out of ordinary time’ caught up in the *mitte* of a multitude of possible ‘festive’ interpretations. More, they are beginning to succumb to the possibility, later realised, of not just being friends, but ‘friends’ in the meaning Quakers inherited for their name from James, part of a vital Easter ‘community’. The gospel of John says, ‘Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you’ (John.15: 15).

It is Gardam’s skill that makes this the literary form of a Gadamerian ‘event’ and, through artful, playful demonstration of religious hermeneutics, such a memorable ‘uncovering’ of ecumenical possibilities inherent in the sharing of textual horizons. Through this brief description it is possible to see the beginnings of the change that can occur in the *mitte* and the dramatic opportunity for change it allows as well as religious possibilities.

Receptive Ecumenism and Religious Interpretive Community: a proposition for contemporary community

... the fundamental principle ... is that each tradition should focus on the self-critical question: ‘What can we learn or receive with integrity from our various others in order to facilitate our growth together into deepened communion in Christ and Spirit?’ (Murray, 2010, p.ix)

We have considered both Fish’s hermeneutic of the religious interpretive community, as well as Gadamer’s fuller description of what occurs within that community’s hermeneutic circular movement: between foreground and horizon

in the space between Word and words. We may now wonder how that movement between Word and words applies to our own lives and that of the ecumenical community. For Paul Murray there are, 'three key voices' of Receptive Ecumenism, a new movement whose 'fundamental principle' Murray describes as based on 'the self-critical question': 'What can we learn, or *receive*, with integrity from *our* various others in order to facilitate our own growth together into deepened communion in Christ and the Spirit?' (Murray, 2010, p.x). The 'three key voices' are the 'analytic', the 'pragmatic' and the 'poetic' (Murray, 2010, p.xi). We shall now turn to each of these in order to explore the connection between the *poesis* of the novel, and the pragmatics within the life of the reader.

The analytic has already been explored sufficiently for our purposes in the previous sections on individual and community hermeneutics of reading. We have seen that Fish believes there is a reader or interpretive community of readers, but no fixed text. Gadamer believes there is text and has developed original ideas about how text functions within a hermeneutic circle. Most importantly he has described a *mitte* or building ground in which dialogue between religious readers takes place. We may consider *mitte* the place where Gardam's readers' characters 'play' and amongst whom readers meet other readers, forming a religious interpretive community though they may never physically meet. Jasper has confirmed that such a communion of readers is possible within the definition of the Sanctus in the Eucharist anaphora where there is 'in a sense ... no passage of time but only a dwelling in eternity, though we shall make journeys also through history ... all remain one in the timeless and unrepeatable action of the Eucharist' (Jasper, 2012, p.8).

However, it is Murray who places ‘a lead emphasis on the imaginative, the constructive, the poetic - the dreaming of dreams, or better the having of dreams evoked in us.’ (Murray, 2010, p.xii) The purpose of *poesis* is ‘not to marginalize’ theology or discipline itself, ‘but to call out to centre-stage the real purpose which ecclesial theologians ultimately pursue’. (Murray, 2010, p.xiii) The ‘real point’ of *poesis* Murray says is ‘to be able to perceive more clearly what possibilities lie open for increased-wellbeing’ and for the church ‘to serve its task of illuminating the possibilities for the created flourishing in God’ (Murray, 2010, p.xiii). Murray is clear that this *poesis*, this ‘dreaming of dreams is neither detached from reality nor does it stand as an end in itself’ (Murray, 2010, p.xiii). He says ‘*Poesis* is ...necessarily done in the middle of things: poised between given circumstances and accumulated understanding on the one hand, and necessary accountability, refinement, and anticipated actualization, on the other.’ (Murray, 2010, p.xiii) It does not take the reader long to see the place that Gardam’s fiction occupies in Murray’s ‘middle ground.’ Religious fiction’s interdisciplinary locus between *poesis* and theology, particularly in the hands of Gardam, allows her characters in life-like ‘circumstances’, to meet and negotiate the ‘refinement’ and ‘discipline’ of religious life. Into this is built, within the discipline of the story itself, circumstance and dreams that develop and enable not only the characters as individuals, but also the community and ‘the church to walk more discerningly into its future’ (Murray, 2010, p.xiii) Here in this discussion there is a clear merging of the church of Gardam’s characters and the readers who identify with them. Gardam enables both fictional character and reader to ‘dream’ discerningly of a prophetic vision, a future that includes the very real, non-fictional construction of a religious ecumenical

interpretive community.

The question remains however as to what interpretive community guide there is for those of us who live in the world and desire to live ecumenically - in other words, the pragmatics of ecumenism. We have the guides of the various specific religious interpretive communities that have also been part of Gardam's formation: *The Book of Common Prayer* for Anglo-Catholics; *Quaker Faith and Practice* for Quakers and the *Rule* for those lay Benedictines or oblates who affiliate with a Benedictine monastery, but who live outwith abbey walls.

The last, the Benedictine movement, was formed in the first centuries of Christianity, before the disruption and fragmentation of the early Church in later medieval and Reformation times. The Benedictine *Rule* is therefore ecumenical by definition and perhaps nearer to an ecumenical interpretation of the Word, the guide we seek: it addresses all Christians who wish to dedicate their lives to Christ in an interpretive community of the Word that includes both Benedictines and lay members. However, the Benedictine *Rule* is not widely known in our time. Though indispensable when discovered and its meaning 'uncovered' by the individual, and its numbers of attenders and lay members is growing, it has not been adopted by the wider Christian interpretive community. Practicalities of the question regarding how Christians live ecumenically in community of the Word remain. How does a Christian remain local to her Church and, at the same time, share the horizon of the broader one? The pragmatics of religious interpretive community in our time must be addressed.

In such pragmatics, the Receptive Ecumenism communities move between the specific words of their local interpretive community guides and the shared horizon of the Word. This helps the declared ‘road block’ (Kelly, 2011, p.7), that ecumenical dialogue seems to have reached: Receptive Ecumenism both accepts that there are different religious interpretive communities and at the same time returns the collective Christian interpretive communities to the shared text of the Word. All Christians, as Kelly pointed out, might be interpreted as returning to the early days of the Christian church - to the first few hundred years before the attempt to organise, an attempt that almost always and inevitably results in a factioning *by* words rather than uniting *in* receiving Word from one another (Kelly, 2010).

The early Christian movement thus influenced all the three faith movements Gardam now follows and whose Word and manner have permeated her fiction: from the return of Anglo-Catholics (The Oxford Movement) to pre-reformation liturgy, the Quaker movement to ‘primitive Christianity’ and the Benedictine movement’s sixth century dedication to return to simple gospel living. All placed emphasis on a return to the Word and their pivotal motion a hermeneutic one between Word and word. Such motion was prescriptive to various degrees, but it was also alive, descriptive of the Spirit within the hermeneutic. In other words, Quakers, Benedictines and Anglo-Catholics were indeed *movements* of the Holy Spirit. Such movements demonstrate, particularly in the case of the Benedictines, a quality described by Casey in his book *An Unexciting Life* as not so much stuck in their faithfulness, as released into a ‘stability [that] is dynamic not static’ (Casey, 2005, p.237). It is for this reason that Casey believes that the movements of neo-primitivism alone do not work.

They are stuck in the past rather than moving forward *with* the past for its emergence and merging with the present in a combined wisdom.¹²

It is this dynamic stability that Receptive Ecumenism offers us and Gardam's fiction offers us also. However and importantly, Receptive Ecumenism gives the religious interpretive community a language, names what it does and asks of its members that they receive the Word from each other in a community of equals.

For the realisation of Receptive Ecumenism's vision Murray prescribes the importance of imagination, a form of *poesis* that he describes in phenomenological terms:

The dreaming of dreams...the having of dreams evoked in us...conviction that some dreams are not simply subjective fantasy...or bulwarks against the terror of reality, but given to us by an Other whose dreams they are, and given to us precisely in order to be born into being. (Murray, 2010, p. xv)

In Gardam's poetics there are placed importantly characters whose dialogue, both internal and external, negotiate the tensions between the constraints of assumed common social mores and different expressions of faith. However, when it comes to the moment of ecumenical community expression, they cease to talk about it and simply do it. In this way they are exactly as Gadamer describes and Murray affirms. They are so absorbed in the process of

¹²As Casey puts it 'The whole impact of an ancient text such as the *Rule of Benedict* derives from the fact that it preserves a "memory" of a way of seeing and doing things which is not governed by contemporary ideology. The ancient approach is not normative; there is no question here of advocating neo-primitivism. It does have the effect of reminding us of the sheer relativity of many aspects of thought and conduct which we have come to think of as absolute' (Casey and Tomkins, 2006, pp.20-21).

Gadamerian play, of building (community), in the *mitte* that they ‘lose themselves’ and all sense of *chronos* within the space described as *kairos*.

At such times in Gardam’s novels there are few words about the different interpretations of the Word. Rather there is a sign of Receptive Ecumenism’s pragmatics: practical action, demonstration of the Word in simple actions, poetically described, most markedly in the final scene of *Last Friends*. Here, ‘Anglican’ Dulcie gently coaxes ‘I am a Roman-Catholic’ Fiscal-Smith to take part in the Easter Procession. It is only at the end of this novel, Gardam’s last, and on its final page, that she names ‘the Resurrection’ that has shaped the previous pages of the whole trilogy. We have been, as Fish describes, forming text and letting it go as we read along with the different characters’ stories and we have invested in them, projected our anticipations forward as Fish says. Much of the time procession we have been playing, dreaming, for instance, with Dulcie and Fiscal-Smith in the locked church or travelling with Filth to run-down hotels and finally to his death on the hot tarmac of a Hong Kong runway. In the Easter community and procession the characters are joined and we are now joined with them and the community of readers also. Such is Gardam’s ‘poetic’ expression in fiction of the pragmatics involved in the ecumenical ‘dream’ encouraged by Receptive Ecumenism. The Resurrection is not just the coda to this trilogy, but a tribute to the incarnation that formed its author. The religious interpretive community reads it in Gardam through the poetics of the gospel and the pragmatics of the ecumenical community life she describes for her readers.

This chapter has explored how reader response theory, particularly as described by Stanley Fish, can help us to understand the religious dimensions of

Gardam's work. This is so regarding individual reader responses as well as the place of interpretive communities in her work. We have seen how hermeneutical inquiry (where we may see our horizon merged with other faith horizons that are founded in their community interpretation of the Word) enhances such readings, and how we understand the nature of ecumenism (as common inheritance of the Word, with emphasis on receiving its Word and prophecy through poetics in an ecumenical community of equals) are already present in the deceptively simple, but complex overlays of communities that comprise Gardam's fiction.

Gardam's use of the religious is by no means the only method by which the religious can be understood and represented in fiction. There are many other ways of exploring religious community life through literature in general, for instance through the parabolic nature of fiction (Miller, 1991, p.135ff). Such stories can act like a parable in telling a simple illustrative story where often myth and legend are intertwined in the parable. Such forms have been well exploited in modern fiction and analysed in modern literary criticism. As with myths, a simple religious parable further invites a deeper religious capacity for those who wish to explore and receive it. Beneath the simple story lies the *sub rosa*, a deeper understanding and interpretation of text.

However in Fish's description *sub rosa* lies within the individual reader and its interpretation occurs elsewhere than the context of religious fiction. It is possible though that the hidden meanings Fish describes might also be religious and help the reader explore such meanings and ways of expressing interpretations of the Bible. Fish leaves no room to consider how imaginative words might breathe life into the Word and thereby create a religious space for

those whose hearts are in building these religious communities not only in fiction but in fact.

Fish seldom if ever explores such complex interpretive strategies at work in religious communities. They and their hermeneutics are nevertheless present, and we can experience them in fiction such as Gardam's that describes religious interpretive community and invites the reader to join that community in an imaginative exploration of it.

Chapter 3. Lectio Divina and the Pragmatics of its Practice

‘In the last century these de Bulmers - they were nearly all women - entirely ran the village, the church, and the school. They set up a free school of their own in their house to teach the local fishermen to read and write and study the Bible’ (Gardam, 1991, p.180).

The above concerns Gardam’s nineteenth century great aunts in Coatham. It describes a family in which the women as well as the men were not only literate, but expected it of themselves to pass on the ability ‘to read and write and study the Bible.’ *Lectio divina* is a practice that has close associations with this ministry, as does Gardam’s own religious writing. As a reading practice, *lectio divina* links religious and literary theory, cognitive and experiential understanding, individual and community. In this chapter therefore we shall take an experiential approach to this method of reading, one that will engage with many of its qualities. Reading is a subject that has generated a vast research literature - the reading practices of ancient readers such as Augustine and Ambrose are still contested, in particular whether reading was normally carried out orally rather than silently. There are specialist historians of reading, such as Robert Darnton and Roger Chartier whose work deals with the *Ancien Régime* in France, and Jane Allan who explored the period after 1800. Cognitive psychologists today still investigate the conditions under which children and adults learn to read most effectively. All this is important to reading as an activity *per se*; but in this chapter I am concerned only with that form of it known as *lectio divina*, which is as Michael Woodward put it so accurately ‘creatively bringing together the book of the Word and the book of our own experience’ (Casey et al, 2010). In this chapter we further explore aspects of

the *Rule*. We shall see how a form of reading termed *lectio divina* both enhances and augments the theories of individual and community religious interpretive community we encountered in chapter 2.

Lectio Divina

Lectio is the Word. Simply put, it is prayerful reading out loud of short passages of the Bible or sacred literature to oneself. We read Word as if it *were* a poem with a personal prophetic message uncovered as we read. We do this unhurriedly and, ‘follow the voice as the pages turn’, as Gardam did with her mother (Gardam, 1991, p.183). In *lectio divina*, however, rather than being read to, we are following our own voice. The effect and manner of this is described below in more detail, but the following is clear: nothing stands between the reader herself and the Word. Word leaves her mouth and enters her ears in one body with no intermediary other than her own heart. In this circular movement between mouth and ear we are as Benedict said learning to ‘listen with the ear of the heart.’ *Lectio divina*, Casey reminds us, is thus ‘more than mere exegesis’ (Casey, 2005, p.429).

The effect of hearing the Word through the heart and not merely the head is that the reader finds the Word wedded to her own experience. She is less likely to forget it. Word is contemplated, explained in words to herself by herself, re-remembered and accrues experiential meaning. It becomes part of the reader’s physical memory, gathered into the skirts of her experience and part of her walking witness. In the same way Word has, in Gardam’s life and in

her writing, been witness to a community of readers and an invitation to share how Word works out its meaning in characters' everyday world.

A further effect of *lectio divina* is not so often mentioned in descriptions and should be highlighted here. This effect has analogies in poetry and the client's personal narrative in counseling and therapy and by implication in Gardam's fiction also. Contemporary writers have mentioned this phenomenon in recent years in connection with *lectio divina*. This is the moment when a word or phrase has particular emotional resonance for the reader. It may not be clear why this is so, and often it is not apparent in silent reading, only in reading aloud. The emotion may be joy or pain, but it feels like a knot in the material, and is arresting enough to stop the flow, as if there is something at that point that might be better understood. Casey in his book *Sacred Reading* calls this by its religious name: 'compunction'. In *Sacred Reading* he says:

It is by compunction that we discover what is happening in our own inner world. The text of Scripture becomes, as Saint Athanasius says, "a mirror in which may be seen the movements of one's own soul." *Lectio divina* is not only a means of discovering something about God: it also helps us to understand our hidden selves...our most authentic level of being is mirrored in the Scriptures. (Casey, 1996, p.30)

Compunction happens in *lectio divina* when a word or phrase stands out in the first stage of reading aloud (*lectio*) and is then taken for consideration into the second stage (*meditatio*) Here in slow dwelling in and repetition Word can open itself up and uncover Christ's place with us.

Though Casey does not say so he uses language not unlike that of the process that occurs in therapeutic counselling: ‘Our feelings alert us to changes taking place at a much deeper level of our being, at the level of the heart’ (Casey, 1996, p.30). However, Casey assures us that his description of what occurs in *lectio divina* is specifically religious and ‘that our most authentic level of being is mirrored in the Scriptures’ (Casey, 1996, p.30) Although the outcome depends on ‘the grace of God’, Casey says it is ‘our willingness to be touched...opening ourselves to a level of vulnerability’ that ‘we come to the Scriptures aware that our souls are perishing through starvation.’ Most importantly, and, in view of our discussion of Receptive Ecumenism in the last chapter, Casey observes that we should, ‘come with a will that is receptive’ (Casey, 1996, p.31). For ‘in the space we create...*lectio divina*...not only enlightens the mind, it also massages the will’ (Casey, 1996, p.31).

We do not have far to look for literary parallels in this process of imaginative elucidation. The capacity of poetry to do this will be discussed in chapter 5. In the meantime a Romantic instance of the power of this is famously found in William Wordsworth’s *The Prelude*: ‘There are in our existence spots of time,/That with distinct pre-eminence retain/A renovating virtue’ (Wordsworth, 1995 p.479). If this transcendent potential of literature has an equivalent it might be found in the process of *maieusis*. More will be said of the effect of *lectio divina* upon an individual below. However, we should also acknowledge the effect of the interpretive community upon the individual’s regular practice of *lectio divina*. Here is Casey again, for whom *lectio divina* produces:

a progressive fusion of perceptual horizons, so that newcomers [to a religious interpretive community] begin to perceive and evaluate things in a context ... true to their own experience and convergent with the vision of others...a liberation from rampant individualism towards greater communion with the past and a deeper solidarity with the present. In theological terms it can be seen as on-going conversion at the level of seeing, perceiving and evaluating. (Casey, 2005, p.432)

Lectio Divina: A Brief History

Lectio divina has been practised since the time of the desert Fathers and has its roots in Talmudic literature and classical rhetoric. The Benedictine Luke Dysinger reminds us that:

Lectio divina originated in veneration of the Torah and meditation on the sacred scriptures that characterized ancient Judaism: Philo of Alexandria, a contemporary of Jesus, described its practice among Jewish monastics in Egypt and Palestine. Christian leaders such as Cyprian of Carthage, Ambrose of Milan and Jerome eagerly recommended it to the Christian faithful and thereby attest to its widespread practice in the early church. (Dysinger, 2008, p.107)

The story of fourth century St Augustine's conversion to Christianity comes from his *Confessions* (Augustine, 1961, p.177). Sitting in a garden one day he heard the voice of a child playing nearby saying, '*tolle lege*' which means 'pick me up and read.' Augustine saw lying where he had left it earlier, 'the book containing Paul's epistles' which he opened at random. He read the words, 'Not in revelling and drunkenness, not in lust and wantonness, not in quarrels and rivalries. Rather, arm yourselves with the lord Jesus Christ; spend no more thought on nature and nature's appetites.' (Rom. 13: 13) The effect was immediate, 'it was as though the light of confidence flooded into my heart and all the darkness of doubt was dispelled.' The efficacy of *lectio divina*, no matter the fine

differences in how it is approached, is clear enough in this fourth century description of Augustine's and is still claimed in its increasing use today.

In the sixth century Benedictine included in his *Rule* a section on the practice of *lectio divina*. However, Benedict wrote as if the reader already understood its *raison d'être* and process. His description is practical and concerns the time Benedictines should devote to daily *lectio divina* and the approach to be taken. I shall be referring to that approach or manner in more detail in the next section.

Later, Guigo II, a twelfth century Carthusian monk, wrote a 'ladder' of steps for *lectio divina*. He says, 'Understand now what the four staves of this ladder are, each in turn.' In common with other medieval authors, such as Hugh of Saint-Victor (Carruthers, 2008), Guigo leaned towards the process of digestion as an aid to description of slow ingestion of the word. *Lectio divina* was a physical process:

Reading (*lectio*) is busily looking on Holy Scripture with all one's will and wit; Meditation (*meditatio*) is a studious in-searching with the mind to know what was before concealed through desiring proper skill; Prayer (*ora*) is a devout desiring of the heart to get what is good and avoid what is evil; Contemplation (*contemplatio*) is the lifting up of the heart to God, tasting somewhat of the heavenly sweetness and savour. Reading seeks, meditation finds, prayer asks, contemplation feels.¹³

¹³The ladder of four rungs: Guido II on contemplation. <http://www.umilta.net/ladder.html>
Retrieved 29.1.16

Guigo's description denotes the complexity of medieval reading practices that have since been uncovered and discussed by scholars such as Mary Carruthers and Duncan Robertson. Petrucci, for example, distinguishes between three reading techniques that were used for different purposes - silent reading, 'reading at a low voice, called murmuring or rumination which assisted meditation and served as an aid to memorisation' and reading aloud, which was 'very similar to the practice of liturgical recitation and chant' (Petrucci, 1995, p.133). Taught in the monastic schools first, and later developed in early universities, such as Bologna, *lectio divina* became an essential intellectual method that was applied not just to scriptural texts, but to other disciplines as well, such as law and philosophy (Morrissey, 1989, pp. 27-75).

Lectio Divina and the Rule

It is the Benedictines, who have been particularly involved in the *lectio divina*'s recent revival in the last decades. Both Benedictine oblates and lay members practice *lectio divina* in the same way as the Benedictines. There are also lay groups attached to chaplaincies, churches and in community.

In the *Rule* Benedict assumes familiarity with *lectio divina* methods because they were already known and practised by his readers, for example in monastic schools. He advises how it is best to be deployed in the life of the Benedictine community. Although, he says almost nothing about the process of *lectio divina* itself, a short section on the approach to *lectio divina* appears in the chapter in the *Rule* headed 'Daily Manual Labour': (*Rule*, pp.117-119).

1. ... all the community must be occupied at definite times in manual labor and at other times in *lectio divina*.

2. The period from the fourth hour until about the sixth hour should be given to *lectio divina* (two hours.)
3. From the first of October to the beginning of Lent, they should devote themselves to *lectio divina* until the end of the second hour, ... after the community meal, they will spend time in reading or learning their psalms [three hours].
4. During these days of Lent each member of the community is to be given a book from the library that they must read thoroughly from beginning to end.
5. Two seniors... They should make sure that there is no one overcome by idle boredom who is wasting time in gossip instead of concentrating on reading.
6. Sunday is the day on which all should be occupied in *lectio divina*.
7. As for those who are sick or too frail for demanding work, they should be given the sort of work or craft that will save them from idleness.

The Benedictine approach to *lectio divina* is thus subsumed by the method of individual reading and the pragmatics of community life, according to the manner laid out in the *Rule*. It would be trite to summarise Benedictine ‘core values’ in contemporary managerial speak since so much of the community relies not just on Benedict’s specific advice (‘The period from the fourth hour until about the sixth hour should be given to *lectio divina*’), but also his tender approach (‘As for those who are sick or too frail for demanding work, they should be given the sort of work or craft which will save them from idleness’). The Benedictine approach to receiving the Word in *lectio divina* would therefore be informed by the very same approach outlined for the *Rule* of their whole life. Word is received in a manner of prayerful hospitality, to ‘welcome the stranger as Christ’ and humility of which there are twelve steps most especially the first ‘to be in awe’, and tender discipline.

We can illustrate this by citing Benedictine advice regarding conduct and then citing some suggestions from the *Rule* that guide the practice of *lectio divina*:

1. Prayer: 'We must be quite clear that our prayer will be heard, not because of the eloquence and length of all we have to say, but because of our heartfelt repentance and openness of heart to the Lord whom we approach.' (*Rule*, p.86) And 'It is essential that nothing should be accounted more important than the work of God' (*Rule*, p.111). Thus in *lectio divina* we are not aiming for a lengthy and complex explanation, rather we are approaching Word as a child: trusting and hopeful - content with a simple and possibly incisive insight.
2. Hospitality: 'Any guest who happens to arrive at the monastery should be received just as we would receive Christ himself, because he promised that on the last day he will say: I was a stranger and you welcomed me' (*Rule*, p.123). We might consider welcoming Word as such a guest, a stranger whom we do not know, but as if it is Christ himself.
3. Humility: 'The first step of humility is to cherish at all times the sense of awe with which we should ever turn to God' (*Rule*, p.67). As with people, if we approach Word with awe of its potential rather than weary cynicism we are far more likely to experience its spiritual riches. Casey makes the point that humility is concerned primarily with being truthful, above all to ourselves (Casey, 2001, p.29).
4. Tender discipline: 'If one of the community comes with an unreasonable request, the cellarer should, in refusing what is asked, be careful not to give the impression of personal rejection and so hurt the petitioner's feelings' (*Rule*, p.96). Sometimes it is harder than others to welcome

Word, because it is a stranger and not the company of someone we might choose to be with. It seems old fashioned or just wrong. We have asked for succour in *lectio divina* and find none on this particular day. Then it is good to suffer our reaction to it, consider what is aroused in us of anger, injustice or rejection and then to consider those reactions with love and mercy.

Lectio Divina: Contemporary Ecumenical Experiments

Casey describes this phenomenon of the revival of *lectio divina* in his book *An Unexciting Life*. 'Speaking of the monastic tradition he says, 'In any tradition there are certain latencies which manifest themselves when conditions are ripe' (Casey, 2005, p. 423). It seems that *lectio divina* practised within monasteries since before the time of Benedict is now spreading to groups of Christians for whom this traditional ecumenical form of reader response had previously been unknown.

Here, to describe it in contemporary language, is a guide to *lectio divina* recently prepared by me for a university colleague, Ruth Dunster, new to the process:

Listen with the ear of the heart. Suspend your disbelief and know that Christ is with you as you pray. Choose a few lines from the gospels, psalms or desert fathers and mothers, for example from the gospel of the day.

Step 1: Read them aloud and unhurriedly to yourselves 'on the lips' accepting the text unconditionally as a literal story, however unbelievable it may be. It might help to read them simply as if they were an obscure poem. This is *lectio*.

Step 2: Notice which words or phrases stir response in your heart more than the others.

Step 3: Return to these words and repeat them over again as if tasting them. Notice their texture. This is *meditatio*.

Step 4: Listen with the ear of the heart as if the beloved Christ is tenderly listening also. Let Him come to you. How does His Spirit speak to your condition at this moment today? This is *oratio*.

Ponder this in your heart as you move through the day.

Here is Ruth's feedback:

Imagine finding a treasure that has been right there for centuries, but you'd just never seen it, I feel creative freedom and gentle listening are such gifts. Straight away having sat a while following this structure I have to say, what understated richness. I love the balanced and paced progression of the stages. Perhaps allowing oneself to trust and love each word as poetic. I will think about that. But I think the slow resting in the power of the narrative and letting a particular phrase speak is such a hermeneutical freedom and gift... much of that process is about slowing down and having reverence for the text. (Dunster, 2015)¹⁴

Lectio divina can provoke strong responses in groups, both positive and negative. The response with a group of Quakers to the second community guide at a workshop in High Leigh was positive. Friends returned, for a second early morning session of *lectio divina*. For the third workshop (a residential weekend at Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre) the reception was one of antipathy. Quakers did not read the Bible, in fact found it all 'sexist'. They had thought this was a workshop on 'spiritual reading' in general, despite wording to the contrary. It was a deep lesson in the shift from quiet acceptance of different faiths that Quakers professed they had, to the reality of the intolerance most Quakers now had for the Bible - a book that is the foundation of all Christian faiths.

¹⁴ Cited with permission to quote.

What this antipathy demonstrated, in the cool light of reflection, was that such prejudices unchecked forestalled any possible nurturing the Word might offer contemporary Quakers. The next question was how one might bypass that prejudice, so that Friends could experience, as their founders had done, that Word could, ‘speak to their condition.’

One example of the interpretive community of *lectio divina* successfully in action was the 2009 ecumenical *Lectio Divina* conference held at the Benedictine Worth Abbey, Sussex (Casey et al, 2009). The Benedictine monastery at Worth is Catholic. In true Benedictine spirit however this gathering was ecumenical. Moreover attenders were considered equal within the various traditions that included Catholic, Baptist, Quaker, Episcopalian, Church of Scotland attenders amongst others. There were talks about *lectio divina* by academics and published Benedictines, such as the Cistercian Michael Casey and Benedictine Laurentia Jones, as well as communal meals and small ‘home’ *lectio divina* practice groups, facilitated by the Benedictines and lay Benedictines.

At Sunday mass around one thousand were gathered in the Abbey. The Quaker who was plucked Zacchaeus-like from the crowd to bring forward the capacious marble communion bowl could hardly refuse. By Sunday morning Word had become her ecumenical home. Horizons had merged in the common *mitte* or mid-ground of Word shared worshipfully in the conference’s interpretive community based in the *lectio divina* groups and conversation with people who had now become ‘Friends’. To protest against taking full part in this new ecumenical interpretive community on grounds of a specific (Quaker) interpretive community guide seemed superfluous. And so it did, sheltered by an Abbey roof large enough to make *lectio divina* that community’s home, and

under the one shared fused horizon of the Word: ‘Walk while you have the light’ (John.12: 35).

How was this experience of *lectio divina* then received when I as Quaker Chaplain took my turn on the rota of the university’s daily ecumenical morning prayers? (University of Glasgow, 2015). I restructured the normal framework of prayers so that the reflection took the form of a brief introduction to the steps of *lectio divina* with an emphasis on allowing the text to wash over the thinking part of the brain and allowing what tugged the line of the heart to remain for contemplation with the Spirit. In a sense I was following the pattern described by Robertson in which with experience the *lectio divina* steps are not always taken sequentially and can be overlapped. This in itself was predicting Cope’s work on the Quaker ‘incantatory style’, a style that he describes as circling the Word growing ever nearer its essence, rather than approaching the Word in orderly steps.

Here is the text I used for morning prayers. I reproduce it here as my attempt to recuperate an ancient form of reading and adapt it for a specific occasion:

Reflection

Today we are going to do things the other way by having the reflection first before the reading. The idea of *lectio divina* or contemplative reading of sacred text will be familiar to some of you. It’s based on the idea of treating The Word as if it is there as Quakers might say to ‘speak to your condition’. When I read the Word try and ‘listen’ as the Benedictines say ‘with the ear of the heart’ (rather than the mind) and notice which Words or phrases catch your attention. It is not important to know *why* they do so, but rather to ‘hold them in the Light’ and see what the Spirit might be saying to you.

This is not so much a moral lesson, or exegesis, but rather listening to the text as if it were an obscure poem and finding just

one phrase that ‘tugs’ the line as the poet Ted Hughes put it. There is no right or wrong answer because we all come to prayer with different things to consider. For the early church Fathers and Mothers *lectio divina* was expressed in four steps. The monk Guigo described these as: *lectio*, reading aloud; *meditatio*, meditating on these Words that stayed with you; *oratio*, praying about them and, lastly, *contemplation*, or keeping them in your awareness as you go about the rest of the days business.

For today it might just help to think, as I said, of this text as an obscure poem with the occasional word or phrase that speaks to you, or perhaps to think of it like a painting, some part of which has what is called ‘an entrance for the eyes’ (Hollander, 2002, p.7), a way into the picture, of understanding. We start with something small. Again there is no right or wrong answer. The way into a poem, painting or piece of sacred text can not only be different for different people, but different for the same people on different days.

Here we go: listen, catch a phrase or Word, meditate on it and ponder it in your heart as you remember it throughout the day.

The response of this small ecumenical group was different again. The faces were still because, as one member said, ‘the silence was so peaceful, we did not want to move at the end.’¹⁵ Perhaps this was partly because this time *lectio divina* was offered to a composite core group of different Christian denominations committed to worshipping together and in the habit of participating in morning prayers led by Christian Chaplains of different denominations. In other words this ecumenical religious interpretive community came with the intention prerequisite to *lectio divina*: they prayed ‘with confidence’ (*Rule*, p.45) as Benedict advised or, as Quakers describe of their own approach to worship, they came ‘with heart and mind prepared’ (QFP. 1.02:9).

Lectio Divina and the Benedictine's third vow: *Conversatio Morum*

Benedictines make three vows to the particular community they join.

These are stability, obedience and *conversatio morum*. The last is a little obscure, its translation clarified by the Benedictine, Cuthbert Butler, in 1919:

In the six places in which '*conversatio*' only is found in the MSS [of the *Rule*], it means either the personal manner of life of the monk, or the manner of the life of the community... when all is said and done it may best be rendered into English 'the conduct of one's life.' (Butler, 1919, p.136-7)

For the Benedictine this meant, and still means, bringing the whole of their life under the letter and spirit of the gospels as guided by the Benedictine interpretive community's *Rule*. From the foreground of the text in prayer (private *lectio divina* or community liturgy) to work in the field at the furthest horizon, the Benedictine inhabits Word and words, words and Word, renewing acquaintance with Word and testing it in words of life beyond the page.

The lifestyle of the *Rule* is an integrated life: the Benedictine embodies both work and prayer. It is also a life of individual and community in the dynamic stability described by Casey in a chapter headed 'The Dynamic Unfolding of the Benedictine Charism' (Casey, 2005 p.129ff). Thus the larger circular hermeneutic of the Benedictine who moves between Word in prayer to words in the field is also found in the circular hermeneutic of the whole community. This same movement is evident in *lectio divina*: between Word on the page and words of personal experience and back again. Thus *conversatio morum* is not only the third Benedictine vow, but also a description of the sophisticated sixth century hermeneutic that remains the engine of Benedictine life and of *lectio divina*.

We have seen in this chapter how *lectio divina* is considered a way of linking the tradition of the Word to present context, a context we normally express in words. I have given a brief history of *lectio divina* as well as summarising the guidance on method given in the Benedictine *Rule*. We can see how the Benedictine reading of *lectio divina* within the Benedictine interpretive community remains a practical and comprehensible guide to the process of sacred reading. The Benedictine approach however also enables people of different Christian faiths to practice *lectio divina*, alone as well as together, in ecumenical gatherings from small groups to large workshops.

Moreover, group *lectio divina* enhances the process of the ecumenical interpretive community of readers. People of all Christian faiths can receive imaginative and practical interpretations of the Word personally. They can then reflect on and share those experiences with each other in the manner already described in Receptive Ecumenism.

The Benedictine's third vow to *conversatio morum* is the important engine in which the whole interpretive community moves in a circular hermeneutic between Word and its interpretation in words. The space around which this motion goes is precisely where discussion of that interpretation takes place, where Word is expressed in words, to oneself and to each other within the community.

Meditatio, and Missing the Point

The discipline of *meditatio* releases the reader from servitude to the written page... By reciting or singing these texts while at work, away from the book, he makes them his own (Robertson, 2011, p.100).

So where does all this experimentation with facilitating *lectio divina* lead for our purposes in considering Gardam as a religious writer? First, there appears to be little recent research literature on the use of *lectio divina* with reference to biblical literature in general and in the religious lives of those who read that literature. In part, as a result of this, the power and efficacy of *lectio divina* as a reading heuristic is diminished, in a way that would not be the case in general literature, for example in bibliotherapy. Perhaps most surprising, there is often an *animus* against its use in the reading of scripture even from those, like some Quakers, who declare themselves tolerant. One is left with the vexed question of how to demonstrate the effectiveness of what one has found by ‘convincement’ - that *lectio divina* is not only inspirational but spiritually efficacious also. It is not too much to say that the form of reading, certainly with regard to the efficacy of the Word in *lectio divina* or in fiction, can inspire a degree of evangelism. It is an enthusiasm similar to that of a critic who said, of Gardam’s work, ‘I nearly hand out copies of Jane Gardam’s *Old Filth* at street corners’ (Schiff, 2015). Her religious writing makes one want to declare the good news.

The demonstration of this ‘good news’ is possible in small convinced groups, but perhaps requires more discussion about how to make it known more widely. Recently I gave a copy of Gardam’s short story *The Meeting House* to

each member of a group of Quakers with whom I worship in a ‘Light Group’ (Pinder, 2011). Granted, it was a small group and a knowledgeable one, both in literary and religious terms. However, the participants’ individual responses to the story were that it described not only the experience of a Quaker meeting for worship, but also the Quaker manner and response to the events such as those Gardam describes. The question might be how to broaden this type of experience, one in which fiction is appreciated as a form of religious writing for discussion not only amongst Quakers, but also in ecumenical groups.

This is a space that Robertson describes in his section on the second stage of *lectio divina*, namely *meditatio*. If fiction is a way to absorb the Word in words, it might be helpful to re-consider Gardam’s *Missing the Midnight* so that we may understand more about how she provides the readers with space for their own response, whilst at the same time providing enough fabric in the literary structure for the reader to understand that this *is* a religious space.

In order to do this I shall compare two passages from two editions of *Missing the Midnight*. Gardam published edition 1 in 1997, under the publisher Sinclair-Stevenson. Edition 2 was published a year later, by Abacus. The significant amendment occurs early in the story. We have already met Esther who is enduring a miserable train journey home from university, her fiancée having broken off their engagement:

Edition 1, 1997:

My mother had gone round saying, ‘Esther’s engaged to a graduate.’

There was another thing my mother didn't know, and neither did I at this time, and it was that I was harbouring a point-of-explosion appendix. I was thinking that the pain was anguish and my green face sorrow.¹⁶ Nobody ever looked as unattractive as I did that Christmas Eve. So I put my hand to my face and the tears rolled.

But I could not ignore my fellow passengers. The smell of them was so arresting - the smell of beautiful tweed clothes, shoe leather pipe-smoker's tobacco and some wonderful scent. There was a glow now in the compartment. Even in the glass there was a blur like a rosy sunset. (Gardam, 1997c, p.7)

Edition 2, 1998:

My mother had gone round saying 'Esther's engaged to a graduate,' I put my hand to my face and the tears rolled.

I could not ignore my fellow passengers. The smell of them was so arresting - the smell of beautiful tweed clothes, shoe leather pipe-smoker's tobacco and some wonderful scent. There was a glow now in the compartment. Even in the glass there was a blur like a rosy sunset. (Gardam, 1998b, p.6)

The most obvious difference is that Edition 1 includes a passage that has been edited out in Edition 2. The passage omitted is one of explanation, an interpretive, and in this text, an over intrusive authorial voice. It occupies the imaginative and immersive space into which the reader is otherwise able to move in Edition 2. The authorial voice in Edition 1 intrudes because it removes the reader from the immediacy of her involvement with the story, itself a sensory experience. The 'arresting' bodily senses in which the reader is immersed include touch (tweed and shoe leather), smell (wonderful scent), and sight (wonderful glow). Arguably sound and taste come in to this description also: if anything squeaks, it is the leather with quality and when we can taste, it is through our sense of smell which has already been alerted with the smell of

¹⁶ This sentence is awkward, but it is copied as written in Edition 1.

the tweed and leather. An over-explanatory authorial voice removes us from this full and physical immersion in the five senses. The reader is hearing another's interpretation before she has had time to experience and absorb her own impression. Turning back to medieval theory on how *lectio divina* could be effective, Guigo II (d.1193) also emphasises the importance of the freedom to explore the five senses as in *meditatio*. Robertson points out that for Guigo:

The defining characteristic of the genre [writing from *meditatio*] is the freedom enjoyed by the writer. A literary meditation is not bound to the exposition of a given text, as is a commentary, it does not develop a logical argument, as does a treatise; it does not usually address a named reader, as does a letter, nor speak to a present responsive congregation, as does a sermon. It is still essentially an extension of reading based, however on no single text but rather a free-association of any number of scriptural references. In weaving together of quotations and reminiscent, in the flow of reading into writing, a meditation can become an exercise in high verbal artistry (Robertson, p.208-209).

In Edition 2 Gardam offers the reader just enough explanation from her own previous experience of *lectio divina* without being overly intrusive. As a writer who is religious, Gardam has life-long experience of *lectio divina*, that is, of dwelling in the Word in her own words. This experience has seen her develop a high literary facility that then in turn allows her to introduce written *meditatio* to the reader. However, in stepping back before she has said too much, Gardam manages not to interfere with the reader's response. This is similar to Quaker custom. If a Friend ministers too long in meeting for worship she is eldered with the customary words, 'Will our Friend please be seated, so that we may consider her words carefully.'

Robertson describes the same writing facility in Guigo

His *meditatio* departs from the reading of texts, proceeds from the experience of the book to the “book of experience” (*liberum eperientiae*) and returns to testify to the valid pertinence of the Scriptures to what has been felt and done in non-textual life. Written down, a *meditatio* becomes a text in its own right, to be read and “meditated”, by another reader in turn. (Robertson, 2011 p.209)

How we read Gardam is of course is up to us. Her stories are of interest enough without the religious dimension, though, as I argue throughout this thesis, our understanding of and sensitivity to the religious dimensions of Gardam’s work renders her achievement all the more impressive. “Understanding does not remain outside,” writes Bernard, “it does not grope along the surface, like a blind man, but searches out the depths, often bringing precious spoils of truth and carries them away” (Robertson, 2011, p.204).

Edition 1, in offering the reader an alternative reason for Esther’s misery, undermines both Esther’s and the reader’s religious experience that comes after the passage I have quoted. Far better Edition 2, which uninterrupted and unqualified, prepares the reader for the religious dimension of what follows. The ‘red lipped girl’ enquires as to the purpose of the ‘sweet little silver thing’ and the priest explains it is the “pyx. A viaticum...an ‘oil stock’ It’s for taking the Sacrament to the sick in an emergency.” He explains further, “Those are the oils. For Holy Unction. We anoint the dying”. She jumped back’ (Gardam, 1998b, p.11). For the ‘red lipped’ girl, having been so alive in her sensory immersion, the shock of death is greater felt. She has been caught out by her own shallow interpretation of religious objects as diminutive and decorative “sweet little silver pretty things” (Gardam, 1998b, p.11). The reading of the situation in the carriage is as different between the girl with red lips and Esther as William of

Saint-Thiery describes here: “the same gulf between attentive study and mere reading as there is between friendship and acquaintance with a passing guest, between boon companionship and a chance meeting’ (Robertson, 2011, p. 204). In *Missing the Midnight* the priest turns the chance meeting into religious companionship, one whose efficacy does not become apparent to Esther until she emerges from the carriage and is surprised to see her whole family waiting on the platform.

In the editing process, from the Sinclair-Stevenson to the later Abacus edition, Gardam has placed importance on the difference between interpreting and pointing for the reader, and drawing the reader into the situation in order to judge for herself. It is nothing more than allowing the reader, as in *lectio divina*, her own relationship with the words, and thereby the Word when it arrives, that speaks to her condition. Anglo-Catholic Sacrament and Quaker silence show us Christ’s presence and absence, a gap and a tension, the reader ever struggles with. Both religions offer space for the person to enter in and to be received as Murray describes of Receptive Ecumenism. They signify a religious space, much as the parables of Jesus did, or John’s patterns of metaphor, as much as Gardam’s text does for the reader. Gardam’s fiction, her voice, knows how to get out of the way. As Gardam points out in her review of Alice Thomas Ellis, it is the difference between being told to ‘shut-up’ and being invited to ‘listen’ (Gardam, 2004b). Gardam does not set out to explain, but to engage the reader aesthetically and religiously, and thus enable the reader to learn experientially or ‘experimentally’ with her characters. It is perhaps not too much to claim that in such powerful aesthetic moments the Word is made flesh in narrative and character and, inverting John.1:14, we dwell in it, as a form of *meditatio*.

Gardam's fiction has a strongly architectonic quality to it - one of its compelling qualities - and this is due at least in part not to the accumulation of detail upon detail but, as in many modernist aesthetics, a stripping-back or paring of such detail as we have seen. The architectural metaphor was of course familiar to medieval writers. Robertson, speaking of Hugh of Saint-Victor, picks up a typical passage:

The sense of connection between reading, argumentation and spirituality emerges in Hugh's discussion of another traditional metaphor, derived from Gregory, that of comparing scriptural exposition to architectural construction: 'First we put in place the foundations of history; then, with the typical meaning we build the superstructure of the mind as a citadel of faith; finally, by the grace of the moral allegory, we clothe the building with a coat of a paint. (Robertson, 2011, p.220)

Knowing Gardam's religious and literary history we can appreciate that this construction is in place in Gardam's books. However, the process is far deeper than this. With Gardam, the reader does not feel she has entered a cathedral (and been charged for it), rather that, as Robertson says again of Hugh of Saint-Victor,

The foundation history is below the surface of the earth; it does not have always smoothly fitted stones - the literal reading of Scripture contains many incongruities - but its solidity bears the weight of the whole edifice. (Robertson, 2011, p.220)

In future chapters on Gardam's religious art, we shall see more of how she uses both strategic narrative gaps, as well as the authorial practice of *meditatio*. We shall see how she enables us to appreciate more profound meaning; or, to adapt Robertson paraphrasing Guigo, how she helps us to

‘penetrate[s] the literal “surface” of the text to discover the “hidden” or “interior” meaning, that is the allegorical sense’ (Robertson, 2011, p.226).

Chapter 4. *Lectio Divina* and *Poesis*

I could read at four because my mother read to me so much. I don't remember having to learn. I wasn't taught, but followed her voice as the pages turned. (Gardam, 1991, p.183)

Introduction

In this chapter I shall examine some of the aspects of reader response theory that we considered in chapter 2 alongside other reading theories that have significant factors in common with *lectio divina*, which was the subject of chapter 3. More particularly I demonstrate how aspects of poetic theory, both Romantic and contemporary correspond with the qualities and practices of *lectio divina*. I then consider the relationship between *lectio divina* and contemporary fiction, and its use in the Slow Reading movement. Following the thread of time, I conclude by considering how the concept of *chronos* or real time in theological argument and in its practice in *lectio divina*, can be used to illustrate Gardam's narrative art.

Lectio Divina and its contemporary renaissance

As mentioned in chapter 3, there has been a revival of scholarly interest in the theory and practice of medieval reading. What is especially valuable about this renaissance is that the researchers are writing about medieval practices not just from the point of view of a literary historian. They often use in their work postmodern and contemporary literary theory, and draw on that to reveal how sophisticated medieval reading actually was. One of them, Duncan Robertson, goes further and claims that modern theory such as reader response criticism can learn from the theoretical and practical complexities of medieval

reading. His book, *Lectio Divina: The Medieval Experience of Reading* (2011) is invaluable in clarifying *lectio divina* as an early, if all but forgotten, a kind of reader response theory. Robertson says that ‘medieval reading theory offers powerful insights into the question of reader-response taken up by academic critics in America and Germany during the 1970’s’ (Robertson, p.2011, p.27).

Robertson says that *lectio divina* is a form of reader response and as such, ‘medieval reading theory offers powerful insights into the question of reader-response taken up by academic critics in American and Germany during the 1970’s’ (Robertson, 2011, p.27). Thus, for example, he notes that Fish’s call to “slow down” the activity of interpretation is not a new one and is in fact re-invented. Fish is simply repeating an older form of reader response theory: ‘...the ruminative *meditatio* prescribed by the church fathers.’ and which is the second step of *lectio divina* (Robertson, 2011, p.31).

Robertson is emphatic when he describes the effect on the history and culture of literary criticism of *lectio divina*’s omission from the history reader response theory: ‘Jane Tompkins¹⁷ skips blithely from Plato to the Renaissance without pause for the Middle Ages and without considering religious approaches...these omissions constitute a serious oversight’ (Robertson, 2011, p.31)

Robertson also takes exception to the lack of historical perspective of contemporary critics. He considers that the consequence of the reader response

¹⁷ Robertson is referring to Tompkins, J. *Reader-Response Criticism*, 201-32 concluding essay, “The Reader in History: The Changing Shape of Literary Response,”

movement's 'failure to take note of medieval reading theory has demonstrably hobbled the reader-response exploration and contributed to its premature closure' (Robertson, 2011, p.34). Robertson ends his book with a heartfelt comment on

the work of the modern literary theorists movement [that] ended in the 1980s, overwhelmed by a politicization of the interpretive community, having failed to reach the conception of reading toward [that] which, I believe, it ideally tended: spiritual freedom. That is to say confidence...licensed by a spiritual rather than political consciousness of community; an energy compelling the reader to venture beyond the inert *littera*...into a fullness of active, affective, intellectual and creative literary participation. (Robertson, 2011, p.233)

It seems like an extraordinary claim, but Robertson's argument is a persuasive one. As Studzinski points out in his excellent systematic summary of the scholarship on *lectio divina* there is a growing area of research on the subject. What marks Robertson's approach is his concern that modern critics have missed out explaining how a reader's attitude towards reading a text affects response. He speaks particularly of the Benedictine manner of humility, described extensively in the *Rule*:

Modern critics... do [not] ...explore such notions as faith, patience and humility. These terms (perhaps all too familiar in church discourse) denoted pre-interpretive *disciplines* governing the intensive work of re-reading and *meditatio*, vitally important in religious reading pedagogy (Robertson, 2011, p.32)

Above all, Robertson thinks that the main purpose of *lectio divina*'s form of reader response theory is neglected. Love or *caritas* is both the intent and hope for engaging in *lectio divina*. The second commandment, to 'love one another,' is the premise of any Christian religious interpretive community. The

community is united in its agreed interpretive text and thus withstands the vicissitudes of physical separation of individuals within that community. In that sense the community echoes William Penn's early Quaker ideal that, 'we live in one another still' (QFP. 22:95) Robertson returns reader response insights to early Christian readers and writers, and he cites the example of one of the first writers of a monastic rule, St Augustine:

Augustine specifies the building up of charity as the ultimate aim and meaning of all the Scripture (*De Doctrina Christiana* 1.36)... the reader derives positive inspiration from the communion with the congregation, which remains crucially present to him, even when he finds himself geographically distant from it or reading in physical solitude. In the sharing of intellectual and affective devotion (*intenta mentium devotio*), the many become one (Robertson, 2011, p.33)

Robertson is describing a religious interpretive community whose common text is the Word, the Word that motivated its religious interpretive community's guide, the *Rule*. He concludes that, 'Communal reading institutes a live dialogue among readers/hearers and with the author of the text, an interaction in which all participants are able to respond to one another' (Robertson, 2011, p.34).

Robertson is not the only scholar to draw attention to the relation between individual and community (which as we saw in chapter 2 is an essential tension in reader response theory). Others such as Brian Stock (2001) and Mary Carruthers (2008) have commented on aspects of this in medieval reading while scholars with an interest in religious communities also describe and analyse the relationship between the one and the many. Thus Jasper describes the religious

interpretive community in his book *The Sacred Community*; and his point is so vital, that he addresses the reader directly as if by epistle:

We have come, you and I, in a short space in this brief chapter, a long way from my study, this room in Beijing, where I write, sitting at a desk, in spirit both here and not here, and with you - whom I can but imagine. ...But even so for fleeting moments we are one. ...There are moments in literature, moments in the shadow's light, that grasp, in word and look, a shade of the liturgical moment, and they are capable of reducing us to silence, a silence in which again might be heard the possibility of the song that is the Sanctus. (Jasper, 2012 p.18)

In this passage Jasper creates a narrative space that performs two functions. First, he makes real or immanent the absent or implied reader, as Wolfgang Iser put it. Second, he assists the opposite process that also takes place in reading, whereby readers construct the author of their imagination. In Iser's 'Phenomenology of Reading Process' (the sub-title of the final essay in *The Implied Reader*) Iser considers textual absence, and the powerful effects that this has on a reader's imaginative construction of the text. Where there is absence of text, imagination enters and describes, amends, speculates, asks questions. Thus the act of reading becomes 'a sort of kaleidoscope of perspectives, pre-intentions, recollections' and, like a kaleidoscope image, always shifts, even if only slightly, in our mind's eye (Iser, 1978, p.279). 'In this way trivial scenes suddenly take on the shape of an "enduring form of life"' (Iser, 1978, p.276). Reading, whether it be poetry, fiction or *lectio divina*, is rich with the variant hues of textual space, but also with what Jasper has described above as 'the shadow's light' of the 'liturgical moment' (Jasper, 2012, pp.18).

In their sense of absences, of both readers and textual markers, and in their constructions of the relations between individual and community in the reading process, Robertson and Jasper are making similar points about the importance of religious interpretive communities for the construction of textual meaning, and for relation between readers and writers. They argue that a meeting is possible between individual readers who will never meet within the space that is, as it were, the 'Sanctus' of the same text, including the dead and the not yet born. Such a meeting is a response that is both local to shared text but also out of time and in eternity - and as we shall see, it is a quality that both poetry and fiction share alike.

Lectio divina and theories of reading poetry and fiction

The most interesting "sentences" are in poetry. (Bland, 2013, Gardam *loq.*)

Seamus Heaney's critical essay collection, *The Redress of Poetry*, considers many aspects of the creative process. In his last collection he turned to what he described as the 'redressing' of poetry, a compensating balance between circumstance and grace: 'This redressing effect of poetry comes from its being a glimpsed alternative, a revelation of potential that is denied or constantly threatened by circumstance' (Heaney, 1995 p.4). Later Heaney relates this redressing balance specifically to the Christian religious response so that poetry 'corresponds to deep structures of thought and feeling derived from centuries of Christian teaching and from Christ's paradoxical identification with the plight of the wretched' (Heaney, 1995, p.3).

Heaney does not liken these glimpses to those found in *lectio divina*, but he does connect the experience to a Christian redress of ‘grace’ that certain types of poetry offer. There are many instances. Heaney cites, for example, George Herbert’s poem, ‘The Pulley’, in which God gives restlessness as a counterweight to the contentment of riches. The redress of rest is not experienced until the reader relinquishes those same riches (Heaney, 1995, p.12).

Heaney’s ‘revelation of potential’, so close to the theory of reader response and to the practice of *lectio divina* (where there is sought the potential of revelation) finds its place in Romantic poetic theory. Wordsworth famously described such glimpses or ‘spots of time’ in ‘The Prelude’. Whilst for Wordsworth such moments were not described as being specifically Christian, certainly these ‘transcendent’ moments had a ‘renovating virtue’ that ‘nourished and invisibly repaired’:

There are in our existence spots of time,
That with distinct pre-eminence retain
A renovating virtue, whence - depressed
By false opinion and contentious thought,
Or aught of heavier or more deadly weight,
In trivial occupations, and the round
Of ordinary intercourse - our minds
Are nourished and invisibly repaired;
A virtue, by which pleasure is enhanced,
That penetrates, enables us to mount,
When high, more high, and lifts us up when fallen.
(Wordsworth, 1995, 208-218)

It is interesting to compare Herbert’s sense of divine presence with Wordsworth’s felt transcendental moments in ‘The Prelude’. In Herbert’s ‘The Pulley’ God could appear strategically placed, as a jealous God. In Wordsworth’s

‘The Prelude’ God is a ‘spot of time’, efficacious, but not necessarily salvific, engulfed by the individualism and rationale of the enlightenment, spiritual but not necessarily religious. Such moments act like a ‘renovating virtue’, but they are not quite as exacting as *lectio divina*’s sources of ‘compunction’ discussed briefly in chapter 2. Compunction can prick sharply. For, as Casey says, moments of compunction have, ‘implications for the kind of space we create in which to read’ (Casey, 1996, p. 31). These Wordsworthian ‘spots of time’ are the piercing¹⁸ moments of revelation, but not *de facto* of Christian revelation of which Herbert writes. Such conditions offer qualities of spatial experience in which time is both local and time specific (*chronos*) yet universal and timeless (*kairos*) and are echoed in Wordsworth’s description of a moment in nature’s own space. According to Wordsworth at such times we experience a moment that is both local specific, in that it ‘penetrates’, and universal, in that it ‘lifts us up when fallen.’ There is, as the Benedictine Anne Field describes of the monastic hours, ‘the resonance of an interior movement of the understanding, a pause for silence “the desire to penetrate more deeply into the word that has been heard” in the Spirit, so that soaring of prayer may gush forth in the soul in response to what the ear has heard’ (Field, 2000, p.25).

Other poets have commented in similar terms on poetry’s ability to ‘redress’. Ted Hughes in *Poetry in the Making* describes two ways in which poetry is like *lectio divina*, although he does not declare this similarity and it is unlikely that it occurred to him. Here is Hughes at the beginning of *Poetry in the*

Making describing poetry as fishing, as if it were the first stages of *lectio divina* in which the reader reads aloud noticing what of the material tugs at her:

Your whole being rests lightly on your float, but not drowsily: very alert, so that the least twitch of the float arrives like an electric shock...and the whole process of this concentrated excitement...is to bring up some lovely solid thing like living metal from a world where nothing exists except those inevitable facts which raise life out of nothing and return it to nothing. (Hughes, 2008, p.60-61)

By the end of *Poetry in the Making* however Hughes is more specific about the connection between the ‘tugs’ when reading poetry and reading the gospels, when he invites us to consider a remarkable gospel moment:

You can imagine who is likely to be getting the most out of reading the gospels, for instance: the one who discusses every sentence word by word and argues the contradictions and questions every obscurity and challenges every absurdity, or the one who imagines, if only for a few seconds, but with the shock of full reality. Just what it must have been like to be standing near when the woman touched Christ’s garment and he turned round. (Hughes, 2008, p.118)

The purpose of Hughes’ essay is to help us appreciate poetic experience. It is an intent, I would argue, that lies at the core of the theory and method of *lectio divina*. Just as the most eloquent and perceptive theorists of *lectio divina* are also practitioners of this art of reading, so too it is no coincidence that two poets, Heaney and Hughes, are able to make such powerful connections between their art and the experiential theory of *lectio divina*.¹⁹

¹⁹ Moreover, these theories or constructs of *poesis* are in fact versions of Murray’s third criterion for Receptive Ecumenism. Murray describes *poesis* as ‘the imaginative-constructive’, one of ‘the three voices, the three concerns’ of Receptive Ecumenism (Murray, 2010, p.xi). It is interesting and indeed one might say ecumenical of Murray, who is after all a Catholic, to use the term ‘concern’, a concept of particular Quaker significance, as has already been discussed in the preface.

Heaney and Hughes both discuss characteristics of poetry that resemble *lectio divina*. But what of fiction? There is perhaps only one example of a contemporary English author who refers directly to *lectio divina* in relation to the theory of reading fiction. Susan Hill is a contemporary English fiction writer, and an Anglican. She writes about *lectio divina* as a method of reading fiction. In her book *Howard's End is On the Landing*, Hill describes a year reading her way through the books on the shelves of her own home. Although Hill's initial application of *lectio divina* is of reading books about a religious way of life, she then extends the idea that *lectio divina* might work just as well as an approach to the reading of a novel:

I have been taking two pages at a time and going over them line by line, paragraph by paragraph, in that way of reading that St Benedict called *lectio divina*, and which is still used for studying the Bible and the works of the Christian fathers, in monasteries and convents. Many more books than those of the spiritual life lend themselves to *lectio divina* - reading a great novel, and certainly great poetry, in this way is profoundly rewarding. (Hill, 2010, p.114)

This is a bold claim to make since it runs the risk of unsettling those who locate Word specifically and exclusively in the Bible and other sacred writing. However, writers such as Gardam, for whom Word is part of the fabric of their personal text, can write both the Word and words. Even in a superficial reading of Gardam, it becomes apparent that she takes delight in this inter-textuality. The Word dwells quietly, sometimes disruptively, in the flesh of her characters' utterly believable lives. In this sense Gardam is an innovative writer, and she, like many other such voices, is questioning the apparently unquestionable. Heaney described her authorial situation in a passage on the relationship

between cultural and religious subjugation and liberation (which as a Catholic in the Northern Ireland divide Heaney himself knew well). Heaney says:

What is involved, after all, is the replacement of ideas of literary excellence derived from modes of expression originally taken to be canonical and unquestionable, Writers have to start out as readers, will have been predisposed to accommodate themselves to the consciousness which subjugated them...In any movement towards liberation, it will be necessary to deny the normative authority of the dominant language or literary tradition. (Heaney, 1995, pp.6-7)

‘It is first necessary to read and accommodate the subjugating consciousness of other texts in order to deny their normalcy in language or tradition’ to paraphrase Heaney above. Gardam uses her knowledge of normal church language in the following Prayers for All. Gardam intermingles statutory prayers with the less statutory private thoughts of all and, through her embedded knowledge of both religious and non-religious language, sets one register against the other in a tragi-comic way.

The penultimate chapter of Gardam’s novel *Faith Fox* is a series of short monologues described by Gardam as ‘The Thoughts of All’ (Gardam, 1997b, p.389). The ‘All’ are the main cast of the novel. They have assembled for an evening Christmas service that is also a baby welcome conducted by the Anglican Reverend Jack, leader of a residential interfaith community. The service takes place in the chapel of a partially renovated priory in the North East of England. The cast includes the community, together with a few friends and relatives who have come to welcome baby Faith. Faith is the daughter of the now deceased Holly Fox. The bundle has been passed round various members of the community, from Jack’s partner to Pema, a Tibetan refugee, and it is still

uncertain who will care for the baby. It is baby Faith's mother, the deceased Holly, whose absence has been the centre round which most the novel's action has revolved. It is to this cast that Jack says, 'Let us pray' (Gardam, 1997b, p.389).

From the first of the internal monologues in *The 'Thoughts of All'*, it is clear that Gardam's integration of words within Word of Anglican prayers is at its skilful and witty best. The silent 'Thoughts of All' is of a tone at once confessional and petitionary, interspersed with snatches of half remembered Anglican prayers that have as they had with Gardam 'entangled themselves forever in the memory' of Gardam's characters. Thomasina (the deceased's mother) begins, followed by Pammie, Ernie, The waitress from Ellerby Moor Hotel, Mrs Middleditch, Jimmie the Postman, Jocasta and Philip. Their prayers, grasped, as Gardam says of her own prayers, like handle-rails, are a form familiar yet awkward alongside worldly concerns:

Thomasina²⁰ thought, Pray? Our Father which art - Dear god, have mercy on us all and hear us. I don't know where I am or what my future will be. Watch over me, Holly gone, Herbert gone, Giles gone. Garden left, must think of it. Pammie left and Les Girls and the golf club.... Oh Lord I pray for beloved Holly and may she be in everlasting light, may perpetual light shine upon her. ... Tell me what I am doing in this place and tell me, I beseech thee, O God, how I'm to fill the rest of my life. (Gardam, 1997b, p.389)

The Anglican prayer includes the phrases, 'Our Father which art', 'have mercy on us', 'Oh Lord I pray for beloved' 'may she be in everlasting light', 'may perpetual light shine upon her', 'I beseech thee'. There is comical elision in the phrases 'Dear God' and 'O God' where Word and word are interchangeable

²⁰ All names are in bold in the original text

either as direct petitioning or simply exclamation at the enormity of the task ahead: “I beseech thee, O God, how I’m to fill the rest of my life.’ The reader is led from the specific foreground of a formal language of prayer to an horizon of petitionary prayer dealing with a desert of vocation so vast it is as daunting existentially as death itself. The reader at once understands both Thomasina’s desperate petition, but also God’s probable perplexity as to how to answer it. The contrast is comi-tragic in its familiarity.

It is interesting to consider Gardam’s passage with the Anglican prayers removed and how the passage empty of Anglican prayer compares:

Thomasina thought, Pray? I don’t know where I am or what my future will be., Holly gone, Herbert gone, Giles gone. Garden left, must think of it. Pammie left and Les Girls and the golf club.... Holly.²¹.... Tell me what I am doing in this place and tell me how I’m to fill the rest of my life.

Even with prayers extracted there is still indication that Thomasina is addressing a transcendent source (‘Tell me’), but comic effect is almost entirely removed. The passage loses the rhythm and contrast between ancient and modern, and along with it, dramatic effect. It fails to engage the reader quite as much and the reader therefore also fails to learn that Word can integrate perfectly well with the contemporary words that are an expression of Thomasina’s deepest uncertainties and thoughts.

Let us now remove any allusion or address to a transcendent source:

Thomasina thought, Pray? - I don't know where I am or what my future will be., Holly gone, Herbert gone, Giles gone. Garden left, must think of it. Pammie left and Les Girls and the golf club.... Holly.what [am I] doing in this place and how [am I] to fill the rest of my life.

The passage now lacks both contrition and petition. We are back in the unsanctified life of golf-club suburbia where we started the novel. There are no Words or holy wells here. Surely the journey has been about more than this? Of course it has. The reader has been slowly gathering snatches of prayer and considering the form, uniformity and deformity of community. The reader has also been grappling with Thomasina about which way of life might not just simply suffice, but nourish the petitioner of the one big recurring question, 'tell me how I'm to fill the rest of my life.'

Significantly it is after prayers that the baby's elder half brother Philip discovers Faith is not in the Christmas crib. It is a search for Faith literal and metaphorical that unites the cast now as they at last form a community united in prayer and purpose.

Behind the scenes and during prayers Nick the biker has been concerned that he saw Faith about to be taken away by one of her carers. He has therefore 'Put her int side-car and brung 'er' to her unsuspecting and overlooked grandparents: the maternal Dolly and 'I tell you Dolly, get the police' Toots. There are various analogies of the baby Faith to the search for religious faith, but none so stretched that they remove the tension from the story. The reader knows, as do Dolly and Toots, that they are merely minding Faith, who is given in trust, rather than claiming her. It is the cynical Toots who unconsciously

shows most faith when he says prophetically, biblically even, of the lost lamb at the door, 'The one that goes down for her will be the one who knows. The one that understands her. The one to take and keep her. You'll see' (Gardam, 1997b, p.410).

And he is right. It is their estranged and sometime aloof daughter-in-law, Thomasina, mother of Holly and grandmother of Faith, who finds her way home from the materialism of the middle class golf club to Faith and the previously spurned (working class) in-laws. In another writer's hands this tale might have become a cliché. However, with Gardam's balance of plot, parable, ancient prayer and modern prose, this does not happen. A religious tale of birth and the finding and keeping of Faith is brought home to the reader and thrives amongst both the novel's post Christian interfaith community and its readers' interpretive one. The reader has experienced Thomasina's petition, been contrite with her and received her answer to prayer in the deliverance of Faith which after all one has at least in part to fetch up for.

In the merging of Word and word, a form of reader response, of *lectio divina* has occurred as Gardam talks us into the plot of the birth of Christ. Faith's grandmother, in soothing the child, carefully unwrapping her, guides the reader to the focus of the Marian devotional motif - the Christ child (Faith) and therefore by association, her deceased mother (Holly). The heart of the story is revealed as in *lectio divina*, one word at a time, step by step as Dolly the grandmother removes the material world of the Tibetan binding from the child Faith, so that the Word (and the reader) in turn are now also unwrapped, bound to the moment:

‘Here we are,’ said Dolly. ‘*Here* we are.’ She got her fingers beneath the bundle and lifted it out and began to undo it. ‘Whatever’ve they dressed her in? Whatever is this? She’s in somebody’s old curtains and I sent up that robe of your mother’s a month ago. She’s got something hung on her front. It’s a bit of knitting on a card. Looks like a big eye. *Here* we are.’ (Gardam, 1997b, p.404)

We begin and end this short exposition with the placing emphasis: ‘Here we are...*Here* we are.’ For Dolly there is no-where better to start than locus specific, with the child herself. It at once focuses the reader in the words (she does not wish to skim them now). Fingers find their way beneath the bundle, hands a signifier for the ways in which we ‘love one another’: in the washing of the feet, healing of the sick, taking of communion and in supplication and prayer. Such loving gestures however are often covered up, as is the baby Faith, by the material and the prospect of possession. As with *lectio divina*, if we skim we can miss the real treasure that contemplation of the Word brings.

The tale ends as Thomasina, the grandmother whose gardening gloves had once been ‘laid together as if in prayer,’ now also significantly casts such ceremony aside as she reaches out (ungloved hands) to take Faith: ‘She’s all yours’ (Gardam, 1997b, p.410). Peace is with her as it is with Faith’s grandparents. And also with the reader. Gardam is making the traditional sign of peace in the shaking of hands at the end of Anglican mass or Quaker meeting for Worship. It is the mutual handing over and receiving of trust.

Indeed it is the legacy of Holly, the child’s mother and the grandmother’s daughter, that remains intact in this child as the reader is returned by the

simple exchange above to the first description of her deceased daughter's simple faith:

She believed effortlessly in God, effortlessly in Christ, hazily in the Holy Spirit. She confused Bethlehem and the Gaza Strip and never thought which language Christ spoke in since what He said always sounded so English. Eternal life presented no difficulties to Holly Fox for she knew that it must be so, and heaven somewhere or other, or why should such awful things happen to us here.... (Gardam, 1997b, p.13)

Gardam breaks the fourth wall of the narrative, challenging any misgivings that such naivety renders belief invalid. She addresses the reader prophetically: I tell you²² everyone looked for the crumbled feet of clay²³ on this shining²⁴ girl and nobody found them' (Gardam, 1997b, p.130). Such is Faith.

Lectio divina and the Slow Reading Movement

I had just lately realised that the marks in the middle of the small, shiny page of Beatrix Potter's 'The Tale of Peter Rabbit' were words. They had sounds invisibly attached. Pictures were great, but they were extras. (Gardam, 2014c, p.13-14)

In his article 'The reading cure' Blake Morrison describes the work of Jane Davis at the Reader Centre at the University of Liverpool (Morrison, 2008). The 'Get into Reading Scheme' consists of around fifty groups of about ten members each who gather together weekly. (Davis, 2016) 'The usual pattern is for a complete book to be read aloud, cover to cover in weekly sessions' Morrison

²² 'I tell you' is a phrase of the prophets including Christ, for example 'But I tell you of a truth, there be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God' (Luke 9: 27).

²³ 'He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings' (Psalm 40: 2).

²⁴ 'If thy whole body therefore be full of light, having no part dark, the whole shall be full of light, as when the bright shining of a candle doth give thee light' (Luke 11: 36).

noted, adding that there's 'no dumbing down in the choice of texts'. The groups take place in prisons and hospitals as well as groups for looked-after children. No one is marginalised on account of a pre-conceived idea of their ability to read Dickens, Hardy, Shakespeare or many of the other classic writers (Morrison, 2008). In that sense the reading community of the Slow Reading Movement resembles that of *lectio divina*. This interpretive community is open to all and together reads a whole book out loud in short passages.

Morrison describes how the Slow Reading Movement groups act as 'an experiment in healing', a place in which, 'you get to talk about things that people usually skate over, like aging or death.' It is almost as if a miracle is taking place: Morrison quotes a Get Into Reading worker, Katie Peters, who says 'people who couldn't take a step could dance' and 'people who couldn't utter a syllable could sing' (Morrison, 2008). For those who practise *lectio divina* the result is similar. In the second stage of *meditatio* there comes insight and then in the final, *contemplatio*, there comes healing often, peace, almost always.

Moreover Peters points out 'there is something about poetry, not just the rhythms and rhyme, but the way it provides an opportunity to hold a thought together through time, that really helps, even the people who are not natural readers.' Morrison quotes D H Lawrence: 'One sheds one's sickness in books.' and then Mathew Arnold who said that reading is like kindling 'our own best self' (Morrison, 2008).

Morrison associates the efficacy of reading aloud to the healing of the soul itself. He quotes Plato who said that 'the muses gave the arts not for "mindless

pleasure” but “as an aid to bringing our soul-circuit, when it has got of tune, into order and harmony with itself” Morrison develops this link further arguing that ‘the Bible has the story of David calming Saul: “And it came to pass, when the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, David took a harp, and played with his hand: so Saul was refreshed and was well and the evil spirit departed from him”’ (Morrison, 2008).

The general, if not religious, efficacy of slow reading is proven by several medical studies quoted by Morrison. It is interesting to note that whilst this research is carried out in secular rather than religious contexts, the efficacy of slow reading movement is not only multi-faith, but proposed by educators and medical practitioners across the religious range. Morrison himself for instance was raised Catholic and one of the researchers he quotes is the Quaker educator and General Practitioner, Gillie Bolton, who has taught and published on reflective writing for nearly thirty years (Bolton, 2014). It seems that the interest in slow reading cure is as ecumenical as is its efficacy, a fact shared with its religious counterpart *lectio divina*. If that is true, then slow reading can take us beyond a literary *cathartic* purgation to the theological *metanoic*, a site not simply of the reading cure, but also of healing we might even term religious.

In their article ‘Slow Reading: Reading along *Lectio* Lines’ (Badley and Badley, 2010), Badley and Badley take the explanation of the connection between Slow Reading and *lectio divina* one stage further:

The ancient way of reading, now better known as *lectio divina*, challenges the fast, pragmatic reading, so characteristic of our time. We propose that the present moment may be ripe for educators to appropriate again *lectio*-style reading as an

educational counterpart to the Slow Movement, whose growth in recent decades may indicate cultural openness to the recovery of more reflective and located practice. (Badley & Badley, 2010)

The Badleys are straightforward regarding our cultural predicament.

‘Waiting and moving slowly have gone into exile.’ Many others have commented on aspects of this. They describe a form of alienation not unlike that investigated by Adler, for instance, who observed that:

students feel the pressure to rely on abstracts or published summaries and reviews...As a result, they rarely enter the great conversation with the authors who have shaped whole cultures...and they may graduate, unaware that such a conversation even exists or that the invitation for their own presence in that conversation stands open. (Badley & Badley, 2010)

Ultimately, Badley and Badley unconsciously echo some of the questions posed by Receptive Ecumenism when they ask themselves the following concluding questions: ‘how do we live well in our culture, receiving the gifts it offers while discerning and correcting for its shortcoming?’ (Badley & Badley, 2010). As with the Receptive Ecumenism movement, Badley and Badley’s slow reading movement places emphasis on receiving and discerning. There is also a reasonable plea that the example be extended to the pedagogies of learning in general: ‘we now face the task of reconceiving educational practice to create learners who will live out of rooted reflections on perennial human questions and current culture.’ (Badley & Badley 2010) There are further ‘pragmatic’ questions, a word Receptive Ecumenism also shares: ‘How does this practice reshape our understanding of the reading process? Is the aesthetic character of reading an important educational value?’ They continue, ‘In view of our

attempts to use *lectio divina* type reading we find ourselves glossing Fish's question and asking, how is there a *class* in this *text*?' [my italics]

The inversion of Fish's question is profound. The question 'Is there a text in this class?' was asked of him by a student. It referenced the seemingly perilous state of text in an interpretive tradition of reader response critique. Such a critique, as we saw in chapter 2, creates tension between individual creation of meaning and the place of interpretive communities in shaping individual creativity. Moreover, Fish's question is loaded, inviting us to think of a way in which there is no text in the class other than one that adheres to a jumbled set of interpretations. Badley and Badley's inversion of the student's question asks us to consider the nature of social interpretation of text. The question is changed from 'is there a text in this class?' to the more positive 'how is there a class in this text?' How does *lectio divina* engender reader response in a group, a response that is not only cognitive but affective and theological as well? This is the achievement of the method, as we can see from the evidence of the Slow Movement.

There is, however, one comment we must make of the work of Badley and Badley. Having described the similarities between *lectio divina* and slow reading as well as its benefits, Badley and Badley qualify their many well-referenced examples by the simple fact that they 'work in a seminary' and thus with 'students who begin with an acknowledged love of God (and Scripture).' Thus, whilst Badley and Badley's premise and theory might be both thorough and well referenced, their classroom experiment is not entirely without reader bias. Their readers already belong to a religious interpretive community and as such,

if not automatically placing the prayerful approach to *lectio divina* first, they have at least recourse to *lectio divina*'s prayerful approach and practice in their every day lives. Such experience is rarely at the first hand know-how of an average reader of fiction. Badley and Badley's paper thus begs the question as to how the writer first engages the individual reader who might welcome a religious reading once she found it. In a post-Christian world how would the reader know such an event were possible?

Badley and Badley have gone some way to explaining the workings of the pedagogy and practice of reading non-religious literature, albeit within a religious interpretive community, using the religious reading practice of *lectio divina*. However, it appears that the pragmatics of the non-religious reader receiving religious Word in aesthetics, for example in Gardam's fiction, remains largely unexplored.

To begin this exploration we could take the example of epistolary forms in a's work. The criss-cross of letters differs from exchange of emails. Letters posted normally arrive in chronological order of posting. Often Gardam's characters are thinking out loud either addressing the reader through the fourth wall or talking as they enter the room. Gardam's heroines are often caught mid-train. In *The Summer After the Funeral*, for example, Gardam catches the snatches of a mother who thinks out loud, but who also writes her thinking down in letters to her war-dispersed children. These communications are a stream of practical consciousness, of workings- out, in letters that cross and amend each other whilst her three children find themselves individually posted hither and thither across wartime England and Scotland. It is a knitting of caring in a

pattern constantly adapting to the changing shape of the situation and dropped stitches picked up by bewildered relations and loose religious affiliations. At one time the mother assumes a monastery to which she has sent her son is Buddhist when in fact it is Benedictine. At any rate the kindly monk, Father Ignatius, speaks to her son who has been made anxious by too much and too little contact. Father Ignatius misunderstands the source of his concerns - 'How many generations of men have I had to tell they are mistaken?' (Gardam, 1983, p.119), but succeeds in addressing it anyway. He does this in a passage that shows his experience, having lived Word in words, and it places him wisely and well with pragmatic pastoral presence in the boy's predicament. 'You know, Sebastian...I think you know, you are worrying quite unnecessarily' (Gardam, 1983, p.123).

As we saw in chapter 1, Gardam's choice of epistolary communication follows the ancient manner of precisely the religious influences she has imbibed both from her own religious habits as well as her Anglo-Catholic mother's writing:

She could write. Wonderful letters of the kind you hardly ever get now and they were compulsive. She wrote all the time, endlessly. She'd just say to any child in the street, excuse me could you just take this letter to the post. And she was always writing sermons. (Miller, 2005)

I will discuss more of the epistolary tradition as outlined by the Quaker Jackson Cope, the Benedictine Jean Leclercq and others in chapter 6. Suffice to say letter writing has that peculiar immediacy that we experience in *lectio divina*: it is a manner of conversation in which we do not only read, but also experience

ourselves as being read. Moreover the letter is often hand-written and thus slow written as much as slow read. The reader joins the pace of the correspondent.

Slow reading resembles the naiveté of a child. It necessitates trust because it acknowledges our vulnerability with new texts and is concerned about how, as the Badley's put it, to situate ourselves in the text. Gardam, who has raised children as well as read and written prolifically for them, is familiar with the subtlety of this task.

The following poem by Alan Ahlberg returns us to the first days of reading - syllable by syllable, slowly and out loud. It also reminds us of the slow uncovering of a sentence word by word, so that its meaning is not apparent until we had said all the words. Predictive reading comes with practice and, as with predictive text, it isn't always right. As with *lectio divina* slow reading makes each sound a new discovery. The slow reader experiences each word in present time and its effect thus has the capacity to resonate more deeply. There is less accelerated momentum in the slow reader's present to project them over-hurriedly into the next word. The slow reader inhabits or dwells in the word and all its connotations. In this way for example the slow deliberate reading of the dyslexic who finds it harder to skim is often more focussed, understanding more perhaps than the one who skims and does not centre on the present.

The Slow reader

I - am - in - the - slow
 read-ers -group - my -broth
 - er - is - in - the -foot
 ball - team - my - sis -ter
 is - a - ser - ver - my
 lit - tle- brother - er - was

a - wise - man - in - the in-fants - christ - mas - play
 I - am - in - the - slow
 read - ers - group - that is
 all - I - am - in - I
 hate - it.

(Ahlberg, 1984)

The poignancy of Ahlberg's poem lies in its mimicking of the syllabic reading practices of novice readers. It builds to despair in the last line, one that is descriptive of the misery of a child who is labelled a failure and the child's shame associated with that.

Yet this poem's form is also descriptive of another more positive reading. Those who have helped a child learn to read will be familiar with the concept of 'paired reading' (Thurston and Topping, 2016). The more experienced co-reader reads alongside the child. She is led by the child's pace, not criticising, but as if the two were sharing a common liturgy or hymn sheet. This is similar to the Benedictine injunction that no-one's singing should be distinguishable from her sisters, but should instead go alongside the volume, pace and key of the rest of the singers. Thus the child and adult in paired reading keep rhythm and pace together, one might hold and wait for the other should they stumble, the more experienced reader quietly offering the word's usual reading. There is no implicit criticism here, only a joint striving for adult and child to read in unison within the small, shared interpretive community. The fact of this shared or paired reading is that children gain confidence and remember words. As with *lectio divina's* second stage, *meditatio*, children learn the pronunciation and meaning from repetition and the context of the surrounding words. The word thus accrues meaning beyond a simple dictionary definition and becomes plastic

in its capacity to move within other words, yet retaining its centre, its essence. The less experienced reader thus adheres the Word to her own point of reference within her interpretive community's text.

Each of us has been a slow reader in one way or another in our lives either as a learner or in reading unfamiliar texts. Here is Morrison's description of being an adult 'slow learner', a student at a university seminar:

Seminar

'..if a Sparrow come before my Window, I take part in its existence and pick about the gravel...'

-Keats, letter to Benjamin Bailey 22 November 1817

This poem is you, sitting in a seminar
You would like to join but know nothing about
Zones of contestation, problematised binaries,
Performativity, generative rupturing
Or the ideology of transgressive epistemes

Luckily others in the seminar do know,
or talk as if they do, or anyway, talk.
So you can join the starlings on the telegraph wire,
Ride that pushchair with the sleeping toddler,
Hide in the blouse of the woman at the bus stop.

Just make sure to be awake, before the end -
Nod, applaud, rap your knuckles on the table,
As if you've been enlightened and inspired
And when you leave will see the world afresh,
No longer baffled by its hermeneutics.

(Morrison, 2013 p.12)

All readers recognise the experience of 'being baffled,' if not by hermeneutics, then certainly by the text in front of us. We have possibly even been ashamed, or humiliated at some time in front of a class. Morrison implies that a large part of this is others pretending they know, 'or talk[ing] as if they do.' We are in fact not alone in our bafflement. The game seems to be to pretend we are present

whilst we are in fact day-dreaming, only re-entering the discussion just at the time our presence is required, to applaud.

Lectio divina returns us to the disposition of a child, to a text in which we are all beginners, amongst other children, reading The Word syllable by slow syllable, borne along by our curiosity and faith that a story relevant today will uncover its meaning for us. This is true even of those scriptural passages that are more familiar. ‘Always we begin again’ says Benedict and this is true also of text that uncovers its different meanings in the reader from one reading to the next.

Gardam is particularly skilled at returning us to the situation of the perplexed inner child trying to read the bewildering behaviour of other adults whilst at the same time assuming a certain literary knowledge in the reader. In assuming such knowledge the reader is as open to absorbing it as the child in paired reading, now that we are paired with Gardam the religious writer. Gardam, the more experienced writer, is reading alongside us, uncovering the Word in words for her characters and ourselves. She is thus part of the interpretive community wondering at Word but amongst our words. In an earlier edition of *The Oxford Companion to Children’s Literature* it has been said that Gardam has too many literary references (Carpenter, 1999, p.196).²⁵ However, the literary references used by Gardam’s characters have significant meaning. They are used because they take us out of the timescale of the fictional. They reference other times and places, and it is to that time-shifting quality that we turn finally in this chapter.

²⁵ This has since been updated by Hahn (2015).

Lectio divina and the aevum

I like to start with an image. (Gardam, 2014a p.13-14)

Aevum, an idea originally conceived by Aquinas, was revived and extended by the literary critic Frank Kermode. It is perhaps one whose time has come. Kermode described a space in literature similar to Aquinas's concept of *aevum*, a space occupied by a third point order of angels inhabiting neither *chronos* nor *kairos*, but always imminently ready to become matter (Kermode, 2000, p.194). The *aevum* exists in the space between 'tick and tock' (Kermode, 2000, p.44), in the 'middest' (Kermode, 2000, p.74). Kermode observed that Aquinas, 'had to invent this third order of duration, distinct from time and eternity...[he] called this third order *aevum*' (Kermode, 2000, p.70). It was a valuable phenomenological as well as a theological concept because it

served as a means of talking about certain aspects of human experience...It helped one to think about the sense men sometimes have of participating in some order of duration other than that of the *nunc novens* - of being able as it were to do all that angels can. Such are those moments which Augustine calls the moments of the soul's attentiveness; less grandly, they are moments of what psychologists call 'temporal integration'. (Kermode, 2000, p.71)

Kermode is here linking the theological faculties of empathy and identity with *nunc novens* or timelessness and harnessing them for literature. He continues with a description of the concept of *aevum* and its link to the 'time-order of novels':

Characters in novels are independent of time and succession, but may and usually do seem to operate in time and succession; the

aevum co-exists with temporal events at the moment of occurrence, being, it was said like a stick in a river...*Aion* was used by the Gnostics to mean the time of a world of becoming. Then as we have seen it became the time of the angels, and then, the time of men in certain postures of attentiveness, and especially the mode of certain human approaches to perpetuity. (Kermode, 2000, p.72)

Interestingly, some thirty years later, and in the epilogue of the revised edition of *The Sense of An Ending*, he remarked that he was, ‘a little disappointed that the notion [of the *aevum* being distinct from *kairos*] had escaped serious comment’ (Kermode, 2000, p.197).

When we turn to Gardam’s writing we find evidence in her novels of a writer acutely aware of time - time evoked by place, lifespan, epoch and empire, twisting and turning in narrative forms. Gardam confirms both this sense of *kairos* as well as community in it:

the form of the novel can communicate the timelessness that, even while they are enmeshed in historical events, her characters experience. "If one knew enough," she explains, "one could predict the future. It's just the sense that you are not on your own, in some strange way." (Clark, 2011)

In Gardam, the same scenes recur, retold by different characters, sometimes in different books even and the light cast is slightly different each time. An example of this across her stories is the three-version narrative of the burial and rediscovery of Betty’s pearls in the two novels, *The Man in the Wooden Hat* (Gardam, 2009c) and *Last Friends* (Gardam, 2013a), and the short story *Facing the Music* (Gardam, 2013). This will be discussed in more detail, but in the meantime it is helpful to consider a similar theme in the gospel stories

that are reiterated, carried across the parabolic gospels of Mathew, Mark and Luke.

In this dispensing of ‘traditional chronological narrative’ we come nearer the earlier description of *conversatio morum*: *kairos* and *chronos* meet as the Benedictine Word is embodied along with words of everyday living. It is the familiarity with which Gardam approaches the same theme that helps the reader’s understanding of these paradoxical concepts of time. *Chronos and kairos* meet in Gadamer’s aforementioned *mitte* or middle point of Gardam’s novel as it does in our own lives. Thus *Last Friends* mimics the shape described in Gadamer’s hermeneutic in which there are ‘foreground’, ‘*mitte*’ and ‘horizon.’ The novel *Last Friends* moves from the first chapter (*chronos*) in which ‘The Titans had gone’, through the *mitte*, or ‘playground’, the novel’s crisis. On the final page we are taking part in an Easter procession at the heart and altar of which remains *kairos*, and the sacrament of eternal life. It is Gardam the author who becomes director of the scene as she already has in the play within the playground of the same locked church. Here however, no-one is locked in: Gardam directs both Fiscal Smith, Dulcie and the entire cast of this play along with us, its community of readers, ‘towards the Resurrection’ (Gardam, 2013a, p.205).

Gardam is describing not only a change of heart in emotional terms of *catharsis* (‘The process of releasing, and thereby providing relief from, strong or repressed emotions’ OED), but also one in religious terms of *metanoia* (‘change in one’s way of life resulting from penitence or religious conversion’ OED). There is a changing of heart in Dulcie as dull duty springs into *caritas* or love,

expressed in a British Museum HiBrow literary reading (Gardam, n.d.), where Gardam describes her regret at the way she has treated the ‘hanger on’ Fiscal Smith. Dulcie’s change leaves Fiscal Smith scurrying to catch up as she urges him on to join the Easter procession. However, as Jesus implied, early or late, it is the fact we join the community at all that is important, not so much when. It is with Gardam’s help, and that of ‘a minor character’ that we the readers process alongside. Dulcie’s minor-character status does not really describe her place, for she becomes major at this point in the novel because of her impulse of transparent loving kindness to Fiscal Smith. She becomes at once both resolute in her messianic urging of him to join the Easter procession and simultaneously gentle in that persuasion. Occupying the *aevum* enables her to move between corporeal and spiritual in just the facilitative way Kermode describes.

In a sense this mid-space becomes its own site of *conversatio morum* as Dulcie moves back and forth between Word and urging words to Fiscal Smith: “‘Fred - the organ! It’s *roaring*. The Procession’s gathering up for “The fight is o’er, the Battle done” - Come *on*. Wonderful! Hurry!’” (Gardam, 2013b, p.205) Here we have Dulcie, Fiscal Smith and the reader in the midst of eternity, or as near in Easter as we will get to it this life-time. Gardam’s ‘folding and unfolding of time’ has its purpose in the collapsing of all time into its communion of the readership community with the saints at Easter.

Another example of the erasure of difference between minor and major characters occurs in Gardam’s *The Meeting House*. The caretaker, Charlie Bainbridge, is at the top of the hill, surveying the old High Greenside buildings:

The silence grew around him again and he waited. He tried out some remarks to himself.

'Here's some puzzle,' was the first.

'I stand here,' was the second.

'Let's now see what it's all about,' was the third.

(Gardam, 1995, pp.59-60)

Bainbridge may appear to be invisible, a minor character, but he is foregrounded, in that he takes in the whole scene, and we see the perspective of narrative through his eyes.

Gardam's narrative technique that erases the difference between traditionally-understood foreground and background characters has its analogy in the critical reception of her as an author. Kermode would most likely applaud the less critically acknowledged Gardam who, despite a considerable following, does not appear yet as part of any canon in particular - feminist, magical realism or otherwise. She would probably agree with Kermode's ironic words in his book *Forms of Attention*: 'As a historian of sorts, I seem to have always been interested in them [critics] without ever wanting to fight under any banners, seeing them rather as the transient agents of an extremely complex tradition' (Kermode, 1987, p.88).

Kermode gives examples of books such as *Ulysses* that have been admitted into the canon, and once inside the canon, 'treated as heteroecism, a miniature Torah' set apart from accessible literature, as if accessible were different from canonical (Kermode, 1987, p.90). He goes on to compare this to 'Augustine's notion of the world as a poem' one that he sees as 'visible and accessible to all, though its correspondences are closed to all but the most penetrating minds' (Kermode, 1987, p.90). Just as Badley and Badley reversed the question concerning text in the class and thus opened up new ideas regarding the social

construction of the text, so Kermode, in re-introducing us to Aquinas' consideration of the *aevum*, raises theological issues of accessibility and the canon. He calls us to reconsider earthly hierarchies of literature with a humility much as *lectio divina* does, and indeed as Gardam's religious writing does.

Throughout this chapter, I have shown in the journey from Robertson's theory of *lectio divina* through the voices of poetry and fiction, and through critical concepts as apparently unrelated as The Slow Movement and Kermode's description of the Aquinas *aevum*, that as a neglected form of reader response, *lectio divina* still thrives. Indeed it thrives in all literature, from the Bible to the Word uncovered and discovered in poetry, fiction, short story and novel. Word is still redolent when aided by the words that enable our imagination; we become immersed in an induced *meditatio*, the second stage of *lectio divina*. Such words induce a contemplative slowing down, an internalised reading out loud of our condition to ourselves so that we listen, as Benedict would say, with the 'ears of our hearts' to our souls 'condition' as Quakers would. The Word's unmistakable efficacy, its Spirit 'lives' in us all and 'in one another still' (QFP. 22:95).

In the next and final Part of this thesis we shall explore how *lectio divina*, and indeed all the theoretical constructs discussed in this Part, can be used as valuable tools to help us understand the sophistication of Gardam's achievement as a fiction writer.

Part 3

Chapter 5. Gardam's Religious Communities:

A Common Treasury for All

'The seeds of knowledge are within us like fire in flint; philosophers deduce them by reason, but the poets strike them forth by imagination, and they shine the more clearly' (Kermode, 2000, p. 80, Descartes *log*).

Every precious stone

In Part 2 we considered reader response theory, particularly with reference to the interpretive role of the reader. I also described what might be regarded as an ancient form of religious reader response theory known as *lectio divina*. We have seen that *lectio divina*, particularly its second stage, *meditatio*, is a method of reading that enables us to contemplate the resonances of the Word in sacred reading. We have considered Gardam's point that short stories are poetry and by extension we have explored the idea that the novel is also. Thus *poesis*, the crafting of poetry, short story or novel, is also built of the relationship the reader has with the text. A text can thus be shaped through *poesis* so that it becomes both religious and ecumenical. This is particularly so when the reader is making her own interpretive relationship with the Word. Murray suggests *poesis* is one of 'three key voices' that helps the reader engage with the ecumenism of our age. In Receptive Ecumenism we receive the Word from the other. It crafts its own internal and dialogical poetry, which can be prophetic. The following chapters demonstrate how these three main theories namely: reader response theory, *meditatio* in *lectio divina* and Receptive Ecumenism interlock within Gardam's fiction and contribute to her being considered a 'religious writer'.

In the brief biography of Gardam, at the beginning of this thesis, I described the three main religious influences in Gardam's life that permeate her fiction: Anglo-Catholic, Benedictine and Quaker. At the times of their formation all three movements saw themselves as a contemporary expression of the early Christian community reclaimed for their contemporary centuries. It might be helpful therefore to re-examine these three particular religious influences on Gardam in more detail, how the Word is conceived in their writing and how these conceptions therefore permeate Gardam's own words, her fiction. We shall do so by exploring Gardam's narrative art, and in this chapter her handling of precious objects, in particular pearls, as symbolic of many aspects of narrative - character, points of action, role, role reversal, characters' feelings, and much else. We shall then consider a common theme in Gardam's work, namely the tension within relationships, and between relationships and the wider community. I shall begin the chapter with a brief section outlining the cultural resonances of precious stones in religious writing, and their use in Gardam's narrative art.

The cultural resonance of gems and precious objects is rich and complex, and therefore requires further introduction to its imagery and symbolism in order to understand Gardam's use of it as a narrative device. We might consider one such stone, the carbuncle, an elusive biblical stone that is not mentioned in Gardam, but whose properties are everywhere implied. The history of the word 'carbuncle', not as the contemporary 'inflammatory, circumscribed malignant tumour, caused by inflammation of the skin and malignant membrane' (OED), but its very opposite, a precious stone, is redolent with a meaning well beyond modern medical usage:

Carbuncle. (Formerly, often more fully, a carbuncle stone): A name variously applied to precious stones of a red or fiery colour; the carbuncles of the ancients (of which Pliny describes twelve varieties) were probably sapphires, spinels or rubies and garnets; in the Middle Ages and later, besides being a name for the ruby, the term was especially applied to a mythical gem said to emit light in the dark. (OED)²⁶

In Ezekiel the ‘carbuncle’ has a very different meaning in which it becomes part of a glittering, gleaming garment, descriptive of paradisiacal, prelapsarian life:

Thou has been in Eden the garden of God; every precious stone was they covering, the sardius, topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold: the workmanship of the tabrets and of they pipes was prepare in thee in the day that thou was created. (Ezek.28:13)

What we can understand from these descriptions of the carbuncle is that, while red may be its predominant colour, it is by no means its only manifestation. Like the Word, the interpreted meaning of carbuncle changes hue according to its setting and the context of its use. To paraphrase Fish, the Word is kinetic, its interpretation elastic according to text and authorial intent, but its essence lies within the circle of meanings prescribed by the interpretive community of readers, who would have drawn upon Ezekiel and many other sources.

Thus in the fifteenth century Chorle and Byrde describe in the register of the time ‘the white karbonkkel that rolleth in the wave’ (OED) A red gem or coal is not fixed as stone, but redolent, fiery, rolling. The carbuncle thus draws light in the day and emits it at night; it can be red or white in colour; it can be a hard singular gem or rolling in the waves and thus taking on a fluid character. Its transformational protean nature becomes a critical feature of its meaning - that

²⁶ The online version of the OED gives an abbreviated definition omitting the description of ‘the carbuncles of the ancients’ although it does mention the ‘mythical gem said to give out light in the dark (now historical)’. Note that the online OED, in its entry profile for the noun, describes it as one of the earliest 1% of entries recorded in the OED, with quotation evidence from texts in King Alfred’s reign.

much is clear when one follows the historical development of its etymologies. In other words it can be a dynamic metaphor that can starkly suggest its antonym: for example red, hot, fire or the harnessed energy of white, cold, sea.

Fish pointed to the same quality of ordinary language. In *Is There a Text in This Class?* (1980), he argued that distinctions drawn between literature and other forms of writing only served to impoverish all forms of writing. Thus, if literature is defined as a special discourse over against ordinary language, it trivialises the complexities of ordinary language which is 'extraordinary because at its heart is precisely the realm of values, intentions and purposes which is often assumed to be the exclusive property of literature' (Fish, 1980, p.108).

Gardam's fiction reveals the same strategy. Extraordinary objects are embedded in ordinary lives in order to illuminate how extraordinary those lives are, and the part that religious thought, feeling, motivation, and much else, plays in them. At the same time though, Gardam draws upon the literary discourse of such objects, while maintaining the flow of a modernist, realist narrative.

We can see this at work in the protean language almost everywhere in Gardam's fiction. The contrast between red (lipstick) and white (pearls) is a vehicle Gardam uses more than once and effectively, since its connotations are numerous, often quixotic and contradictory, and shall be discussed later in this chapter. There is red lipstick on the spiritually impervious lips of the young woman in *Missing the Midnight* and white on the strings of pearls (single, double and duplicitous) that wind their way through the *Old Filth* trilogy. There is red on the lips of Lady Hatt and her pearls, now warm on the neck of the newly

deceased, poor and rather ‘dotty Miss White’ as she lies in the Lady Chapel surrounded by her carefully gathered *Maltese Easter Lilies*. Thus, colours and possessions change, as fortunes do, in the ‘twinkling of an eye’ (Cor 1.15:52), with Gardam’s narrative often bordering on both the mythical and the biblical and using frameworks of contrasts, and proposed and fused meanings to suggest transformation and mystery: ‘Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump’ (1 Cor. 15: 51).

Red of course is also the blood of Christ, and white, the body of his flesh. Without the ingestion of wine (His blood) and bread (His body, the Word), there would be no Anglo-Catholic communion. Both red and white live together in the communicant by implication of their stark opposites, because they have to. To live in the present as a religious writer or reader is to live both in the truth of Christ’s bodily death in this our real time or *chronos*, but also in everlasting life, in His Spirit, in which we his religious interpretive community meet in all time, or *kairos*.

Both earthly gem and sea pearl come about through natural processes pressure or crystallisation; they are redolent because, like the Word, they are a concentration of the Spirit of themselves. In this sense they are similar to the ‘sea coal’ hidden for millennia in Saltburn’s subterranean mines before being cast to the light on the shore above. Gardam was well aware of the process, describing how ‘under the sea Boulby mine runs out invisible for more than a mile. There is special danger money paid to Boulby miners’ (Gardam, Burton & Walshaw, 1994, p.2). Gardam thus threads into the page of our present locus a far wider reaching chronological landscape that reaches from the aeons of

geological time (sea-coal) and historical carbuncle to our present post-Christian (pearl) and with it she brings both Word and its resonance.

So it is that in *Last Friends* we hear from Parable Apse, himself striding the intertidal zone, the horizon between shore and land. He is ‘the insect man in an old suit and bowler hat’ (Gardam, 2013b, p.64), a prophetic man, local lawyer and collector of sea-coal, who we have already seen patrolling the coastal sands with the pram that serves as his barrow. He collects what he calls the, ‘Black gold. Black diamond. Tiny black - and white - pearls’ (Gardam, 2013b, p.64). The words spit like sparks. He is stoking the fire and talking to the young Terry Venetski, himself intertidal, adolescent, only son of the now crippled Russian seaman and his local sea-coal gatherer wife. Parable is convincing Terry however of another inter-tidal fact, that his ‘intelligence is above these parts.’ Parable’s fire is lit by ‘a shovelful of glittering, hard dirt, like jet’, and he is directing Terry to the profession of law that will be his nemesis. ‘What is’t?’ asks Terry of Parable Apse as the coal fire ‘blazed up, hot and brilliant.’

‘Sea-coal. Washed, of course. I wash it in a bath in my yard several times a week. Out of office hours of course, and never on the Lord’s Day. In my back yard I have a pump with clear, unbounded water that cleanses like the mercy of God. The sea-coal’s what washes off the ships you know...Clean and beautiful sweet smelling, effective and free. Your mother should market it.’ (Gardam, 2013b, p.66)

Parable’s wet coal retrieved from the salt sea is washed. It gleams jet-like, baptised in the pump’s fresh water before hissing on the refining fire. It burns because it once lived, but in its demise warms both Parable and Terry.

In this inter-tidal zone we encounter Kermode's *aevum* where literature and religion meet and converse. Ordinary and yet extraordinary, sea-coal catches fire with spark and creates light. Parable Apse is a parable himself: prophet and Christ-like he emerges as if from the sea and into Terry's reluctant midst, directing him out of the desert of educational possibility in his hometown toward possibilities he might not otherwise have considered. Parable is also the metaphorical altar under the apse where the boy Terry, son of a crippled Russian sea-man and sea-coal collector, has communion with the prophet who points the way ahead. Gardam flourishes as a religious writer, both in the use of the parable as narrative within the stories themselves, but she also makes rich and complex play with metaphors. The religious dimension of her work is powered by such resonances, contrasts and merging of meanings. They carry an alchemical, poetic power in as much the same way as the Gospel of John contains no parables, because John proceeds by metaphoric narrative points, notably around light. But the joy perhaps, whether coal from the sea or Betty's pearls in the garden soil, is in their discovery, and that they are found by us, located as with *lectio divina*, in our own place and time. It occurs in a siting that links the reader's historical horizon to the imminence of Christian times to our future shared horizon, and to the very real possibility of Christ's immortality. The Word track that Fish describes as disappearing behind us and appearing only just before us, has in fact left traces, bright colours, sparks and gleams in its symbols, most particularly and explicitly evident in the Anglo-Catholic church architecture and language. As Elisabeth Jay has observed 'It is, I think no accident that three of the leading Tractarians, Newman, Keble and Williams, were poets, for they sought always to convey the spirit behind the literal word' (Jay, 1983, p.11). With these symbols and Gardam's immersion in and dwelling

in them (*meditatio*), the readers ‘walk’, not as Isaiah says, in the Old Testament ‘light of fire’ (Isaiah 1: 31), but rather, as John says in the New Testament, ‘while the light is with’ us (John 12: 35).

The receptive, reflective pearl

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field: the which when a man has found, he hideth, and he thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.’ (Matt 13: 44-46)

Pearls as we have seen occur and recur throughout Gardam’s stories. The word also means ‘seed’ (the Word), and such a seed can be ‘efficacious’ But where is this efficacious Word, that which Quakers call the Christ-seed, in Gardam’s world? Apparently anywhere, but particularly in words of poetry. In a delightful article by Gardam (2010b) on ‘bringing poetry to the streets of Sandwich’ with ‘street poetry’ (‘sometimes it’s called random droppings’), she describes putting up poster poems, (‘We spent a fortune on print and board’) in various places around Sandwich town. They are dropped like Betty’s pearls we imagine. The premise of poster poems allows Gardam a thread for a descriptive article, a paean almost, to the life of poems situated in everyday places. As with *lectio divina*, it is the poem’s reception in everyday life and lives that is with Gardam and remarked upon. Thus, following a list of places and poems dropped, we have ‘Christ if my lover were in my arms/And I in my bed again!’ (anon) stopping the traffic twice outside the art gallery owner’s corner shop. However, not everywhere is hospitable: there is a refusal by the public library to

take a poem at all 'because its noticeboard was "reserved for library business"' (Gardam, 2010b).

That The Word and words flourish in undesignated and unsanctified contexts is a device Gardam uses often and is a religious statement about the sanctity of the everyday. It calls us to what might have been there before, for instance by displaying a piece from Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* because he most likely passed through Sandwich on pilgrimage, but there is also Word to comfort the townspeople now: "A doctors' surgery was delighted with a poem by Francis Burroughs (little known) that urged the waiting-room to think not of the body's malfunctions but of the miracle that it works at all' (Gardam, 2010b).

Pearls follow Gardam's fondness of starting with an image. Lucasta Miller says that for Gardam:

Apparently tangential, random images can resurface years later in different forms, their connection to their real-life contexts severed. As [Gardam] recalls a visit she made at 21 to a descendent of Montague's in search of material for her thesis, it strikes her that she's discovered the source for an image - that of the "guilty pearls" - that she used in *Old Filth*. In real life, the eccentric Montague descendent, a married man, had tried to seduce her and offered to buy her better pearls than the Woolworth's ones she was wearing. In the novel, the pearls have been given to the protagonist's wife by her lover. (Miller, 2005)

We have seen in the first section of this chapter that Gardam's narrative art can draw upon the special qualities that objects such as carbuncles and pearls have in literary discourse, and use them in ordinary, contemporary surroundings. Pearls appear in both Gardam's novels and short stories, seemingly episodic, pouring off their wearer's neck to be received by the place beneath. In *Old Filth*, 'She took off the pearls and put them on a chair' (Gardam, 2004a, p.35) and later 'let them slip into the loose earth' (Gardam, 2004a, p.62).

As with the Word, metaphors such as the pearl have their own ‘dynamic stability’ that houses the potential to illuminate what is around them. Pearl is not only precious and natural, but the image is so long embedded in the reader’s collective consciousness, strung on such a long established biblical and poetic thread, that its resonance is very present with us almost before we read of it. It is waiting and, as with the gospels, psalms and other writings that make up the collected books of the Bible, Gardam’s writing is also. Her collected works of stories short and long is threaded with recurring metaphors, each one illuminating the context in which it finds itself. As with *lectio divina*, each reading of her narrative, sheds some light but also spiritual ‘Light’ as Quakers call it, and that Light, luminescence gives its relief to the contours of the place in which it is situated.

Pearls are illumined by the wearer as much as the aspect of the listener illumines the pearls. We see pearls briefly in Gardam’s novel *The Flight of the Maidens*. As in *Missing the Midnight*, they are worn by a confident young woman, two women this time, and also observed in the railway carriage by a protagonist not quite as sophisticated: ‘They were good-looking, well-dressed, confident and smiling. Pearls. One string each’ (Gardam, 2001a, p.66).

In the tragic short story *Rode by All With Pride* pearls and their origins are referred to in detail, only emphasising the triteness of their wearer whose successful daughter has drowned in a Wimbledon river. ‘There are people with *real* problems,’ wrote Marjorie to Jack in Tokyo, and Jack went straight out and bought Livie some pearl stud earrings (Minimoto, like her mother’s) and wrote her a delightful letter saying how little he worried about her. She was splendid’

(Gardam, 2014c, p.149). A confident young girl with red lips wear pearls in *Missing the Midnight*. We can see the light reflected in the moving pearls:

She was the most lovely looking girl in a glorious red coat. Her expensive hair was dark and silky, with shadows in it. Long pearls swung. Big pearl earrings. Huge, soft Italian bag. The hand that rested on the door latch outside wore a huge square diamond. Shiny red lipstick. She smiled down. He smiled up. They were enchanted with each other and enchanted because they felt their families were enchanted too. (Gardam, 1998b, p.7)

In Gardam's narratives red and white are sometimes in the same foreground so that the contrast is even more marked. There is an ambiguity about the colour red, similar to the ambivalence of the carbuncle noted earlier, one that is symbolic of treachery or of empathy, or both.

Thus it transpires that Filth's wife Betty has two sets of pearls: the first 'my famous pearls' are given to her by motherless Filth on their betrothal on condition of a promise from Betty that she must never betray him. The pearls had been given to Filth by an older woman he had met on a sea- crossing. Mrs Robertson was briefly and barely known by Filth for she dies on the same crossing. In *Old Filth* she is the signifier of some maternal continuity his mother who died shortly after his birth could not give. Filth gives these pearls to Betty at their engagement:

He dropped a little cloth bag into her lap and she took out from it the most magnificent string of pearls. 'Yours' he said. They're old. Someone gave them to me. When I was sixteen. In the war. Just in time. She died a few minutes later. She said "One day you can give them to your sweetheart." (Gardam, 2004a, p.24)

The second set, 'my guilty pearls', are a gift from Veneering, Filth's long-term rival in Law who at the time of Betty's betrothal also becomes Betty's

lover. Thus the second set, the double (and by implication, duplicitous) string, become 'my guilty pearls' and the ones Betty lets slip into the loosed garden soil into which she then quietly pours her last breath. When speaking of Gardam's pearls Lucasta Miller says 'Gardam gives us a beautifully understated symbol and in the words of novelist and critic Amanda Craig, it is a symbol "of the way gifts get passed on unknowingly" (Miller, 2015). In the first of the trilogy, *Old Filth* Veneering telephones Filth's wife Betty and asks her,

'Are you wearing the amethysts?'
 'Don't be ridiculous. It's nine o'clock in the morning'
 'Pearls'
 'Oh well, yes'
 'Touch them. Are they warm? Are they mine? Or his? Would he know?'
 'Yours. No, he wouldn't notice. Are you drunk?'
 (Gardam, 2004a, p.46)

A similar conversation takes place in the second of the trilogy, *The Man in the Wooden Hat* (Gardam, 2009c, p.184). 'Are you wearing my pearls?' asks Veneering of Betty. When they do meet later Veneering observes 'You're not wearing the pearls' (Gardam, 2009c, p.177). Memories overlap one another and it becomes harder to distinguish past from present, or which episode comes where on the narrative thread, as they grow nearer to death and the place where all time meets. Gardam's characters centre round memories in an episodic way: symbols, the Word and words are the true meaning, never mind in which order they come. The symbolism of pearls from both *Filth* and *Veneering* however is more earthly - it is one of possession in love. This is reminiscent of the idea of tangible ownership in Carol Ann Duffy's sensuous poem *Warming Her Pearls* (Duffy, 1987)

Next to my own skin, her pearls. My mistress
 Bids me wear them, warm them, until evening
 When I'll brush her hair. At six, I place them
 Round her cool, white throat. All day I think of her. (Duffy, 1987)

Pearls are a poignant symbol of infertility. Just after childless Betty dies, following her pearls into the garden soil, a young neighbour finds them. The boy entering the garden and playing with the older woman's pearls is reminiscent of Tom in the children's book *Tom's Midnight Garden* (Pearce, 2008). In the book Tom's garden is occupied by a playmate, the Victorian, Hatty. Hatty becomes Tom's playmate, although she would have been an old woman by the time he is a young boy.

Of the youthfulness of pearls it is said that 'there has been a tradition that pearl, and coral and turquoise stone that have lost their colours may be recovered by burying in the earth' (OED 1626 Bacon Sykva 380). Perhaps Betty's pearls in being buried have not only been restored to life, but also with their fertile blooming produced this boy child. Perhaps also the boy, being impartial, will turn the pearls to good use and they will reflect the light of the owner. In the meantime Filth waves off the boy, glad never to see his sometime rival's treacherous gift again.

Later, the pouch (womb) containing Mrs Robertson's pearls gifted to Betty are taken by Filth on his long home journey to the country of his birth, 'The Malay States' where he 'died as he stepped off the plane' (*Last Friends*, 2013b, p.16). The man, both son and husband, returns his unborn children, the womb filled with unfertilized ova, back to the place of his conception. The fertile

sheddings of the unfertilised womb layer like those of the nacreous pearl.

In Eastern Christianity the pearl is ‘a small part of the consecrated bread’²⁷ Perhaps the incorruptible pearl raised out of the soil has recovered some of its lustre, this eternal life after burial and emits its potent Christian message if the reader is open to seeing it that way. There are in this scene then resonances of *The Book of Common Prayer* in ‘The Order for The Burial of the Dead’. This is the form that both Betty and Filth’s funerals follow, one in which chiasmus occurs, the rhetorical strategy we discuss later in this chapter, with reference to mother-daughter relations:

the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.
For this corruptible must put on in corruption, and this mortal must
put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on in
corruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality; then
shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is
swallowed up in victory. (1 Cor. 15: 20)

Pearls accompany Filth into marriage and onto death with a bubbly delight unusual for him. On his engagement Fiscal Smith says to Filth “”And you won’t mind giving presents to the bridesmaids?” “*What?*” “I take it they all want the same. A string of pearls.” And Eddie was suddenly transported with boyish joy’ (Gardam, 2004a, p.73). At his imminent death pearls become a symbol not only for Filth’s triumph over Veneering (keeping Betty as his wife and outliving his rival) but also for the new life ahead (Gardam, 2004a, p.201) ‘Old Filth had his passport - yes, he felt that in the bag. He had Pat’s brush. He had Miss

²⁷ OED CDL Wiseman Unreality Angel, Belief 1853 II.406

In the Coptic liturgy..after the division of the Host, the priest shall take one pearl (or particle) of the three above named.

Robertson's pouch. He felt fat beads inside it and pulled them out. A great, string of pearls...Lightness almost mirth filled Eddie as the ship [carried him]... Over the Styx.' Just before his death Betty's un-conceived ova in the womb become 'fat' as if fertile. Whatever they are, they are his, as Betty was his in the end too.

But not everything to do with pearls is infertility. Gardam shows this wonderfully well as she continues her theme at the young solicitor's wedding, mentioned earlier. The solicitor had previously made it plain that she was never going to get married or have a child. However, the one and only time she meets aged and childless Filth, she but is impregnated with the idea of having a child and of arranging the pre-requisite marriage. At her long resisted but delightfully entered wedding, guests arrive and the description ends of a cast of characters both fertile and biblical in Gardam's use of archaic language: 'Babs turned up with her hair short and blood-red...Vanessa gave Claire the rope of pearls she'd worn to the altar to look after until she returned. Claire took care of her heart [red] to be sure of seeing the grandchild' (Gardam, 2004a, p.166).

In *The Summer After the Funeral* pearls become tainted by Mrs Messenger's comments, but then are redeemed by the proximity of the lilies:

'Lovely pearls rose and fell contentedly now above Posie's modesty vest and brown wool cardigan suit. She wore no half-hoop - her father (a rich bishop) had always been everything to her and had been a long time dying releasing her rather past marriageable age' (Gardam, 1983b, p.34).

Then the unpleasant Mrs Messenger addresses the protagonist Athene regarding inheritance from Aunt Posie 'You'll get the pearls. Very nice for you, too. They'll suit you. It doesn't seem fair though. Some people have all - I suppose you know she's got funny habits?' (Gardam, 1983b, p.46) Athene receives one of her mother's letters quoting the King James Bible liberally as she does and this time referring to 'the lilies of the field'. Whatever her mother means by this reference, Athene is comforted by her mother's familiar handwriting and so her toiling over Mrs Messenger's tactless remark ceases.

In the short story *The Easter Lilies* the owner of the pearls is cool, heartless, moneyed, glamorous, 'brick-red in the cheeks and vermillion in the body and her face an expression of fierce malice.' with 'the dangle of unsteady earrings' (Gardam, 2014a, p.171). The humble Miss White retrieves the hard-won and well-travelled Maltese lilies from Lady Hatt and carries them, breathless, to the church where she fans them out on the Lady Chapel floor. Then:

Lying in their midst was a magnificent string of pearls. 'Her pearls!' thought Miss White. 'They must be Paul's friend's pearls. They must have dropped off. Oh how very dreadful!' She touched them with her fingertip. 'They are beautiful,' she thought. 'How dreadful. I must put them in the safe. She won't know what happened to them. (Gardam, 2014c, p.172)

Miss White, almost seduced by the sensuous pearls, desists. She thinks mostly of their owner who must be missing them.

The pearls glowed among the lilies. The light of the vestry where the safe was, looked far away. Miss white looked at the lilies and then at the pearls and thought, 'The pearls are more beautiful. It ought not to be so. The lilies are weeds after all. And they are dead. I am old and a fool.' (Gardam, 2014c, p.173)

Miss White's heart finally fails among the bruised lilies on the Lady Chapel floor. But there is justice. She has died amidst the natural lilies of the field that Christ said 'toiled not.' Further, Miss White has inadvertently left to the church funds an inheritance in the form of the pearls that the church assumes are hers. Miss White's purity of intent into which the pearls have been drawn has been shared amongst the religious community. They are reflecting the light of their current guardian.

She had left everything to the church, of course, and there was practically nothing except her small flat - and the pearls, which everyone was astonished to hear about. They were spectacular, said a sympathetic jeweller, and he gave two thousand pounds for them. (Gardam, 2014c, p.173)

A superficial reading of the ironic inversions of plot might take this as an unconscious alms-giving, but there is more than that in Gardam's description of the event. The pearls have become what they were in their original state - part of what the Diggers and early Quaker movement called 'the common treasury for all' (Winstanley, 1989). It does not take much to understand the metaphor. Pearls like the Word are found in the salt and the fresh waters of our given world, words and language also being part of that common treasury of the readership community, the context in which we understand the Word, God's gift through Gardam to the readership community. Gardam never preaches to or admonishes the reader. If we are aware of the resonances then, as readers in the religious interpretive community, we receive the pearls from the religious writer with thanks, graciously, as if the left hand of Gardam had not even told

its author the parable the right hand was penning.²⁸ Humility, an enduring religious quality, is exhibited here in the fine craft of Gardam's narrative, where, as often happens in Gardam's fiction, the authorial voice is at once both present and yet removed. It is present in the use of the pluperfect tense ('she had left'), an interruption of the author's use of present tense used when describing the scene in the Lady Chapel. The conversational voice indicated in phrases such as 'of course' and 'practically' indicate that the narrator is now present and confiding in the reader. The authorial voice is removed at the point of death, allowing the reader to move in on the gap, that Iser termed 'a moment of indeterminacy' of meaning (Iser, 1978, p.182-95). In working to fill the gap Gardam is encouraging the reader to conduct her own *meditatio* on the scene thus involving her all the more in the story's unfolding. Gardam is both absent and present. Once she even encourages the reader's absence from the scene but involves us with speculation about the value of the pearls. That pull towards the material is only momentary and elicits the reader's compensatory pull back to the scene in the Lady Chapel. The reader has been pro-active in her move towards the scene and is now that she is entering into a religious space, also participatory in it. This is the objective of *lectio divina* and it is one that Gardam has fulfilled in encouraging the reader to 'be still and know' (Ps.46: 10). It is a gracious act of both author and reader to get out of the way of the story of a minor character who, under the story's circumstances, has proved to be almost invisible. Humility is thus a presence in the text, not only born by its characters, but like the Word, in its very authoring.

²⁸ 'But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth.' Matt. 6: 3)

Ecumenical community in Gardam's fiction

The central concept of the Word as light needs no introduction for as many have observed it is a central metaphor in John's gospel, (for example, in John 1:17, 'But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin'). What is interesting, however, is to compare how three different Christian movements understand and use the metaphor, what differentiates them and what they have in common. In the following analysis I define three words: Anglo-Catholic '*sparks*' (Herbert, 2015, p.70); Benedictine '*sparklett*' (LeClercq, 1974, p.182); and Quaker '*sparks of fire*' (Cope, 1971, p.202), all derived from the same metaphor for the Word (*spark*).

The Word '*spark*' occurs several times in the Bible, most memorably in Job: 'Yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upwards' (Job. 5: 7) and 'Out of his mouth go burning lamps, and sparks of fire leap out' (Job. 41: 19). It also occurs in Isaiah: 'Behold, all ye that kindle a fire that compass yourselves about with sparks: walk in the light of your fire and in the sparks that ye have kindled' (Isaiah. 1:31). There are other associated references to the root Word *spark* that we can explore within the three main religious influences of Gardam's writing.

Benedictine ‘Sparkletts’

Gardam retreats at the seventh century Benedictine Minster Abbey²⁹, Kent

whose history she relates here:

Then, farther south in Kent, there was St. Mildred, whose mother, in 670, founded the minster that still stands there in good nick with nine nuns who are an ever-present help in trouble to all religious and none. Mildred was also the master of a shipping line that ran up and down the Thames estuary. There is a shadowy little carving of her face in the gate. They are Catholic nuns there, and do not ask them their opinion of female bishops. They are too busy. But, I’m sure they pray about it. (Gardam, 2014f, p.17)

As with all Benedictine abbeys of the English Benedictine Congregation, ‘Ecumenical Dialogue has always been an important part of the life at Minster Abbey’ (Minster Abbey Nuns, 2016). Benedictine communities in Britain include Catholics, Anglicans of various persuasions as well as ecumenical communities that include Methodists. Those affiliated to the Benedictine communities, oblates and lay members, include baptised Christians belonging to these and other churches as well as some (unbaptized) Quakers. One such Quaker, finding the contemplation familiar, was baptised as a Roman Catholic, and became the Prior at Prinknash Abbey. The Benedictine Basil Pennington points out the similarity between early Quaker and Benedictine approach to the Bible in his introduction to the Quaker Michael Birkel’s book *Engaging Scripture: Reading the Bible with Early Friends*: ‘the approach of the early Quakers was very much that of the earlier patristic tradition, a sapiential approach which allows the inspired Word to form our minds and hearts’ (Birkel, 2005, p.x). We can

²⁹ ‘The nuns at Minster have been a great strength...I stayed after my husband died’ (Gardam, 2016c).

comprehend therefore that Benedictine membership, whether monk, nun or lay member includes the main religious movements that are the focus of Gardam's ecumenical religious sense, including Quaker. Thus, it would be surprising if the hospitable ecumenism reflected in the *Rule* did not make itself apparent in the tone of Gardam's own writing. Indeed Benedictines are specifically mentioned in three of her novels, *The Flight of the Maidens* (2001), *The Summer After the Funeral* (1973) and *Faith Fox* (1997) as well as in her short story, *The People on Privilege Hill* (2007). Benevolent, usually in the background, Benedictines are none-the-less present, much as the priest is in *Missing the Midnight* or indeed as the childless Filth himself metaphorically becomes. In the novel *Old Filth* the result of Filth's conversation with the brash, young lawyer Vanessa is that she finds herself, much to her initial surprise converted to the idea of marriage, children and a church wedding (Gardam, 2004a, p. 149-166). 'Thus is the world peopled' pronounces Gardam, both truthfully and biblically (Gardam, 2004a, p.166). Peopling is no respecter it seems of which church (or none) one belongs to. Peopling is ecumenical.

The Benedictine ecumenical approach resonates with Gardam's own personal and literary approach. There is unity in the Word evidenced in the various Christian churches embraced by the Benedictine movement, a movement that existed before the divisions between the churches were as firmly established as they are now. As much as the Benedictines naturally find commonality in the Word over boundaries of Christian belief, so also does Gardam restate the importance of the Word in her own religious literary boundaries. Amanda Craig speaks of this phenomenon when she says that

Gardam, ‘shows us that what matters in life is kindness, imagination, community and work’ (Craig, 2014).³⁰

If, as I argue, the Benedict movement is important to the religious dimension of Gardam’s work we might look to find evidence of it in her fiction. In Part 2 I argued that *lectio divina*, method of reading text common in the medieval world, was adopted as part of Benedictine scholarly culture. I also argued that this method of interpretive practice was an early form of reader response critique. We shall use this method to uncover the religious influences in Gardam’s fiction. Furthermore, that being so - and following the ecumenical context just outlined - it would be reasonable to ask whether the Benedictine and the Quaker and Anglo-Catholic movements have anything in common in their reading practices and their representation of religious experiences, and whether Gardam uses this in her fiction. We can begin by considering LeClercq’s description of the ‘Literature of the Benedictines’ because, it being the earliest of all three movements, hints at that which the Quaker and Anglo-Catholic styles might have inherited from the Benedictines. LeClercq describes a Benedictine stylistic marker that might encourage a slower reading pace and thus enhance a reader response to sacred text not unlike *lectio divina*. I shall describe it first in the Benedictine, then the Anglo-Catholic and Quaker style.

LeClercq describes how the Benedictine’s personal favourite readings, *sparkletts*, were collected, copied into small books and arranged in groups

³⁰ Benedictines consider prayer (five offices and one mass) and *lectio divina* (up to three hours a day) their most important work.

according to source. The individual groups or *florigelum* were then available for the Benedictine to sip and savour as a bee does honey. They were not for exegesis, but rather the succour and inspiration of the Benedictine here and now. They were read and re-read using the techniques of *lectio divina*, which began of course with the process of copying, within which there was opportunity for *meditatio*. Thus we are reminded of Guigo's descriptions of the steps of *lectio divina* in which he extended the alimentary metaphor of tasking and rumination, which, as Carruthers points out, is a common metaphor for understanding from text among medieval authors, to describe the digestion and efficacy of the Word in *lectio divina*,

'Sparklett' is the Word in action, a spark or kindling that lights the imagination, and fans the flame of the reader's relationship with it. The Word's centre is redolent with a firey Light that is both illuminating to the text and warming to the individual heart. It has infinite capacity to catch the light of the Benedictine, her community and religious interpretive communities that make the Christian world. (LeClercq, 1974, p.182)

Quaker 'Sparks of fire'

Gardam retreats at Minster Abbey, as we have noted; but she also attends Canterbury Quaker Meeting. 'Nowadays', Gardam says, 'I veer between being a Quaker and my ingrained Anglo-Catholicism' (Miller, 2005). In our interview she said, 'I wish I had the courage to be a Quaker' (Gardam, 2013b) Certainly the landscape where Gardam grew up in the North East of England was full of Quaker biblical influences. In *The Iron Coast* she describes:

Joseph Pease the Quaker...rebuilt the town of Saltburn on a higher, cliff-top level in the pattern set put in the *Book of Revelation*. It was to be the Celestial City, with streets named after precious stones: Diamond Street, Pearl Street, Ruby Street, Amber Street. They look quite modest today - solid Victorian gables, and no gardens to speak of, no fountains, no

seraphim, but at the time they seemed a metaphor for grace. (Gardam, Burton & Walshaw, 1994, p.7)

From the start in the Quaker movement women were considered equal to Quaker men and were no less visionary. Gill Skidmore describes writings by eighteenth-century Quaker women in her book *Strength in Weakness* (Skidmore, 2003). Quaker women over the last four hundred years are accustomed to speaking truth to power and constantly re-negotiating what that means within their own conscience, through journaling and with the discerning support of those Friends with whom they worship. Early Friends such as Margaret Fell published just as prolifically, for example Fell's *Women's Speaking Justified* used scripture to prove her argument for women's equality with men (Fell, 1666).

Jackson Cope, in his article on seventeenth-century Quaker style quotes Fox who in a similar way collected his experiences in a journal that was published posthumously. The sparks of the Word are for him metallic, flinty, horse-shoe against stone in the cold air:

When first I set my horse's feet a-top of the Scottish ground I felt the Seed of God to sparkle about me like innumerable sparks of fire, though there is abundance of a thick, cloddy earth of hypocrisy and falseness that is a-top and a briary, brambly nature which is to be burnt up with God's word. (Cope, 1971, p.202)

Cope describes early Friends as 'evidencing a tendency to break down the boundary between literalness and metaphor' to the extent that 'instead of merely indicating a point of resemblance between two differentiable entities, it has totally merged them' (Cope, 1971, p.202). Thus Word is a seed, but also a spark - a fusion of meaning, but also a fusion of the individual within the

ecstatic moment. It is a strategy not unlike Wordsworth's transcendental moments of epiphany in nature, 'spots of time' in which past, present and future merge. This merging of literalness and metaphor leads to plain, bordering on curt, language. Fox declares when Robinson 'asked from whence I came and I told him, "From the Lord"' (Cope, 1971, p.204). Cope points out that this closeness between the literal and metaphorical was founded in the gospel of John, some parts of which were also circular or 'incantatory': 'In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God' (John 1:1). (This incidentally follows the circular pattern of *lectio divina* during which the reader returns from Word to words of her experience and back again to Word, the one reinforcing the other, and by accretion gathering meaning, always 'listening with the ear of the heart' as we have read, seeking not just where words come from, but where Word goes to (*lectio divina*).)

So important was the sustaining omnipresence of the Word, which was to Quakers the 'Christ-Seed' over all, that it was also likened to mother's milk. Fox used an alimentary metaphor familiar from Guigo's description of *lectio divina*: "feed upon the milk of the Word that was before tongues...[and then go] up into The Word Christ, whose Name is called The Word of God" (Cope, 1971, p.206). And, as with *lectio divina*, Word was nothing without "Grace that comes from the fullness of Christ the Saviour." As with *lectio divina* too, for Quakers speaking the name was also vital: 'The process of salvation involves naming of the name' (Cope, 1971, p.206).

However, Stephen Crisp, even in 1666 foresaw the sad end where Quakers' recourse to the Word was bound. Cope quotes him, saying that it was 'language not morals' that caused the Quaker decline: 'Actions [are] sometimes

blameworthy, the Words and Speech again corrupted, and run into the old Channel of the World...and the pure language learned in the Light, in the time of their Poverty and Simplicity, almost lost and forgotten, and so the work of God which he wrought, in a manner laid to waste' (Crisp, 1694, pp.122-3). This same phenomenon continues with Friends today. Not only has the language and proximity to the Word almost completely vanished, but so has the condition that members should believe in Christ. Gardam has contributed to the restoration of the Quaker spirit in present time in the contemporary short story *The Meeting House* (to be described in the following chapter in comparison with a work by Iris Murdoch) and in the voices of the Quaker couples such as the Stonehouses and the Satterleys in her Second World War novel *The Flight of the Maidens* (2001a). It is as if in recognising Spirit in Quaker meetings Gardam is then able, through her earlier Anglo-Catholic imbibing of the Word, to give expression to it in the same manner that Fox did, with all the confidence in the everyday manifestations that appear from the Word's, the Christ-seed's, presence. Cope goes so far as to say that 'the incantatory style is an epistemological tool: it appears when Christ is talking within the Quaker' (Cope, 1971, p.213).

Anglo-Catholic 'Sparks'

Anglo-Catholic 'bright sparks' are so named by the Anglo-Catholic poet George Herbert in his poem *The Starre*. In this poem the Word is the 'bright spark' that 'shot from a brighter place, ...\to take bad lodging in my heart;' and 'First with thy fire-work burn to dust/Folly, and worse than folly, lust:/ Then with thy light refine,/and make it shine' (Herbert, 2015, p.70). Bright sparks are for Herbert,

the Word that ‘burns to dust’ and its ‘light’ one that refines (Herbert, 2015, p.70).

Gardam acknowledges the childhood influence of Anglo-Catholic discourse on her current register and writing in a description of her childhood: ‘All these years *The Book of Common Prayer* was washing over me and entangling itself in my memory for ever’ (Fraser, 2015, p.120). Miller describes how

Religion was the centre of Gardam’s mother’s life, and it crops up in most of Gardam’s novels in some form or another. “...Mum was a tremendous Anglo-Catholic. Very impressive, actually. She made me go to church for years - I still don’t want to because of that.”...it doesn’t mean that Christianity is something Gardam has rejected in adulthood. She still values her mother’s influence: “I had the prayer book instilled into me without trying - a great present to give a child...I was raised on *The Book of Common Prayer*.” (Miller, 2005)

As a self-described ‘cradle Anglo-Catholic’ (Gardam, 2013d) Gardam is steeped in the Word and the Word has thus become part of her conversational and narrative speech. At such times Gardam excels at the mystical, the Anglican poet George Herbert’s ‘something understood’ (Herbert, 2015, p.48), so that it is not merely the Word read aloud (*lectio*), but the Word meditated upon (*meditatio*) that Gardam writes for us. Gardam herself feels sadness about the decline of readers’ familiarity with the Word:

I find myself tired by my promotion of what in my childhood would have been a perfectly comprehensible novel- which in itself is quite an interesting, but sad fact. What we, I think, are having to face is that the musical, spiritual richness of the liturgy is gone - except among the elect. Whoever the elect are. But another language will emerge. (Gardam, 2013c)

Here Gardam is returning to an earlier theme: ‘In the new [novel] *Last Friends* I am back with the Anglo-Catholics. My childhood church was the Oxford Movement’ (Gardam, 2013c).

The Anglo-Catholic church is rich in such symbols. One only has to read a description of Gardam’s family church, Christ Church Coatham, to appreciate the poetry of this in its architecture:

Font, Pulpit, Sedila, Reredos, and Piscina 1865 by Sir Gilbert Scott. Plain octagonal font on four engaged shafts. Octagonal pulpit drum on six engaged shafts, has offset buttresses at angles and carved panels. A three bay Sedilla has trefoil-headed openings and angels in spandrels. (Archbishops’ Council, 2016)

We can see echoes of this architectural appreciation in Gardam’s description of the Belgian church in the short story *The Virgins of Bruges* from the short story collection *The People on Privilege Hill* (2007). It is interesting to note in this description how her appreciation of architecture blends with its effects, notably those of light and colour produced by the architecture:

But up in the chancel, which was as high and wide as a cathedral chancel, everything blazed crimson and gold and was crowded with people, and behind them, in all the niches for saints and bishops, there was nothing but the gleam of coloured glass. (Gardam, 2007, p. 159)

The comparison of the two passages is striking. The first focuses on architecture as object, historical and technical. The second directs the reader’s attention to the historical experience and the overwhelming sense of bright light and sparks of colour. The first is a dry list of architectural styles, the second a phenomenological and aesthetic reader response to the experience of being in that church at that time.

What will be gleaming here also is the sanctuary light signifying the presence of Christ in both Catholic and Anglo-Catholic churches. Gardam enjoys this symbolism. In her correspondence with me she describes a Saxon brooch, gold with a red stone at its centre: 'I am so touched to have found a poem in a new publication from Woodstock called 'Brooch at Redcar'. A Saxon brooch has been found on the Dunes - very beautiful' (Gardam, 2013c). The brooch had lain near the site of the old shipwreck on which Gardam played as a child. The red stone is compelling in much the same way as the carbuncle we encountered at the start of this chapter.

Comparison of Anglo-Catholic and Quaker

For an incisive comparison of Quaker and Anglo-Catholic use of the Word, Cope's commentary on the proto Anglo-Catholic, Bishop Lancelot Andrewes (1555-1626) is a helpful place to begin. Cope describes the Quaker condensing of language, the 'incantatory style', as 'an incredible repetition, a combining and recombining of a cluster of words and phrases drawn from scripture.' He notes that this seems initially to be, 'highly reminiscent of the "witty" Anglican sermons made popular by Bishop Andrewes [the proto-Anglo-Catholic] in the age of the first James, and revived self-consciously in some Establishment pulpits after the Restoration' (Cope, 1971, p.209). However, Cope finds Andrewes 'carefully controlled divisioning and logically developed examination of the terms he is treating' means that 'he anatomizes his terms until he can relate the nerves giving each life.' Quakers differ. As Fox, for instance, 'breasts forward on the sound waves of his exhortation, he loses sight of the grammatical structure.' Repeating the Word is 'hypnotic', a 'vortex of the divine mystery' in which Fox

‘sees the Light at the centre’. Hypnotic repetition and incantation is part of the Quaker style. As Cope puts it, the ‘incantation of the “Name” has undercut the progression implicitly in grammar because it has revealed the heart of a world above time’ (Cope, 1971, p.209).

In Gardam we might expect to see both Anglo-Catholic and Quaker treatments of the Word: both the Anglo-Catholic Andrewes ‘anatomical’ ‘grammar’ and the Quaker ‘hypnotic’ ‘incantation’ whose ‘Light is at the centre.’ Gardam herself said to me ‘I think you are the only one who has spotted my uncertainty about whether I am High Anglican or Quaker. In the new one [novel], *Last Friends*, I am back with the Anglo-Catholics’ (Gardam, 2013b). We can see this tension played out in the relationships that Gardam describes between characters, and especially the relationships between mothers and daughters.

Anglo-Catholic Mothers and Quaker Daughters

Mothers and daughters are prevalent in Gardam’s novels. Their relationships tend to a type, where there is tension between Anglo-Catholic (read duty/routine) and Quaker (read Truth/experience). Examples of these two religious attitudes in dialogue between Anglo-Catholic mother and attitudinally Quaker daughter include: *The Flight of the Maidens* (Mrs Fallows and Hetty); *A Long Way From Verona* (Mrs Vye and Jessica); *The Summer After the Funeral* (Mrs Price and Athene); *Last Friends* (Dulcie and Susan); *Faith Fox* (Thomasina and Faith), and in her short stories *Missing the Midnight* (Un-named mother and

Esther); *Lunch With Ruth Sykes* (Mrs Thessally and Rosalind) and *Rode By All With Pride* (Marjorie Partridge and Olivia) amongst others.

Daughter Hetty's description of her mother Mrs Fallowes in *The Flight of the Maidens* (2001) is fairly exemplary of the relationships. It is given in conversation with her friends where they regularly meet in the church graveyard: 'Ma's pretty hard-line NT. Jesus first and always. *New Testament. Book of Common Prayer. Anglo-Catholic.*' Gardam the narrator then expands the religious theme: 'her mother strove after a stringent goodness, the moral rectitude which she herself had always been expected to achieve as a child and in which, filled with High Church guilt, she felt she had failed' (Gardam, 2001a, p.7).

Mrs Fallowe's daughter's gifts lie more in, as Quakers say, that she, 'has a sense of the other's condition' (QFP. 19:02). Hetty knows two Quaker families: the local and childless Stonehouses who take in refugees and the Satterleys who run a guest house a train ride away in the Lakeland hills. Hetty's 'one asset' is 'the primitive gift to the timid: the ability to identify with anyone she met, to see inside their head and hear their thoughts and to imitate and, when passion struck, even to become them' (Gardam, 2001a, p.8). There are echoes here of Paul's letter to Timothy in which he observes that 'God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind' (2 Tim. 1: 7).

Cleveland society expresses the difference between Hetty's parents Mr Fallowes, ex-Oxford University, First World War soldier, now grave-digger, was 'unscathed in body, but shattered to bits in the mind' (Gardam, 2001a, p.3) and this was why she was poor. Mrs Kitty Fallowes and Hetty negotiate the

difference between Mrs Fallows 'stringent goodness' and Hetty's 'primitive gift to the timid.' This difference is the source of much of the novel's tension, a tension in which Hetty is constantly trying to flee the claustrophobia of her mother's neurotic construct for her (for example to a Quaker guesthouse in the Lake District hotly pursued by her mother bearing fruitcake) and then feeling guilty for storing her mother's daily letters unopened under her bed.

Meanwhile, Hetty's mother, Mrs Fallows, who suffers not only from neurosis, but also hypochondriasis, finds exceptionally that her symptoms are based on fact. She is hospitalised, but too late. However, even in straitened health Mrs Fallows has managed before her demise to organise a posthumous correspondence with her daughter. It comes in the form of a pre-ordered bouquet, delivered for Hetty's arrival at her new London College a month later, just as she begins the more liberating episode of her life. Hetty says of the flowers to the other 'maidens': 'She ordered them from Moyses Stevens in Oxford Street last month. To be delivered today, with a note she wrote' (Gardam, 2001a, p.277). In the course of Hetty's time with the Quaker Slatterley's her capacity for considering the other point of view and realising the limits of her own has changed enough to appreciate that her mother's love for her daughter and her faith were not only about Anglo-Catholic duty, but rather just that: an expression of love. It was a strength that persisted even in the face of Hetty's father's own incapacity to show practical signs of consistent care for either mother or daughter.

What remains in the end, in the manner of Revelation, reminiscent of the Quaker Pease's jewelled streets of Saltburn, is what Hetty sees ahead. What she sees is described in terms of light:

She turned from the trees to the College buildings behind her, where all the lights were blazing. Young people were running and shouting and laughing inside. Above the roofs, the London sky was rosy, not with sunset but the lights of the great city. (Gardam, 2001a, p.278)

It is a revelation, both emotional and religious:

And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it. (Rev.21:23-240)

Not all Gardam's scenic descriptions of light are of such illustrious places, though they are made equally so by the light. Here is an extract from Gardam's novel *Bilgewater*. It is set in Gardam's place of origin - the North East coast. The teenage Bilgewater views Teeside from a night bus on the hill above, 'the cells of all its little towns floating nearer to each other' (Gardam, 1997, p.138). It provides both light and perspective:

Far away behind the twenty thousand identical streets were the lights of some unloved tower blocks and beyond these a city of fluorescent light, pencil chimneys with small orange paint-brush heads of flame, flares, blazes of fire from furnaces, and wafting smells of gas.' (Gardam, 1997a, p.138)

Meanwhile, in *The Flight of the Maidens*, it is another Quaker couple, the Stonehouses, who have housed the Jewish evacuee, Liselotte. This fact had caused the Anglo-Catholic Mrs Fallowes some indignancy for Quakers had 'renounced the Sacraments' (Gardam, 2001a, p.55) and were by implication unfit carers of anyone. After the death of Mrs Fallowes however it is in fact Mrs Stonehouse the Quaker who speaks up for Mrs Fallowes posthumously, reminding her bereaved daughter Hetty of the promise she made to her mother that she would go up to university. Hetty expresses her misgivings about going to university to Mrs Stonehouse over the ironing. 'I can't go. I can't go to

College...It's too soon' saying that it is best 'to go on living [in the town] as mother did.' The childless Quaker foster mother Mrs Stonehouse reminds Hetty firmly 'That is what she always prayed you wouldn't do' (Gardam, 2001, p.265). Here, using the common language of prayer, reconciliation is made by Mrs Stonehouse both between the deceased Mrs Fallows and herself and Mrs Fallows and her daughter. It is an extraordinary moment of ecumenical domestic grace between Quaker and Anglo-Catholic, mother and daughter.

Hetty is surprised to discover that her father is in fact to be taken in by the Quaker Stonehouse's as the 'gardener'. Thus is the world, if not 'peopled', (as it was by the young lawyer Vanessa in *Old Filth*), at least finding its 'people' taken care of in surprising ways. As the critic Craig has said earlier, Gardam's novels show a 'kindness', and that kindness is saved from sentimentality by the acuity of Gardam's observation. Such kindness is hospitable, practical, timely and often intergenerational and ecumenical. What Gardam has demonstrated in this one of many similar examples, is that both are made whole in the other.

It would be easy to assume that the Anglo-Catholics live by the letter and Quakers by the Spirit, but this would be a false antinomy. Through her Anglo-Catholic and Quaker characters Gardam has co-opted the grammar of the Anglo-Catholic Word and the centring of the Quaker incantatory Word, illuminating them both in the common intent of loving one another. Such literary works are nothing less than reconciliatory and in the long tradition of peace-making.

The Anglo-Catholic poet Herbert perhaps best sums up the reconciliation of apparently opposing expression of the Word, the opposing elements of fire,

water and air that exist in the ecumenical interpretive community. Here is the first verse of his poem *On the Pure and Worldly*.

From the battle of water and of fire (if we trust the doctors)
Is born the tranquil air:
So from an irreligious worldly man that Puritan
A good Christian can be hammered out.
(Herbert, 2015, p.239)

Whether the Word be declared as Benedictine inspirational ‘Sparkletts’, Quaker seeding ‘Sparks’ or Anglo-Catholic refining ‘Bright Sparks’, its dwelling amongst us cannot be incarnate without our engagement in saying it out loud (in Anglo-Catholic liturgy, Quaker ministry or Benedictine *lectio divina*). Something of Gardam’s cradle Anglo-Catholic grammar of the Word provides the essential tension between structures for the now Wordless Quaker incantatory style. Gardam renders this superbly well in the narrative and resolution of her characters’ everyday lives, and if we have ‘ears to hear’, of our own life also.

Throughout this chapter we have explored the images of light, colour and gems, specifically pearls, which Gardam uses in her fiction. We have seen how she deploys the images, scriptural resonances to add rich dimension to forms of narrative that appear to be simple narratives, literal stories of ordinary communities. But the sophistication of Gardam’s art lies in the interpretive depth of the narratives and particularly in the rich seam of religious reference all the more effective for the gap into which our own reverence can fall. She manages what Kermode describes in his book *Forms of Attention* and what could be a reference to Gardam’s recovery in her fiction of the Word literal and metaphorical in carbuncle, pearl, sea coal and spark:

Statues may be recovered by excavation or dragged from the sea, jewelry found in tombs, paintings in attics; but virtue comes into play (in the guise of opinion or knowledge) only after that, when the objects need to be recognized, conserved, and talked about. Opinion probably condemned them in the first place. Prejudiced preferences form a large part of the history of art and of documents. The schoolmasters and professors who abolished most of Greek tragedy were, as the saying goes, only doing their job. It is well, then, to remember that opinion is not always on the side of virtue, that it can be a means to oblivion as well as the main defense against it. (Kermode, 1987 p.74)

Can Word like the pearl wait to be discovered, or is Word in danger of being corrupted in a non- listening context, by deceivers? In a review in *The Spectator* Gardam is impatient with the novelist Alice Thomas Ellis's book *God Has Not Changed* (Ellis 2004). Ellis stated in it that 'Be still is a stagnant thing.' Gardam thinks differently and says so: 'it is rather "Shut up and listen."' (Gardam, 2004b) Gardam's review of Ellis is rather pointedly called *A Fusillade From the Last Ditch*. It's a pacifist 'shot' at what Gardam evidently regards a shallow view of silence, a silence like the Quakers and Benedictines she values. It is an Anglo-Catholic value too however. Pope Francis in his book *The Name of God is Mercy* (2016) has called this ministry of listening 'the "apostolate of the ear."' Gardam is acutely attuned to silence and its potential, spiritual religious and artistic. Her fiction, if we have ears to hear, is full of religious reference and her narrative art, as we have seen, is structured so as to draw the reader into that text of references, literary and religious, together with its gaps, absences and indeterminacies that she weaves. In Gardam's novel *Bilgewater* (1997) the heroine of the same name is transfixed when, during an English lesson, the teacher chalks on the blackboard:

'A novel', said Hardy, 'should say what everybody is thinking but nobody is saying.'...I felt a warmth and satisfaction as I saw the words hollowly gleaming behind the symbols - facts behind facts. Truth behind truth.' (Gardam, 1997, p.40-41)

Chapter 6. Gardam and Her Contemporaries

My continuing Faith still surprises me sometimes. I only know it is the most fascinating, certain thing I have (Gardam, 2016c).

Introduction

In Part 1 I noted that this thesis is the first to recognise and give an account of Gardam as a religious writer. I considered reader response theory as a tool to understand the sophistication of that dimension of Gardam's work, and proposed (following Robinson) that *lectio divina* is an ancient but neglected form of reader response that has particular application to the religious interpretive community. I explored ways in which Gardam has helped the reader, through aesthetic means, and by encouraging our identity with her characters to enter into a religious experience, that which Quakers describe as knowing 'experimentally' (QFP. 19:02). I also noted that Gardam herself knew from the beginning that she wanted to write not politically, but spiritually.

In this chapter I compare Gardam to three contemporary women writers who write about aspects of religion in their fiction. Like Gardam, they are award-winning authors. What this comparison proves is that, whilst these other authors write about religion in the lives of their characters, Gardam writes about how characters experience it. The last is a most elusive and skilled accomplishment, for it demands not only a deep understanding of the nature and practices of religion (as these other writers also display), but also an ability and desire to describe the poetic experience of being religious; an ability one

could argue that springs from the author knowing these things ‘experimentally’ herself (QFP. 19:02).

In section 1, I compare a passage from Iris Murdoch’s *The Philosopher’s Pupil* (2000) to Gardam’s short story *The Meeting House* (1995a). In section 2 I compare aspects of religious experience through epistolary novels: Rose Tremain’s *Letter to Sister Benedicta* (1999) and Gardam’s *The Summer After the Funeral* (1983b) as well as *The Queen of Tambourine* (1992a). In section 3, I compare aspects of the religious experience through the interesting rhetorical concept of the mosaic (which literary device has some aspects in common with *lectio divina*) in Margaret Drabble’s *The Pattern in the Carpet* (2009) and Gardam’s short story, *Telegony* (2014c). I conclude that while Murdoch, Tremain and Drabble offer us penetrating descriptions of religion, they do not however offer us descriptions of what it is to *be* religious. I suggest that Gardam’s hermeneutic is stronger, because she invites the reader to experience and embody both Word and words in a combined religious and literary aesthetic. Further that this knowledge and experience comes from her own religious participation in more than one Christian religion; and I present the evidence for this in her work in my detailed critiques in Chapter 5.

Quaker Meeting for Worship in Iris Murdoch’s *The Philosopher’s Pupil* and Gardam’s *The Meeting House*.

Iris Murdoch (1919 -1999) was an award-winning novelist, as well as a Fellow of St Anne’s College Oxford where she taught Philosophy. She was a self-described atheist who came from a Northern Irish Anglican background. In her

novel *The Philosopher's Pupil* (2000) Murdoch tends towards stereotyping her middle-class Quaker characters, emphasising their internal confessions and efforts to centre down as if for meditation, with all the disparate images which accompany that process's beginning. Murdoch speaks her characters' internal cyclical thoughts with recognisable accuracy. This is a humorous, but none-the-less cynical exercise. Thus the reader is invited to spectate at a distance, which perspective affords humour but simultaneously and importantly provides the reader with immunity to immersion in Friends' experience. We emerge amused, intellectually entertained, but fundamentally unchanged. We have observed, but not conversed.

Somewhat differently, in her short story *The Meeting*, Gardam describes a scene in which the attenders are not all middle class. Some of those gathered are marginal, vulnerable, poor, exposed and even 'wretched'. From this gathering emerges the grace and mystery of the Anglican poet Herbert's 'something understood' (a phrase oft quoted by Quakers to describe the silent ministry in meeting for worship). The miracle of witnessing the resurrection of the dead is a result of being gathered there in 'the things eternal'. Ghosts or angels, those travellers who have died in a 'wretched car on the M6 below Tebay' (Gardam, 1995, p.58) are returned from the life beyond death, and are signifiers of the life beyond and in this case of the resurrection. It is as if the reader were there in the Quaker meeting house, in the body and spirit of the 'gathered stillness in our meeting' (QFP.1:02). A gathered meeting is 'when we join with others in expectant waiting' so that they 'may discover a deeper sense of God's presence.' It is what Quakers 'seek': 'a **gathered** stillness in our **meetings** for worship so that all may feel the power of God's love drawing us

together and leading us' (QFP. 1:02). The Word meets experience of both character and reader and thus the reader too is more nearly in the situation of being 'convinced' or transformed.

If we, the readers' interpretive community, have thus become bodily involved with the reality of Christ's experience then we also attend and witness His crucifixion and resurrection. Gardam's fiction is not a knife and fork job. We are eating with our hands and in communion as Jasper describes with those Christians of all time (Jasper, 2012).

In a more detailed comparison below we explore what these two different writers, Murdoch and Gardam, afford early twenty-first century readers and how and in what manner, Gardam alone gathers in the reader, at the crux of a timeless and redemptive site. We seem to be not so much post- or pre-, but quietly and imminently at the brink of a new horizon. This is no peep show, the reader's unaccustomed ear, despite years of not hearing text, can still be attuned. In the echoes of Gardam's words we can experience the effect of the Word. Our response in that listening is to meet with both Gardam and her gathered readership. The truth of a new readership community is being born 'silently when no-one is looking', here in the foreground of fiction's page in a new and as yet un-named literary canon and emerges just as the old order recedes from the horizon. It emerges by virtue of text and a certain 'listening with the ear of the heart' (*Rule*, p.45). Gardam's description of the Quaker Charlie Braithwaite, is apt: the 'silence grew around him again and he waited ... "I stand here" he said' (Gardam, 1995, p.60).

Murdoch's silence is different to the Quaker inflected silence that can appear in Gardam. Murdoch's silence is described externally: our eyes span the meeting room as people enter and take their seats. There is a directing eye between reader and experience that is cinematic. We are being treated to a production. Already the reader sits back a little, is more passive. The camera pans the worshipping group, pausing by turn to listen in to individual worshipper's internal monologue. Silence then is not something the reader is immersed in, rather, as Murdoch says, it 'reigned' (Murdoch, 2000, p.199), as if above, an external agent. Murdoch's voice is one which records rather than invites participation. 'Reigned' is an incongruous and hierarchical term to use about Quaker worship. Quaker testimony is to equality and their meetings were described by the eighteenth century Scottish Quaker Robert Barclay as 'the silent assemblies of God's people' (QFP 19:21). Further Murdoch's metaphor of 'the sun ... shining through wind-handled trees outside, making a shifting decoration of yellow spear-heads' is war-like. Further, it absorbs into its image the yellow paint daubed on the doors of some Quaker conscientious objectors during the Second World War. In this passage Murdoch skilfully describes the internal and external conflicts from which none of us can escape.

Murdoch continues with similar inaccuracies, dissonances that grate. She uses titles such as 'Mr and Mrs' but Quakers do not use titles. Again, she describes Milton Eastcote as having 'given an address' (Murdoch, 2000, p.199). According to Quaker manner, he might have given a talk, or even ministry, but not an 'address' which implies a hierarchical superiority of speaker over the meaning. Nesta Wiggins is then described as 'a recruit of several years standing having abandoned the paternal Catholic fold for the douce blank Quaker rites'

(Murdoch, 2000, p.199). Quakers are not 'douce' because they are neither sombre nor sedate. Quakers on the whole are centred, or as William Penn said 'sit loose to the world' (QFP. 21:03); neither is their process 'blank' and they don't have 'rites'. Murdoch is either lacking in theology and experience or stretching the literary point or both. Either way if you are Quaker the descriptive irony is distancing, the comedic elements strained.

However, Murdoch does redeem herself in both the causes of equality and particularity of observation. 'Zed the dog, was not allowed into the institute but allowed in to meeting.... waves and particles of inner light flowed through him.' 'Anthea Eastcote' who, Murdoch tell us, was 'supported by a lifetime of such Sunday mornings.... sat quiet with folded hands...rumply hair arched on her head, electric as silk' (Murdoch, 2000, p.202). Silence is molecular and tactile in this assembly.

The Quaker version of the internal confessional begins. Brian McCaffrey was thinking to himself, '...when I consider how much rage...I carry around inside myself how can I blame anybody for anything?' The meeting is then interrupted by an eruption of 'Laughter at late-comers.' Grace falls as 'Tom began to laugh too. The next minute he was praying... love flowed in him as it should... He would love them all, save them all' (Murdoch, 2000, p.203). The seventeenth-century Quaker, Edward Burrough, described a similar experience of Quaker meeting for worship in which 'while waiting upon the Lord in silence...with our minds and hearts turned towards him, being stayed in the light of Christ within us from all thoughts...we received the pouring down of the spirit upon us, and our hearts were made glad' (QFP 19:20).

By the end of the passage we have William Eastcote's thoughts. He says to himself, 'Help is always near if we will only turn. Conversion is turning about, and it can happen not only every day, but every moment' (Murdoch, 2000, p.203). Murdoch, the philosopher, has neatly observed this possibility of conversion brought about by the Quaker's continual 'turning to the Light' within Quaker meeting for worship. What emerges because of this is expressed through Zed (the dog). We are told that his 'thought is not known, but ... his nature was composed almost entirely of love, he may be imagined to have felt an increase of being. He has reorganized his dispersed identity in the Quaker way by organizing it round a centre, doubling back as Cope explains, to the Light.

In her short story, *The Meeting House*, Gardam eschews commentary for a more conversational tone. She guides the reader in: 'Best to leave the car.' she tells us. (Gardam, 1995, p.49) The reader is thus received into the short story according to the *Rule*, and 'welcomed as Christ' (*Rule*, 2004, p.123), guided into Gadamer's playground from the foreground of the story's pages. It helps that Gardam addresses the reader directly, as if through the theatrical fourth wall.

Instead of restricting us to the meeting room as Murdoch does, in *The Meeting House* Gardam shows the reader into the landscape of the story's setting that also moves from foreground to horizon and back again from 'the hawks on the ridge' (Gardam, 1995, p.51) to a hawk-eye like description of 'the common garth wall' (Gardam, 1995, p.51). This spanning across horizon to detail happens again: those looking out 'across the dale... saw a light shining like a low star on the fell-side from where the empty buildings stood' (Gardam, 1995, p.38). We are told there is 'A lark in frenzy, so high he [Charlie Braithwaite] could hardly see it' (Gardam, 1995, p.59). This horizon is also religious for

‘George Fox is said to have preached here himself after his vision of angels settling like flocks of birds on Pendle Hill’ (Gardam, 1995, p.50). The eye becomes accustomed to spanning the space between foreground and horizon as we enter the playground between. The omnipresent hawk, like Ted Hughes’s *Crow*, symbol of the imperative of creation in our artificially ordered lives, slices the sky and our speculations. Mayne reminds us that ‘Kafka said that a book should be an axe for the frozen sea within us’ (Mayne, 1998 p.xv).

Outside Gardam’s Quaker meeting house, there is ‘a grassy breeze’ (Gardam, 1995, p.50). The transferred epithet of breeze to grass echoes somewhere in our textual memories that ‘all flesh is grass’ and the breeze that blows through it the breath of God. We can see, smell, touch and taste it. Gardam says, ‘If Quakers believed in holy places this would be one of them’ (Gardam, 1995, p.50). Quakers do not sanctify their places of worship: ‘True worship may be experienced at any time; in any place - alone on the hills or in the busy daily life - we may find **God**, in whom we live and move and have our being’ (QFP. 2:11).³¹ However, this Quaker meeting house has layered its accretion of prayer over the years. Despite the Quakers eschewing that some places are more holy than others, Gardam comments of Quakers, ‘They do believe however in a duty to be responsible about property...the meeting house caretaker was now Charlie Bainbridge who had walked up to High Greenside once a week for years at all seasons. There were far too many rabbits...Disgraceful multitudes’ (Gardam, 1995, p.51). In Gardam biblical

³¹ Significantly, however, Quakers continue that the community of worship is also required: ‘But this individual experience is not sufficient, and in a meeting held in the Spirit there is a giving and receiving between its members, one helping another with or without words. So there may come a wider vision and a deeper experience. (QFP. 2:11).

language can be part of her conversational style, so that the practical problem of over-breeding rabbits is easily absorbed along with the biblical language. Furthermore, the juxtaposition of the great exodus of the Old Testament to rabbits is comical. The New Testament, for example Matthew, contains many references to the multitudes following Jesus, from which on one occasion at least he seeks refuge: 'And great multitudes were gathered together unto him, so that he went into a ship, and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore' (Matt.13: 2). We are imbibing the Word conversationally with the word, or at least remembering the receding Word from its extant rhythm and echoes within Gardam's text.

In *The Meeting House* the landscape gathers us in psalm-like. The reader is absorbing more by poetic impression amidst the long sentences and qualifying clauses. Such absorption is typical of *lectio divina* as Casey observes, 'the way to read the Psalms is to relax and allow oneself to be immersed in them so that their meaning as a whole gradually penetrates. It is not a question of grasping the parts and scrutinizing them, but of embracing the whole and consenting to be formed by it' (Casey, 1983, p.116).³²

With Gardam, the reader experiences both words and silence. In all there are five references to its different qualities in *The Meeting House*. We learn of its fundamental religious significance for Quakers: 'Silence was at the root of Charlie's life' (Gardam, 1995, p.52); that it can be 'a different, answering silence' (Gardam, 1995, p.55); or that for Charlie 'The depth of the Quaker

³² The reader is in the process of what Casey describes as 'formation' in his book *The Art of Winning Souls* (Casey, 2010).

silence then was like hanging in clear water' (Gardam, 1995.p.56). It is also a silence over which others sometimes mistakenly think Quakers can have control. A traveller who squats at the Quaker meeting house, for instance, charges Charlie to 'Settle your silences' (Gardam, 1995, p.57). This silence is wide and large, both in the landscape of the moors and the heart and it signals both consolation and desolation. Silence spans the foreground and horizon. It immerses us in the suspension that is the *conversatio morum* itself. For Charlie, it is a chance to consider prayerfully, as 'the silence grew around him and he waited...He tried out some remarks to himself. "Here's some puzzle" was the first. "I stand here" was the second. "Let's see now what it's all about" was the third' (Gardam, 1995, p.60).

If we hear the different qualities of silence then the presence of noise is more keenly heard and nuanced also. Gardam describes this disruption: 'two transistors on different wavelengths were set outside on the party wall' (p.56); 'a petrol-engine chain saw and for an hour its lilting scream like cats in acid, seared the brain and ears and soul and a young Quaker who was a summer visitor from Leeds ran off down the hillside' (p.56). There is 'canned music' and 'banging and crashing' 'whining' and swearing (p.52). What the reader hears is not just the contrast to Charlie's silence, but the violence of the noise in the silence of the hillside. The travellers' cacophony in life contrasts all the more with the 'quiet afternoon' of their afterlife when Charlie comes across the travellers' ghosts gathering peacefully in the meeting house, all the more 'blissful' and redeemed (Gardam, 1995, p.60).

Gardam's observances are both of the particular on the ground and the wide sweep of dale and sky. She achieves what Michael Mayne says of that other

writer, Seamus Heaney, who like Gardam is rooted in landscape and scripture, and whom, as we have earlier said, Gardam admires:³³ ‘the poet has to write, ... he appeases that need by learning to find his own unique and distinctive voice’ but ‘then begins a bothersome and exhilarating second need, to go beyond himself and take on the otherness of the world in works that remain his own yet offer rights-of-way to everybody else’ (Mayne, 1998, p.5). We might reframe the above and say that Gardam finds her ‘own voice and has gone beyond it to take on the otherness of the world in works that remain’ her ‘own yet offer rights of way to everybody else.’ ‘Right of way’ is apposite to Gardam. Although raised Anglo-Catholic, her recent Quaker influences lead her to make accessible not only poetic paths, but the scriptural valleys that rise within the suspension of the story itself. In this respect, and bearing in mind the community of authors within which I am placing Gardam in this chapter, if there is a gap between the Bible and the novel, Gardam is one of a new canon that bridges it.

The Epistle in Tremain’s Letter to Sister Benedicta and Gardam’s The Summer After the Funeral and The Queen of Tambourine

In the last section I compared Iris Murdoch’s and Jane Gardam’s descriptions of a Quaker meeting for worship and found Gardam’s prose to be more religiously immersive for the reader. What now follows is a comparison of Gardam and the contemporary English novelist Rose Tremain. I use by way of

³³ ‘Do you know a wonderful poem by Seamus Heaney about a ship suddenly appearing above the heads of an abbey full of monks during service and one sailor trying to climb down to join them?’ (Gardam, 2016c)

illustration their different treatment of letters in their novels, namely Gardam's, *The Summer After the Funeral*, *The Queen of Tambourine* and Tremain's *Letter to Sister Benedicta* (1979). I show how Gardam's use of the epistolary form is influenced by the practices of the Benedictine, Quaker and Anglo-Catholic movements and how this may affect a religious readers' interpretive community, or at least open one up to the possibility of a religious reading of the novel. I also discuss Gardam and Tremain's relationship to 'magical realism' and describe how Gardam's use of magical realism when applied to religious experience succeeds in calling up a *mystical* realism where Tremain's description remains one of magical realism. It might be helpful to explore the dimensions of this type of narrative in order to clarify the difference between magical and mystical realism.

As we saw in chapter 5, Gardam would probably agree with the proposition that the distinction between literary language and ordinary language did little justice to either; and that there can be extraordinary simplicity and plainness in high literary art, and sophistication and complexity in ordinary language. The same holds true for a phrase such as 'magical realism'. The paradoxical juxtaposition of the two worlds of magic and realism suggests a passage or movement between the two states, where at one point the narrative of the two modes is essential to its success as a literary genre. Mystical realism however is different. In this genre there is a sense that the mystical is imminent, ever-present, protean, and figured often as an absence or a narrative gap in the realist narrative with which it fuses.

The novelist Neel Mukherjee has gone so far as to say that in Gardam's case 'The slightest touch of magic, sometimes in the form of grace, as in the heartbreaking "Easter Lilies", often brushes against Gardam's work. The whisper of redemptive uplift that she is generous enough to bring to the end of some of her stories is, above all, truthful' (Mukherjee, 2014).

In the previous chapter I have considered the Word as symbol and literary device, lodged amongst words that provide an imaginative context, the better for us to appreciate the Word's redolence. Our imagination is enhanced by the author's imagination. Her words act as imaginative play, enacting and contextualising the Word for us. The author's descriptive words function as the reader's part in *lectio divina*: more specifically her engagement with second stage *meditatio* when the reader engages her contextual imagination thus situating the Word, through metaphor of the character's situation, at the heart of the reader's circumstance or condition.

The letter, like the monologue, as we have seen, is a literary device that addresses the recipient in the first person. A letter writer's intention is understood, in matters of religion at least, to be part of a dialogue in which there is a sincere search for truth, rather than flattering for other social purposes. In Tremain's *Letter to Sister Benedicta* letters are confiding (to the reader also) and confessional. The writer does not know if her childhood teacher (who was middle aged when she was a child) still survives and in a sense though poignant, this is irrelevant, for we the readers and indeed the interpretive community are hearing her confession. Such a concern for truth is a common theme in Gardam's coming of age novels one of the influences perhaps being the

Quaker history of women's letter writing and speaking 'truth to power' (Gill, 2005).

Like Tremain, Gardam also uses the epistolary form in *The Summer After the Funeral* in which twelve year-old Beams is an aspiring psychiatrist. She takes assiduous and, what she sees as truthful, notes on family dynamics: 'I intend to become a psychiatrist eventually but at present I am studying anthropology as I believe that psychiatrists get pressed for time' (Gardam, 1983b p.74). Writing is her way of gathering internal order from the chaos of her family's dispersal following her father's death. In *A Long Way From Verona* the teenage Jessica Vye does the same using block capitals: 'I ABSOLUTELY ALWAYS AND INVARIABLY TELL THE TRUTH' (Gardam, 2009a, p.16). In *The Summer After the Funeral* Gardam notes, 'Mrs Price's letters in their way enlivened life, begat other letters and would be some sort of interest to historians if anyone ever kept them' (Gardam, 1983b, p.49). The reader imagines Mrs Price caught up helplessly in a letter-writing spiral, as self-perpetuating and long as the length of the dynastic Old Testament families and their own begetting, particularly in Genesis. Gardam's use of the word 'begat' is an accurate and amusing description of Mrs Price's helpless anxiety as she tries to forestall disaster with as much industry as she can muster. 'Begat', however, also puts the Word, friendly, amongst us again and makes it colloquial, conversational. We are never far from it with Gardam.

LeClercq introduces us to the Benedictine style of letter writing, the origins of which can be seen in the classical and biblical epistolary modes. I shall analyse this later in the section. However, in the meantime suffice to note that,

in describing the long tradition of the epistle, LeClercq might help us understand the religious roots of Gardam's interest in letter writing. These began with Gardam's mother's prolific letter and sermon writing and have remained long-standing; 'As a student she [Gardam] had planned to become a literary scholar and had done one year of a PhD, researching the classical background of Lady Mary Wortley Montague because she wanted to know how much Latin and Greek this extraordinary 18th-century figure had actually had' (Miller, 2005).

However, LeClercq returns us not only to the classical influences on letter writing, but also to the physical process. He points to the material and social contexts that formed Benedictine letters that helped to create the character of its inscriber. Each letter took time to inscribe and to read. The Benedictine would probably have read letters out loud, much as in the first stage of *lectio divina*. Understandably letters were then re-read, savoured as in the second stage *meditatio*.

LeClercq describes two types of letter, those bearing news between abbatial communities and those between monks within the same abbey. An epistle from one abbey to another was written on scrolls or 'rotuli' and the end of the scroll added to as it circulated each monastery. Individual monks within a monastery wrote to each other often on scraps of parchment, sharing dedicated favourite sayings from the Bible or desert fathers, small sermons and so on. The arrival of any letter inter or intra the abbey was an event, for its construction was an act of prayerful dedication:

To write a letter...always cost time and effort. ...one "engraved" a letter or "sculptured" it, as if by striking (*cudere*) the

parchment from which the letter was extricated as if by plowing or digging (*exarare*); the parchment...The pieces of parchment (*schedulae*) used for personal letters must often have been only scraps...A letter could not be too verbose or too short...the epistolary genre...retained its character of brevity (LeClercq, 1974, p.177).

The roll becomes a living text, a written version of the interpretive community's discussion of its common texts (in this case the Bible). Religious interpretive communities cohere over their discussions about interpretation of the Word whether this be in person or by letter. The letter connects people.

In a sense the novel also reads like a collection of individual letters, the whole making up the community *rotuli* or long letter. Scene by scene, chapter by chapter, they unfurl, each section adding another layer to the community's interpretation of meaning. Moreover the chronological order of each addition is something that a reader interprets from the complex markers and signals in the text. In this way Gardam's novel follows the model of the Benedictine tradition of the *Abbey Chronicle*: an open log or diary recording events in the community's life, still available on the world wide web today.

Gardam may also be influenced by the Quaker business method, otherwise known as a 'meeting for worship for business'. Such meetings are held in the same way as the silent meeting for worship into which are introduced items for consideration of the gathered meeting. The Clerk writes the 'sense of the meeting'³⁴ item by item reading each minute aloud for amendment and approval

³⁴ The unity we seek depends on the willingness of us all to seek the truth in each other's utterances; on our being open to persuasion; and in the last resort on a willingness to recognise and accept the sense of the meeting as recorded in the minute, knowing that our dissenting

by the whole community. Quakers consider this process is neither vote nor consensus, because the meeting is led by the Spirit (The Jesuit, Michael J Sheeran, named his book after the spirit of the Quaker decision making process, *Beyond Majority Rule* (1983)). The minutes of each meeting reflect the Spirit of the gathered meeting. The same method applies no matter how large the gathering, so that the yearly epistle sent from Britain Yearly Meeting, in which up to fifteen hundred Friends might be gathered, is written in the same manner.

It is interesting to note that in the Benedictine community a similar process occurs, although it is usually the Abbot who presides. However, the *Rule* specifically states that the young must be listened to with particular attention. Chapter three of the Rule says, 'We have insisted that all the community should be summoned for such consultation, because it often happens that the Lord makes the best course clear to one of the younger members' (*Rule*, p.58). This idea is familiar to Quakers:

In Bristol in 1682: On the 7th of the month called July, they dispersed the meeting which then consisted chiefly of children; for the men and women being generally in prison, the children kept up their meetings regularly, and with a remarkable gravity and composure: it was surprising to see the manly courage and constancy with which some of the boys behaved on this occasion, keeping close to meetings in the absence of their parents, and undergoing on that account many abuses with patience. (QFP 19:35)

views have been heard and considered. We do not vote in our meetings, because we believe that this would emphasise the divisions between differing views and inhibit the process of seeking to know the will of God. We must recognise, however, that a minority view may well continue to exist. When we unite with a minute offered by our clerk, we express, not a sudden agreement of everyone present with the prevailing view, but rather a confidence in our tried and tested way of seeking to recognise God's will. We act as a community, whose members love and trust each other. We should be reluctant to prevent the acceptance of a minute which the general body of Friends present feels to be right. (QFP. 3:06)

As with both Benedictine and Quakers, Gardam's novels and the letters therein find voice given to all including the 'minor characters': the young, women and the elderly, whom she particularly champions.

Letter writing is a medium Gardam's characters use often. For instance in novels such as *A Long Way From Verona*, *The Summer After the Funeral* and *Flight of the Maidens* and *The Queen of Tambourine* letters, frequently from mothers to daughters, arrive as events themselves and are pivotal to the plot. Whilst LeClercq explains the formality and rhetoric that friendly letters between monks followed, this formality is not always the case with Gardam's mother's letters. Rather the amusement is partly in the way that letters in her novels are often in direct contrast to a formality of address of which we are still aware today. Mrs Price's letters lack the formal inclusion of 'a salutation, an introduction, a narrative, a petition and finally a *concludios*.' They are written as if the writer had come into a room talking. 'The laws which governed the *modus epistolaris*' (LeClercq, 1974, p.178) are thus not 'observed' entirely by Gardam's letter writers though they have their own 'rhythmical style' and are 'letters ... in which spontaneous feelings are expressed' albeit not necessarily with awareness or in Benedictine 'fine' form (LeClercq, 1974, p.178). Contrasts between formal and informal style provide irony and thus comic elements in Gardam's work. She subverts the rhetorical structure of letters by using ordinary language in a manner that once again shows her to be accomplished in both high literary stylistics and ordinary language.

Reception of letters is a key event in epistolary genre. In Benedict's time the *Rule* was unequivocal regarding the reception of letters and gifts: 'No one in

a monastic community may receive or send to others letters, gifts of piety or any little tokens without the permission of the superior' (*Rule*, 2004, p.126). A letter then was a public rather than a private event, preventing secrecy and jealousy in the community. Gardam's mothers are quite public about their letter writing and incidentally free with other people's information as well as their own opinions. What we have in the novel's interpretive community is the potential not only for the more private modern letter, but, as part of the reader's membership of the novel's interpretive community, the expectation that these private letters will be read both by those passing by the kitchen table and by the reader herself. Mrs Price writes to Athene: ' -Pimlico is hopeless. She runs the diocese. He is a nice old thing with fat lips - just sits all day in his study and she tells him what comes next. God help the Church' (Gardam, 1983b, p.109). Mrs Price is indulging in gossip, or 'murmuring' as Benedict called it, a behaviour he discouraged: 'Above all the evil of murmuring must not for any reason be shown by any word or gesture' (*Rule*, p.101). The reader's voyeuristic leanings are encouraged more in fiction in general as they are in this domestic scene. Mrs Price considers herself religious. However, there is comic irony when Mrs Price's murmuring epistolary manner is laid against that of the epistolary law in Benedictine life.

It has been said that Gardam's writing resembles Jane Austen's in its pithy observance of English social class and mores. 'Literary critics hunt them through for the most minute details of Jane's opinions...to find her precise and accurate information on contemporary manners, style, and cost of living' (Faye, 2011, p.xii). The critic Amanda Craig underscores this when she says, 'Perhaps it's because she has the Austenesque quality of being satisfying and disquieting, conventional and experimental, and is much more artful than she appears' (Craig, 2014).

Indeed, one of Gardam's short stories, *The Sidmouth Letters* (Gardam, 1997c, p.64), concerns the letters of Jane Austen. However, this thesis is concerned with how Gardam goes beyond the concerns of English social class to its religious considerations. In this respect Gardam surpasses one of her own literary heroines of whom she says: 'I discovered Mrs Gaskell at eleven and still like her better than Austen or the Brontës' (Bland, 2013). Mrs Gaskell was a Unitarian and her expressed concern was for a vocation of writing fiction that is an 'appointed work...in advancing the kingdom of God' (Gaskell, 1997, pp.xi-xii, Jay *loq.*). Charlotte Brontë reveals in her letters that her task is more specifically Protestant than ecumenical (Jones, 1997, p.46). In other words, Gardam is not the first female writer to use the epistolary form. She is however, one of the first to write in an ecumenical way that includes the horizons of both the past and future inheritance of the Word within the present of her stories.

Thus through her epistles Gardam offers twenty-first century fiction a more equal distribution of power in the universal Christian theme than simply advancing 'the Kingdom.' In her poetic and pragmatic expression of religion Gardam is nearer in this principle of advancing an equal Kingdom to the seventh-century Benedictine Hilda of Whitby. Hilda was abbess of the 'double' or mixed monastery close to Gardam's home town on the North East coast of England. She ran not only a monastery but purportedly several tight ships by which she commuted often to London by sea. She also encouraged the first known English poet, Caedmon, a layman who served at the monastery.

Bede describes the monk Caedmon and Abbess Hilda's monastery in his *History of the English People* (1968): 'After the example of the primitive

Church, no-one there was rich, no one was needy, for everything was held in common, and nothing was considered to be anybody's personal property' (Bede, 1968, p.247). Not only was Hilda keen to establish a religious community of equals, she also adhered to the Benedictine ideal of daily *lectio divina*. 'Those under her direction were required to undertake a thorough study of the Scriptures and occupy themselves in good works' (Bede, 1968, p.247). And the letters passed to and fro.

Gardam and Tremain: a comparison in letters and magical realism

I shall discuss differences in approach to religious writing in two novels by Gardam, *The Summer After the Funeral* and *The Queen of Tambourine*, and compare them to Rose Tremain's, *Letter to Sister Benedicta*. *The Summer After the Funeral* concerns a teenage girl, Athene Price, and her coming of age following the death of her father, during the Second World War. It is a social book - everything happens within the context of the web of family and various friends and relations into whose care she and her siblings are taken, until they are reunited when their mother has found a new home. It is tragi-comic and full of almost farcical movement and the mother's unrelenting hope, as both letters and individual family members traverse the country in pursuit of accommodation and each other. *Letter to Sister Benedicta* is by comparison sedate and concerns a woman who, in late mid-life, finds herself with no family net, widowed and alone, and writing to one of her boarding school teachers. It is confessional and static, a city novel, with family and acquaintances who appear to have little staying power. Its tone is confessional, but also resigned and elegiac.

The two writers' approaches to the epistolary form affect the tone and outcome of both novels: Gardam's character, the widowed mother, Mrs Price, writes letters to members of a whole community whose main intention is to keep the family united even as they criss-cross the United Kingdom. Tremain on the other hand has her heroine, the 'fifty and fat', widowed Ruby, write a long series of letters to one person. The letters are in the confessional mode to her old teacher in India, a Catholic nun who is very probably dead by now. A private confessional letter from Ruby to a confessor is quite different from Mrs Price's 'coming into the room talking' letters, written at the kitchen table and overseen by all. In this way Ruby follows the intra-Benedictine mode where one member of the community sends a letter to another in the same community. Gardam, however, models herself on individuals speaking to a whole community. This is reflected in the two characters' attitudes to time. Whilst Gardam's widow is busy making and preserving community with the same seasonal urgency she might jam, Tremain's has all the unaccustomed time to sort out her worldly possessions, for her community has fallen away and she is an agency entire of herself.

Gardam's novel is not only an expressed attempt, by the mother to keep the community together, but also is involving of anyone associated with it. Letters go to all concerned, as to amendments to prior arrangements previously indicated. Apart from the letters and dialogue or internal monologue the narrative voice is in the third person. Tremain's novel, on the other hand, is quite private. It is after all a confession and therefore written entirely in the first person to another, or perhaps even entirely, from Ruby to herself.

The effect of both is that we are eavesdropping on other people's correspondences, but that we are particularly trespassing on the confession, which is traditionally entirely private. The effect on the reader is that even as we are listening to the confession we are in fact feeling guilty ourselves. Our observation at least feels voyeuristic, though we can't help but listen in once we have begun.

Gardam's story ends as her stories typically do, with the whole miscellaneous and unlikely cast assembled after much confusion, but with ultimate good will. They are a recognisable, but matured community, albeit transported to a different landscape (Manchester). Tremain however ends very differently. Ruby has extracted herself entirely from her family as she leaves, with some sense of psychological reconciliation, for her childhood boarding school home in India and a life alone. She is returning to the sounds, scents and colours of the old empire. Gardam's resolution is in community here and now. Tremain's is in the individual's capacity to claim a life alone.

Gardam's narrative trail has its tensions and miscommunications, both by letter and by assumption. However, its tenor is one of extraversion, people seek people, are thrust out into the world and are changed by it as they negotiate a fatherless future and then reunite, albeit in a different place.

Tremain's story is one of introversion, as Ruby's children leave home and lose contact and her husband dies and she relinquishes the family home. Her freedom is that she is responsible to no-one. She loses weight without trying, is generous in offering in the comfort of sex to a family friend, Gerald who in turn

is confessor to Ruth. In a religious sense one could say that Gardam's tale is one of extraverted action in community, *via positiva*, and Tremain's of introverted non-action alone, *via negativa*.

Gardam's children are dispersed individually from their Anglican household to a community including many people of good will. Good will surpasses religious differences for their mother, despite her Christian beliefs. To her children's embarrassment and to the reader's amusement Mrs Price never fully grasps that she has sent her son to a contact who lives in a Benedictine and not a Tibetan monastery or indeed that Seb's friend who comes to stay is neither Indian nor Buddhist. An ecumenical or interfaith community ending in which both good will and interfaith relations form their own integrity is typical of Gardam as has already been discussed. By contrast, Tremain's Ruby married Leon the Jew, a fact that enlivened them both at the time, but then disappointed. Tremain's tale is not one of a breakdown because of intolerance, but more because, as Ruby says, of the comfort that Leon's profession as a solicitor procured. He had also procured other women but she had never found another partner except to give another man comfort. She was not answered. Ruth's frank tone of confessional loneliness makes this a tragic tale. It is all the more poignant that she is now addressing God through the possibly deceased Sister Benedicta in the hope that someone may respond to her.

Finally, and for these purposes perhaps most importantly the above, differences lead to a further difference. The Religious background (or its absence) plays its part here too. Gardam is a writer with a self-declared religious belief expressed through three main movements, Anglo-Catholic,

Quaker and Benedictine. Tremain seems never to have discussed or been interviewed about her religious background. From her schooling Tremain's religious influences would appear to be Anglican, but there is no record of it I can find. However there are references that suggest otherwise, including the protagonists regular but rather spiritually arid visits to the Catholic Brompton Oratory to pray for her (Jewish) husband. Despite her distance from religious feeling Ruby adheres to its practice, and the description of her taking solace in it is all the more touching because she has no sign that her practice is efficacious for herself or anyone else. In this way it perhaps shows more faith to worship when faith is absent than it does if one *knows* experientially that God is present, as some of Gardam's characters do.

Where Gardam remains active in her Christian belief, Tremain on the other hand describes her writing approach as one of 'magical realism.' I find no record anywhere of her religious background other than mention of the two schools: first, Francis Holland (School motto: 'That our daughters may be as the polished corners of the temple.' Psalm 144) and then, after her parents' divorce, a Hertfordshire boarding school, Crofton Grange (now closed). Both were Church of England Schools. Crofton Grange encouraged both reading the poets out loud and letter writing. She says,

Our English teacher, whom we called "Robbie", wore a ratty fur coat all winter round, indoors and out, knew swathes of Milton by heart, and sometimes she'd stare out of the window, reciting Milton, instead of giving us a lesson. After Milton, the book she loved most was the OED. Love for words was the gift she gave me. I used to sit in her room, toasting marshmallows on her gas fire, reciting Keats and Walt Whitman. Through her, my class wrote letters to the then poet laureate, John Masefield, and he wrote back. I had thought all living writers were Olympian beings who

would never, ever know of my existence, but Robbie and John Masefield proved me wrong (Tremain, 2003).

Below is a more detailed discussion of the different influences and how this affects their writing styles.

Magical realism's 'most characteristic feature,' according to Christopher Warnes, 'is that it naturalises the supernatural, integrating fantastic or mythical features smoothly into the otherwise realistic momentum of the narrative' (Warnes, 2014, p.151). In Tremain's hands magical realism is a deeply affecting medium. However, the descriptions of Pearce the Quaker in *Restoration* and its sequel *Merivel* are more plainly poignant than magical. Tremain offers magical realism in other contexts: for example, Merivel's unlikely and mercurial relations with the Bedlam hospital inmate Katherine, animal-like in her habits, bears his daughter Margaret, having conceived her under Merivel's autopsy table.

Significantly, in one of Tremain's earlier novels, *Letter to Sister Benedicta*, there is no such magical realism, only the appropriately plaintive and exquisite poignancy of the widow Ruby's confessional as she makes her way through the lonely days in her depopulated home. Ruby's circumstances appear unchanged by the trips to pray or to light candles at the Catholic Brompton Oratory or indeed her internal monologues with Sister Benedicta. Change happens it appears through the natural working out of events: her children settling with partners (after a typically Tremainian and incestuous experiment relationship with each other), the distribution of her husband's estate and so on, and indeed her deceptively passive waiting for time to pass. Ruby has however not merely been passive, but thoughtful to someone else's deserted husband

(lunch and sexual favours rendered, neither of which she has found particularly pleasant) and patient with her errant or absent children. She lets them all go.

However, Gardam is different, because she can be magical realist or mystical realist by turns, particularly in her preferred medium, the short story. In the short story named after him, *The Green Man*, for instance, ‘stood in the fields. In the darkness of winter he was only a shadow’ (Gardam, 1998c, p.423); or in *The Pangs of Love*, a daughter, who happens to be a feminist mermaid, exasperates her mother who exclaims: ‘You are totally different from the others and yet I am sure I brought you all up the same.’ (Gardam, 1998c, p.188) or we might take the example of *The Boy Who Turned into a Bike*: ‘Nancy when she first saw the bike knew it was Clancy. “Can I have it she asked?” ‘What do you want with a bike?’ asked his mother’ (Gardam, 1998c, p.390).

Although her novel *The Summer After the Funeral* is chiefly concerned with the religious community, Gardam’s front-page hints at some magical realism the novel may contain. She quotes from W. H. Auden’s, ‘*A Certain World: A Common Place Book*’ (1982):

We are not free to choose by what we
Shall be enchanted, truly or falsely.
In the case of a false enchantment all
We can do is take immediate flight
Before the spell really takes hold.
(Gardam, 1983a)

Thus, for instance, in *The Summer After the Funeral*, Athene meets the old artist and is never quite sure if she has been seduced by him or fallen asleep. She says, ‘How could one know. I was terribly tired. I went to sleep in a chair. I

woke up in a bed.... I must have been mad...*Would* one know?’ (Gardam, 1983b, p. 70). Athene’s ambivalence is a gap in the narrative: if she is unsure what happened, so are we, the readers. Gardam uses this technique not just within a character’s mind, but also in her description of the world that is turned to reflect a character’s inner state. Sometimes she uses landscape and building, to presage the future. Thus Athene visits the Brontë family’s house at Haworth with her much older boyfriend, a teacher at her school. The village is ‘an awful place... It’s such a colour...It’s *purple*. It’s a purple ugly, place. Like a mining town’ (Gardam, 1983a, p. 70). There is a notice on the wall: ‘The MERRY MIDGETS. This STUPENDOUS COMPANY of DWARFS AND JUGGLERS are to visit HAWORTH on Saturday September 17th’ (Gardam, 1983b, p.132). Athene is looking through Emily Brontë’s window, ‘the window where she had gazed through the night at the moon and been one with God.’ Nothing and everything has changed. Magic or God or not, it is in this context of ugly Haworth, strange performers and the promise of a mystical relationship, that Athene discovers her older boyfriend is not only married, but also has children.

Meantime, Mrs Price’s letters have been criss-crossing the country between her children and their guardians, just as they did when the Benedictines first arrived in the sixth century. Mrs Price has at last affected a reunion of them all and is waiting on the platform announcing to the ticket collector that ‘many threads are about to be gathered up’ (Gardam, 1983b, p.138). The Quaker Francis Howgill’s mystical believers’ ‘net’ is holding them safe it seems. ‘The Kingdom of Heaven’ he describes is different from the aforementioned Mrs Gaskell’s for it ‘did gather us and catch us all, as in a

net...and his heavenly power at one time drew many hundreds to land. We came to know a place to stand in and what to wait in' (QFP.11:01).

There is also the promise that the Price family might return to the vicarage. 'The new rector of Newton is a bachelor not expected to marry (high) [i.e. Anglo-Catholic] and needing a housekeeper.' writes Mrs Price to Posie. (Gardam, 1983b, p.153) In the event the family decides to stay in their new temporary home in Manchester from where Mrs Price writes to Posie, 'there is much Christian work to be done' (Gardam, 1983b, p.174). And not too little magical realism also, the reader hopes.

The Queen of the Tambourine

The second of Gardam's epistolary novels we are analysing, *The Queen of Tambourine* (1992a), is written in the form of middle-aged Eliza Peabody's letters to her Wimbledon neighbour, Joan. Gradually the reader realizes that it is unclear what is realistic fact and what is Eliza's imagination. There is no response to her prolific letters and the reader begins to notice that many are not actually posted. By the end of the novel it becomes apparent that much of the source of Eliza's disturbance is grief. She is childless, having suffered a late miscarriage over twenty years ago, and the grief had caused a rift between she and her husband Henry who has in turn had an affair with Eliza's cousin, who has borne his only child. Unknown to Eliza, the cousin has since died. Further we are told towards the end of the novel that Eliza's mother died when she was six. It is no surprise that Joan with whom she has been corresponding has a voice that could be mistaken for Eliza's mother. Gardam reveals the story as we might see it in life with the manifestation of the disturbance first before we know the

cause. This leaves the reader open to assumptions that fall away when Eliza's circumstances are revealed. *The Queen of Tambourine* has all the time been working against the social stereo-types (middle-aged, middle- class, white woman hysteric) and explains it with a suffering most readers experience whatever our age, class or sex. Eliza's grief and our identity with it releases our compassion, a compassion which is unconditional on the sufferer's status. Throughout the book, Eliza works as a volunteer visitor at the hospice run by nuns. Here she grows close to one of the patients, Barry, a man she would in other circumstances have been unlikely to meet, but who becomes more of a comfort to her in his acceptance and eventual wise advice.

Amid the reviews of this book are many that discuss what it is to be a middle-aged, middle class woman who being under-occupied has lost her mind. What is omitted again is the religious reading of Gardam. Not only has there been suffering overcome, an Aristotelian pre-condition for any drama, but the last passages of the novel refer in symbols and signs to the motif of the Easter story. As often happens with Gardam, a woman alone, estranged from society, in this case Eliza continues her volunteer hospice visits, and is probably less nurturing than nurtured by 'The nuns on the common who were invaluable to me once when I tended to get a bit low' (Gardam, 1992a p.226).

Eliza's husband with whom she is reuniting has had delivered not pink roses but yellow, colours symbolic of the Easter flowers that decorate the church early on Easter Sunday morning and he says 'you know that I loved you I never stopped.' There is faithfulness there despite the betrayal. Eliza and Henry voice their feelings in a renewed way. As Eliza put it, they 'talk[ed] to each

other aloud not as if some horrible secret', and about the process of mutual grief that separated them (Gardam, 1992a, p.219).

Whilst Eliza emerges from madness, she is discerning what is real and what is not. She asks Barry's ghost, 'Barry you *are* true.' He replies, 'I was always true', 'I'll always be with you some where' (Gardam, 1992a, p.223). This echoes Christ's words 'I am with you always, *even* unto the end of the world' (Mat 28:20). Mother Ambrose is also reassuring. When Eliza just misses Barry's death and says 'I'm always late' Mother Ambrose replies 'No you were always with him' (Gardam, 1992a, p.216). There are echoes, in this equal exchange, of the gospel of John: 'Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you' (John 20: 21). In *Common Worship* (2000), the authorized book of Anglican worship, The Peace that comes just before The Preparation echoes this:

The president may introduce the Peace with a suitable sentence, and then says

All **The peace of the Lord be always with you
and also with you.**

These words may be added
Let us offer one another a sign of peace

All may exchange a sign of peace

The Easter theme continues. Eliza has a fitful night, as if she is keeping watch at the Vigil before Easter Sunday. Barry, who like Christ in the garden has had to leave, finally says 'There will be one last thing to face. A hard thing. But

only to do with this last hour' (Gardam, 1992a, p.223). Here there are reminders of the last hours of Christ and his words just before he was betrayed. But where Christ adds the question that goes to the heart of betrayal and loss: 'Will you not wait one hour with me?' - Barry's words indicate companionship and love. There are many more such echoes. Thus towards the end of the novel Eliza remembers that 'At some point, after I think I had probably slept, I faced Barry's last command and said, out loud, "And finally, of course, there was no ghost"' (Gardam, 1992a, p.224), which of course echoes the voice of Christ: 'Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost' (Matt. 27: 50).

In the end it is not just Eliza's letters that go astray or are never posted, but people, a dog, and a whole building we find never existed. What has remained and is unexpectedly permanent is love in the form of Eliza for Henry and Henry for her and in Joan's grandchildren whom Eliza looks after in the absence of their mother. The ghosts of Eliza's own unborn grandchildren, if they are felt at all, are all but banished in the presence of her present charges. Eliza, like many of Gardam's heroines, has not been banished, but rather absorbed even deeper than she was before into the local community. Madness as often with Gardam is a pre-emptor of integration both interior and exterior. In this way her novel has again served the function of taking the genre's classically interior process and extroverting it with grace. We are returned to Eliza now who in a practical expression of this has decided not to accept pay for looking after Joan's grandchildren: 'I'm making them give the money to The Society of the Risen Christ!' (Gardam, 1992a, p.226)

Gardam, as has been said several times before does not preach, instead the reader does feel gently led. It is as if to say, ‘These things being so and our confusion, bewilderment, madness and grief, there are also these facts of love that remain: kindness, humility, and a rejoicing in the truth. The novel’s shape, its gradual unfolding into madness and beyond it into love, is a fictional version of the famous passage in another letter sent by Paul:

Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things’ (1 Cor.13: 4-7).

The Mosaic in Margaret Drabble’s *The Pattern in the Carpet* and Gardam’s *Telegony*

Margaret Drabble (born 1939) was not what Quakers term a ‘birthright Friend’, but did attend Great Ayton School, a Quaker school in York, and her parents later became Quakers. At school she took part in drama, but after graduating with a degree in English Literature, turned to novel writing. Her first three novels, *A Summer Bird Cage* (1963), *The Garrick Year* (1964) and *The Millstone* (1965) are considered her ‘coming of age’ novels. *The Millstone*, for instance is the story of an unmarried pregnant woman finishing a PhD. Latterly Drabble was criticised for writing about the more privileged middle class in a genre that was somewhat derisively named the ‘Hampstead Novels.’ Some of Drabble’s original readers interpretive community, including graduates like myself, were unable to identify with this increasingly privileged portrayal of

middle-class life, and fell away from her following, whilst others joined, an example of Fish's 'slippage' of interpretive community.

Meanwhile Gardam, although part of middle-class life and manners in Wimbledon, kept a keen but distant and sardonic eye on the scene. She says, 'At a party given in London over twenty years ago I met the poet Stevie Smith who asked me who I was. "A Wimbledon housewife I said who writes novels"' (Gardam, 2016b). Such perspective in Gardam the author implies a person with a strongly private interior, as well as a deep sense of what it is to be an outsider, reflecting one whose social perspective is still rooted firmly in the industrial North East, rather than the more comfortable London suburbia of the literati.

In his article *Frameworks of Comparison* Benedict Anderson 'reflects on his intellectual formation.' A brilliant linguist, he spoke several languages including Indonesian. One could exchange Anderson's strategy of learning a new language for learning about any new interpretive community, be it a culture, social class or religion. Anderson's explanation would certainly explain Gardam's religious acuity and ecumenism, as partly due to the fact she is an outsider.

Such a period of struggling with a new language is especially good for training oneself to be seriously comparative, because there is not yet any automatic translation of foreign words into the language in your head. You gradually get to know enough to notice more, and yet you are still an outsider. If you then stay on long enough, things get taken for granted again, as they were back home, and you tend to be much less curious and observant than before - you start to say to yourself: 'I know Indonesia inside out.' The point being that good comparisons often come from the experience of strangeness and absences (Anderson, 2016).

When I interviewed her in 2013, Gardam, knowing that I am a Quaker, asked me the incisive question: ‘Why not Drabble?’ My reply was that Drabble has been honest about her belief in the Quaker ethos (that of God in everyone); and that she is neither a believer nor a Quaker and that my thesis was about a religious writer. Whereas Gardam has expressed agreement with being called a ‘religious writer’, I am not so sure that Drabble, like many Quakers themselves, would be as comfortable with the label ‘religious’.

Gardam and Drabble sometimes meet. Drabble, like Gardam, studied English Literature. It is in this literary connection that we find a meeting place between literature and religion in both Gardam, the Anglo-Catholic, Quaker attender and Drabble, the non-believing adherent to Quaker values. In other words there exists a writers’ interpretive community that has grown out of common experience of being students and writers of literature and being members of an interpretive community for whom their childhood religious influences have been and remain, as Gardam has put it, ‘embedded’ - a significant influence on their own writing.

Drabble’s latest semi-autobiographical novel *The Pattern in the Carpet* uses the jigsaw as its central motif. In it she describes the important role an aunt had in her childhood, for she was the opposite in many ways of her own mother: chaotic, loving, involving, playful, always occupied (rather than pre-occupied) and untidy. One of Drabble’s aunt’s preferred forms of play was the jigsaw, and it is discussion of another, related visual representation, the mosaic, that leads Drabble into a delightful exploration of the extension of the jigsaw

motif.³⁵ Drabble finds herself in the hands of an informative London cab driver, whom she allows to take her not only to the British Library, but to question her definition of the jigsaw.

‘So when was the first jigsaw made?’ I was able to reply, with unusual precision if not necessarily with historical accuracy, ‘In 1766.’ He thought about this for a moment, as we headed east. Then he said, ‘No that can’t be right. There must be earlier jigsaws. Think about it. What about mosaics?’ (Drabble, 2014, p.151)

Drabble continues on an unusually spontaneous journey with what she calls her ‘lucky lapse of rigour’ and embarks with the cab driver on a research tour of London. His knowledge extends as much to London’s underground as over-ground systems, its hidden places and pieces. Warming to his theme he reminds Drabble that London is in fact like a jigsaw, or mosaic, and that this juxtaposition of individual pieces within one picture, ever changing, is perhaps to be considered as part of Drabble’s own piece under construction, her book. The London Drabble describes is fascinating, not only because of its insight into Drabble’s literary process, but also because of its tantalising, but unrealised, potential as a religious process. However, Drabble does convey a deeply interior process as the pieces of research come together in her writer’s mind. Fragments of London reveal themselves as being part of the whole picture and they emerge between others with which she has long been familiar. The whole experience ends like a religious pilgrimage at

³⁵ ‘Mosaic’ is defined as ‘The process of creating pictures or decorative patterns by cementing together small pieces of stone, glass or other hard materials of various colours. Also: work produced in this way; the constructive or decorative materials from which it is made’ (OED).

St Ethelburger's in Bishopsgate, a medieval church that was blown up by a massive IRA terrorist bomb blast in 1993 ... The restoration of St Ethelburga's, Kevin suggested to me, had been a kind of giant stone jigsaw. (Kevin should have written a chapter of this book.) At his prompting I discovered how frequently the word 'jigsaw puzzle' is used about restoration projects (Drabble, 2009, p159).

Drabble's journey, indeed the making of her book, has become a pilgrimage, a cornucopia of sights, accompanied, as in Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, by an unlikely community of fellow travellers to whom the cab driver introduces her. She says, in a manner reminiscent of the religious 'spark' discussed in Chapter 5:

As he spoke, little brightly coloured particles of memory began to scatter and glitter and connect in the back of my brain. Tesserae, tesserae. Click, click, click. Mosaics, patterns, kaleidoscopes, tapestries, pictures. Dispersion, cohesion, mastic, gum, glue. Mimesis, mimicry...reconstructions, reassemblings, replications. Collections, cabinets of curiosities. Simulacra, copies, reproductions. Calendar art, conversion art, paper flowers, elves made of gummed paper. The half-arts, *die Halbkunste*, the *compositae*' (Drabble, 2009, p159).

The experience is at once a dismantling of her concept of London and at the same time the creation of a new multi-layered, multi-faced London, one that is less reliant on the strict delineation, the flat fixed map, of marked time and place, *chronos*, and includes past, future and present, or all time, *kairos*. Drabble's language is almost religious by the end of the chapter in which 'The jigsaw model of experience and the universe. The model in which the scattered pieces from the first dispersal are reunited at the end of time.' (Drabble, 2009, p.152) But though fascinated, moved and grateful, for Drabble (unlike Gardam) that sense of awe does not remain in the rest of her autobiography. Drabble is a writer who came from a religious educational (Quaker) background, for whom

much of those values are still inherent. For Drabble in all honesty (an important Quaker value after all) the constituent parts of the puzzle might at times be a source of wonder, even quasi-religious awe, but they do not constitute a religious faith.

The religious mosaic also features in Gardam as brought to our attention by the novelist Mukherjee. In his review of *The Stories* (2014) he says ‘These tales unfurl their meanings, like the slow blooming of a miraculous flower.’ (Mukherjee, 2014)

Structure is another fulcrum around which the short story turns, easily overlooked. In “Telegony” a collection of three linked stories, about a transgressive love affair in Victorian times, the suppression of that information, and the shadows it casts on the present, is a masterclass in mosaic design (Mukherjee, 2014). This mosaic theme (slants of light revealing kaleidoscopically different colours and perspectives) extends to one of origami (folded shapes revealing different colours and perspectives from the same sheet of paper)³⁶: ‘Ms. Schiff said. “No one folds and unfolds time as Gardam does; she works origami with it, so that in a single moment, we’re three places at once” (Sulcas, 2014). Here Schiff is describing a phenomenon Kermode also noticed. In *Forms of Attention* Kermode comments

If the world is a book, gathered, when rightly seen, into one volume, then the book is a world, capable of being exfoliated into a universe. All discords can be resolved into concords, whether in the heavens or on the page. For the book or the world time stops;

³⁶ Origami is defined as ‘The Japanese art of folding paper into intricate decorative designs and objects; paper folded in this way’ (OED, 2016).

only the observers, the interpreters are mutable and subject to temporal attrition. (Kermode, 1987, p.90)

Gardam's short story *Telegony* is an example of this 'gathering' and 'exfoliating'. 'Telegony' is defined by the OED as 'the (hypothetical) influence of a previous sire seen in the progeny of a subsequent sire from the same mother' (OED, 2016). When this phenomenon of telegony is applied to the human characters of Gardam's story, the reader is involved in the many folds and surprise reveals of different traits, colours: 'other sides' that emerge in the physical features of her characters as they do in origami. The genetic possibilities inherent in the offspring are indeed multiple and colourful, mosaic like. Thus the heroine of *Telegony*, Alice, inherits both her mother's previous lover's Italian black eyes and her birth father's red hair.

If one takes into account that Gardam's *Telegony* is narrated in a set of three short stories, from the perspectives of Alice, her mother and the first person narrator who knew all involved, the analogy is to an even more complex origami. We have seen these reveals before in Gardam's other themes: in the metaphors of pearl and carbuncle and the episodic and altered scenes in the Old Filth trilogy for instance. This interweaving of a theme or scene from different perspectives or in different times also collapses time into itself, so that it is, with its gene collective, inherent and revealed in one time and person (the story's protagonist, Alice). Gardam's *Telegony* invites the reader to consider the many possible genetic and narrative permutations of its outcome.

Alice is well aware of her genetic inheritance and calls it 'metaphorical telegony' (Gardam, 2014,p.379). However, as we have noted, Gardam's stories often go beyond the realm of the metaphor and 'magical realism' to the

religious one of 'mystical realism'. If we consider that Gardam's stories most often include religious meaning, we might view the offspring's double paternal inheritance in a biblical light: whilst God is not always necessarily considered a lover, he is in the Christian faith at least, a daughter's maker. Thus a daughter has a make-up that is the telegony of two fathers: God the Father and her biological father. This is not as theologically risky as it may seem, since Quakers believe in 'that of God in everyone', and this is part of the Quaker faith Gardam most definitely adheres to. Quakers are asked in their guide *Advices and Queries*, 'Do you respect that of God in everyone though it may be expressed in unfamiliar ways or be difficult to discern?' (QFP 1.02:17). The difference is that the reader, having read Gardam's other stories, can be reasonably confident of a potential religious meaning.

In their belief and writings at least, though their ethics follow similar (Quaker) lines, Gardam and Drabble represent two strands of Quakerism: Drabble's expression is the result of contemporary Quaker non-theist liberal humanism and Gardam's includes within that humanism the earlier origins of Quaker religious tolerance expressed in George Fox's belief that 'there is one even Christ Jesus that can speak to thy condition' (QFP.19:02). Thus Gardam and Drabble reveal, however it is folded, the two differently shaded sides (religious and non religious) of the one sheet of paper marked 'Quaker'.

The theme of the same object seen in different lights (mosaic) or from other sides (origami) is not new to women writers however. While I have made points of contrast between Drabble and Gardam, they are members of a community of women writers of fiction; and one of their shared appreciations

and influences is the work of Charlotte Brontë. In Gardam's novel *The Summer After the Funeral*, Athene is convinced that she is Charlotte Brontë. Drabble's novel *The Waterfall* (1973) is said to be partly modelled on Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (Hawdon, 2010).

Charlotte Brontë's biographer, Elizabeth Gaskell, observed that Brontë, the committed Anglican, had 'that strong practical regard for the simple holy truth of expression' and that when writing 'she would sit waiting patiently, searching for the right term, until it presented itself to her.' Thus, says Gaskell,

'this care makes her style present the finish of a piece of mosaic...each component part, however small...dropped into the right place...She wrote on... bits of paper in a minute hand holding each against a piece of board... Her finished manuscripts were copied from these pencil scraps, in clear, legible, delicate traced writing, almost as easy to read as print' (Gaskell, 1997, p.234).

One can hear, in Gaskell's description of Brontë's mosaic-building and in her 'waiting patiently', some of the qualities of *lectio divina's* second stage, *meditatio*, (or indeed in the Friend discerning carefully before offering Quaker spoken ministry)³⁷, the faith that the right words will come. Moreover, it is clear that this process is painstaking, as is both writing, and the contemplation of biblical text. There is an attention to the particular, as there is in *lectio divina*, imparting with this concern, that it is in attending to the specific detail that the

³⁷ 'Do not assume that vocal ministry is never to be your part. Faithfulness and sincerity in speaking, even very briefly, may open the way to fuller ministry from others. When prompted to speak, wait patiently to know that the leading and the time are right, but do not let a sense of your own unworthiness hold you back. Pray that your ministry may arise from deep experience, and trust that words will be given to you. Try to speak audibly and distinctly, and with sensitivity to the needs of others. Beware of speaking predictably or too often, and of making additions towards the end of a meeting when it was well left before' (QFP 1:13).

full glory of God in both the individual and their community's religious life is indicated. Detail in the words is the signifier of the Word.

The literary aesthetic of Aristotelian mimesis is defined by OED as 'imitation' *specifically* 'the representation or imitation of the real world in (a work of) art, literature, etc.' However, there is a further definition of mimesis that moves the reader beyond the merely representative to the imitation of the bodily and linguistic manifestations of their experiencing. Thus we have its definition as the 'Imitation of another person's words, mannerisms, actions, etc' (OED). The former definition of mimesis is one of a representation, the distanced imitation of the real world in art, the latter a more intimate mimicry, an embodiment of personal mannerisms and language than extend from internal experience. The second definition of mimesis is thus particularly apt for fictional descriptions of religious events: it is all the more immersive being a detailed description of a religious person's physical words and manners, external symptoms of internal religious experiences, for example how a Quaker might wait until she feels moved by the Spirit to speak.

This latter definition of mimesis closely resembles the Benedictine manner, which could otherwise be described as a form of congruence, where the person is aware of themselves being at home in the Word and the world. The second stage of *lectio divina*, in which the reader reflects on the Word in her own words, *meditatio*, is already described in Part 2 and is key here. Gardam's fiction more closely resembles a manifestation of the integrated manners and language of that embodied Benedictine reconciliation between Word and words within the religious person, one in which Word and words are so at one as to be

almost inseparable within the character. In religious reading, of which Gardam is an example, the reader is thus presented with a person whose emotional and religious experiencing, however internally conflicting, is never the less all part of her experiencing and represented as such to the reader. Reconciliation of internal conflict is also therefore both Aristotelian (cathartic) and religious (redemptive).

For Gardam religious immersion, though often witty and delivered as we have discussed in a light conversational manner (*eutrapelia*), is different from satirical observation. Gardam's conversational, plain style extends a religious hospitality and empathy to both character and reader. This leads naturally to the reader's experiential involvement and consequently cognitive understanding of the community's *raison d'être* (the Word), and its Christian roots and the individual's expression of it within her religious interpretive community (in words).

Murdoch, Tremain and Drabble all write about the effects of religion, the keen observations of the manner of Quakers by Murdoch, the loneliness of a Roman Catholic widow by Tremain and the almost religious sense of awe of which Drabble writes in her brilliant extended autobiographical description of the jigsaw puzzle and mosaic in *The Pattern in the Carpet*. It is Gardam however who time and again returns even her most isolated characters to a religious interpretive community.

Whilst Murdoch, Tremain and Drabble offer us penetrating literary descriptions of religion, they do not however offer us descriptions of what it is to *be* religious. Gardam's religious hermeneutic is not only stronger, because she

invites the reader to experience and embody both Word and words in a combined religious and literary aesthetic, but because she is an outsider, in the way that Anderson described above. Gardam is thus able to acutely observe the linguistic and tonal commonalities and differences in the various Christian faiths and their expression in their religious interpretive communities' lives: 'The point being' as Anderson says, 'that good comparisons often come from the experience of strangeness and absences' (Anderson, 2016).

Chapter 7. Gardam: A Religious Coming of Age Novelist

Final point - Every serious novel must in some degree and *unnoticeably* carry the form further. Novel must be 'novel'. To survive - like the blob in the ocean, the seed, it must hold in itself some fibrous strength, some seemingly preposterous new quality, catch some unnoticed angle of light - and unselfconsciously.

(Gardam, 1986, p.188)

In the previous chapter we considered how Gardam described and engaged us in an individual's religious experience as compared to authors who wrote about characters who were following a religion. Various literary devices helped make this possible, in particular the use of magical realism that, situated in a religious context, often emerged as experiential and mystical realism. This chapter considers how Gardam's individual religious characters grow into and integrate with a religious interpretive community. In one sense this is another form of the Romantic *Bildungsroman*, (the 'coming of age novel'), of formation and development. As we shall see though, and widening the epigraph to this chapter, Gardam makes the genre anew in subtle ways. For she extends the concept of the 'coming of age novel' to include 'religious coming of age' which I argue occurs in Gardam's writing and which has not been critically discussed in detail before now. I also show that many of the conditions that make an ecumenical religious *interpretive* community (not least one that may cluster around a text such as a novel) are modelled in the Receptive Ecumenism project at The Centre of Catholic Studies, Durham University (Centre for Catholic Studies, 2016).

I shall begin with a brief description of the effects of childhood upon Gardam's adult characters and their integration into religious community. I shall then continue with a more detailed critique of her novel *Crusoe's Daughter*.

'Keep the child in view'

'All my novels are about the influence of early childhood says Gardam' (Bloom, 2013). Gardam began as a writer for children and has published twelve books for children from age six upwards. In chronological order they are: *A Few Fair Days* (1971); *Bridget and William* (1981); *The Hollow Land* (1981); *Horse* (1982); *Kit* (1983); *Kit in Boots* (1986); *Swan* (1987); *Through the Doll's House Door* (1987); *Tufty Bear* (1996); *The Kit Stories* (1998) and *Ink Monkey* (1999). Three novels for teenagers have been classified by some as 'coming of age' novels: *A Long Way From Verona* (1971), *The Summer After the Funeral* (1973) and *Bilgewater* (1977). They appear variously in the teenage or adult section of booklists and in bookshops. However, in these and even in Gardam's eight adult novels and ten short story collections, the inner child of the character remains in the reader's view. They are often detected as reserve (the distinguished QC Edward Feathers in *Old Filth*), plain speaking (the teenage author Jessica Vye in *A Long Way From Verona*) or in other traits that persist. Gardam is following Dickens's advice when writing about people of any age: 'to the end they - we - have hidden lives. Particularly, there are always hidden childhoods. "Keep the child in view", wrote Dickens in a note on the manuscript of *The Old Curiosity Shop* when he thought he was losing sight of Little Nell' (Gardam, 2016c).

Gardam was influenced both by Dickens and his characters. The young boy Pip in the novel *Great Expectations* held out hope of a future with Estella and resourcefully refused to accept Magwitch's money because of its criminal sources. This resourceful independence is true of Gardam's motherless child of the Raj, Old Filth, in the *Old Filth* trilogy. Filth is born in Malay and his mother dies shortly after his birth. His first years are spent with a violent and alcoholic father, and he is cared for by the Malay villagers, one of whom becomes his nursemaid. For all Edward Feathers knows, his 'mother' is that villager. He speaks Malay and is happy until, at four years old, he is fetched by a Scottish Presbyterian aunt, a missionary, and sent to such a (cruel) foster carer in Wales that for years into adulthood he is sure he is responsible for her sudden death. When Filth goes to boarding school in England he spends the holidays at a school friend's family home until that too fails. He appears in adult life, a QC and Betty's husband, formal, ordered but somehow lost at sea. The novel *Old Filth* reveals that Filth has appeared more emotionally distant than he actually is. In the chapter entitled 'A Light House' his practical and informed wisdom comes to the fore. It emerges in a conversation with the young solicitor Vanessa whom he helps to realise that work is not everything (Gardam, 2004a, p.149-166). Such wisdom and strategic wit, the reader begins to suspect, is born of a semblance of faith that survived its onslaught as a child. It is used not just in self-preservation or self-interest, but with the gentle rigour required when one person is altering another's course for their own happiness and best interests.³⁸ It is a poignant scene since the effectively fatherless Filth is most fatherly and,

³⁸ I do not think Filth, as some people have imagined, is Gardam's husband, who was also a QC, but I have wondered if perhaps Filth's elegant economy of prose, wisdom, interiority and wit signifies what Carl Jung termed the 'animus' in Gardam.

though 'it was deliberate' (Gardam, 2004a, p.159), he and his deceased wife Betty were childless. The reason as Filth explains is that 'we were Empire orphans...If you've not been loved as a child, you don't know how to love a child' (Gardam, 2004a, p.159). Filth has kept his child in view and the adult Filth knows he could not raise one.

Filth's rival Veneering, received eventually and grudgingly by Filth as his chess partner and neighbour, is an orphan, having lost both parents when their house was bombed in the war. Its effect on Veneering is different - he is opportunistic. His name after all is taken from Dickens's superficial couple, the nouveau riche Veneerings in *Our Mutual Friend* (1997) for whom everything in their house was indeed a veneer: 'Mr and Mrs *Veneering* were bran-new people in a bran-new house in a bran-new quarter of London. Everything about the *Veneerings* was spick and span new' (Dickens, 1997, p.17). Filth's Veneering has had an affair with Filth's wife that has lasted for nearly fifty years. However, unknown to Veneering, Filth has been fully aware and is content to have remained with Betty despite this knowledge. Perhaps Filth has faith for he is not only wise with Vanessa but 'when he knew that he was very ill', and in a hotel alone, 'he thought he needed a gospel...and turned up one of Christ's ding-dongs with the lawyers' (Gardam, 2004a, p.224).

He wondered, the pages shaking as he turned them, why Christ had so hated lawyers when He'd have been such a brilliant one Himself. Christ when you considered it, was simply putting a Case...Pilate's was his most respectable interrogation. Pilate had not been a lawyer, but another excellent lawyer manqué. Pilate and Christ had understood each other (Gardam, 2004a, p.224).

With the prospect of death, Filth ‘needed a gospel’ and practises a form of *meditatio*. He reads the Sermon on the Mount and thinks ‘benevolently how he should like to be upon another Bench listening to Christ going for the defence in a Case to do with, say, a land-reclamation’ (Gardam, 2004a, p.225).

In Gardam’s novels then children are orphaned and lost, and she does not spare us their difficult times either then or in adulthood resulting from their childhood abandonments. Here she admits the influence of Rudyard Kipling’s own childhood experiences of which he wrote in the short story *Baa Baa Black Sheep* (1995). The tale is based on the young empire boy Kipling (Punch) and his sister (Judy) who are sent home to England and fostered by a cruel aunt. “‘The worst of it is that that the children will grow up away from me,’” thought Mama; but she did not say it out loud’ (Kipling, 1995, p.3). Despite Kipling’s mother’s misgivings the children went ‘back home’ to an England they had never seen and where Kipling’s aunt was so cruel that he almost went blind, Gardam reminds us (Rees, 2004). In *Baa Baa, Black Sheep* Kipling has changed his own name to ‘Punch’, but it is clear to whom the author is referring. Poignantly it starts with the biblical reference ‘When I was in my father’s house, I was in a better place.’ This is both a factual statement and a religious one of course. Kipling observes the following as the children traverse the long sea journey from Bombay to England, as Filth did from Malay to England:

When a mature man discovers that he has been deserted by Providence, deprived of his God, and cast without help, comfort or sympathy, upon a world which is new and strange to him, his despair, which may find expression in evil living, the writing of his experiences, or the more satisfactory diversion of suicide, is generally supposed to be impressive. A Child, under exactly similar circumstances as far as his knowledge goes, cannot very well curse God and die. It howls. (Kipling, 1995, pp. 9-10)

The tale of Punch's emotional exile from his parents, as Gardam points out, is difficult to read. She says, 'It so distressed me that I can hardly bear to see the book itself, let alone read the story' (Rees, 2004). What is sadder still is that the young Punch is relieved when his kind mother extracts them from the cruel aunt and her spoilt son. Life is not quite as the child Punch expects. It is 'all different now.' The author (Kipling) reminds his younger self that his adult life is not bettered simply because the situation is remedied:

Not altogether, O Punch, for when young lips have drunk deep of the bitter waters of Hate, Suspicion and Despair, all the Love in the world will not wholly take away that knowledge; though it may turn darkened eyes for a while to the light, and teach Faith where no Faith was. (Kipling, 1995, p. 39)

Gardam agrees when speaking of Raj orphans such as Filth:

"There aren't a lot of them left," says Gardam, "but as it happens I know three or four. They are very gung-ho very often. They say, 'Didn't miss my parents at all. I'm much fonder of the people who looked after me. I quite forgot them and they forgot me.' But it always strikes me that they are not quite the people they would have been" (Rees, 2004).

For Kipling as for Dickens and Gardam the injured child remains 'in view' however brave they appear to others. In Kipling's short story, *The Gardener* the reader is pained by Helen's search for her nephew's war grave at Hagenzeele Third Military Cemetery. This is even more so when she misses what solace she might have - she does not recognise the man who 'looked at her with infinite compassion' (Christ the gardener) and showed her where her son lay 'supposing him to be the gardener' (Kipling, 1995, p.53). The poignancy here is the sense that for a child time *does* matter. Further, the abandoned adult, because faith is

lost, carries the inner child's mourning, as Kipling did himself, to the end. That child, however poignantly, is that which Dickens, Kipling and Gardam keep in view. Their intimacy with those who mourn recalls the tenderness of Christ who mourns with Mary in the garden and calls her by name. In their authoring, writers such as Gardam have recalled Christ's tenderness to the reader. It is a religious reading because a fiction that is mindful of such Christian metaphors, and is continuously disappearing behind and appearing before, us as Stanley Fish described, is also continuously remembering our loss and re-discovery of Christ.

Threaded through all Gardam's childhoods is religion, for better or for worse. It is seen as an exterior ritual by some such as *Veneering*, or highly interior and thoughtful for others such as *Filth*. Most often Gardam's characters are exteriorized out of relative isolation and into a church congregation, for example Polly Flint in *Crusoe's Daughter*, or beamed into the interfaith community, as was the well-bundled baby Holly in *Faith Fox*.

Crusoe's Daughter

The novel I shall use as an example of a coming of religious age novel is Gardam's *Crusoe's Daughter*. Clark introduces it well in the following words:

'The novel she regards as "quite my best"... portrayed the inner life of an adolescent girl and her intense relationship with the works of Daniel Defoe. It is stylistically ambitious, presenting dialogue, she notes, "like a play"; and this desire to experiment with form, to "get away from the big old paragraphs"' has marked much of her work' (Clark, 2011).

It is the story of the orphaned Polly Flint³⁹ who starts her life as an isolate, disaffected from religion by her guardian aunts' unhealthy obsession with what Polly calls "all that church!" (Gardam, 1986, p.212). However, Polly's life reaches its final stage happily integrated amidst the now deceased aunts' Anglo-Catholic community - that which she had previously spurned.

The words in the epigraph above are spoken by Polly. 'The seed', or as early Quakers referred to it 'the Word', the 'Christ Seed' (Cope, 1971, p.222) provides the 'fibrous strength' within Gardam's fiction. Moreover, it grows within the context of the character's world and words. By dint of identification with Polly, the reader's world also extends. This is not an essential quality of a novel, but it makes Gardam's all the more interesting in that it has the potential to provide new religious experience to the reader, and for her to become part of the interpretive community of religious readers.

Growth is associated with major life transitions, such as at adolescence, mid-life and the third age. Orphaned early in life, Polly Flint's narrative arc covers at least two such transitions. During her adolescence, at the arrival of puberty (blood 'on the sheepskin rug'), Polly is estranged from her guardian aunts' Anglo-Catholicism, most markedly in her refusal to be confirmed. At mid-life, she is accepting of what the red blushes signal, 'Ah well, so it's over. No children now,' but she has 'emerged with a sense of God and resurrection' (Gardam, 1986, p.198).

³⁹ 'Polly's life was very much like my mother's, except that she never drank' (Gardam, 2016c).

As we saw in the literature review in the Introduction, the relatively few theses that discuss Gardam's *oeuvre* tend to focus on the 'coming of age' genre. Novels such as *A long Way From Verona* and *Bilgewater* narrate the life journeys of adolescent girls, respectively Jessica Vye and Marigold Green (otherwise known as 'Bilgewater' or 'Bill's daughter'). According to Sleisov, 'Gardam's novels can be viewed as female Bildungsroman' (Sleisov, 2007, p.5). However, '*Bildungsroman*', according to the OED has a wider meaning than simply 'coming of age'. It is defined as 'A novel that has as its main theme the formative years or spiritual education of one person (a type of novel traditional in German literature).' This spiritual coming of age is something left largely unaddressed by critical work on Gardam to date.

This thesis is concerned with formation, too, but with formation as a *religious* coming of age. Such transition occurs at any age, though its pace may be spurred by one of the three classic comings of age I referred to earlier. One of its chief characteristics is that it is usually evidenced in a person's integration into a wider ecumenical community, and with such development often comes a widening of horizons. This idea is not unique to philosophy or theology, and its dynamics are well developed in psychology and religion. Such literature often points to the synergistic effect of religious coming of age and communities, where the transition can help to sustain a community and where the community can stabilise the transition. Thus the American pastor and psychologist Carl Rogers explained this expansion of horizons in *Client Centred Therapy* (Rogers, 1951). The theory of personality and behaviour he outlined in proposition XVII states that 'when the individual perceives and accepts into one consistent and integrated system all his sensory and visceral experiences, then he is necessarily

more understanding of others and is more accepting of others as separate individuals' (Rogers, 1951, p.520).

Religious coming of age, then, can involve integration of other aspects of coming of age. Religious life, and therefore the various religious interpretive community texts speak, not just to the specifics of religious life, but to the *whole* of a person's life and their community. In terms of religious formation, the Cistercian Casey (whose interpretive community follows the *Rule*) says 'the process of internalisation [of a community's interpretive text] goes something like this':

There is a meeting of two cultures or value systems, one personal, the other social, optimally leading to a common horizon; the newcomer comes to see things as the community sees them. The "new" values and the "old" values conjoin in the newcomer serving as a daily basis of his actions and response. This "fusion of horizons", the ability to blend "old" and "new" values, is the surest guarantee of monastic vocation. (Casey, 2012, p.26)

If we consider that for Casey the expression of monastic vocation necessitates 'the basic technique of monastic theology [that] is reading ancient texts in the light of present reality' (Casey, 2012, p.159), then we begin to understand the similarity between the Benedictine's and the fictional protagonist's challenge in Gardam's text: how to integrate religious interpretive community text in its individual member's present reality. The formation of monks in religious community and lay people in theirs may not be so very different.

In order to consider this religious coming of age it is helpful to consider one of Gardam's protagonists in the context of her own religious coming of age.

Polly Flint had grown from a self-confessed 'island', she says, 'to love music, to love the church, to begin to take part in this particular kind of song' (Gardam, 1986, p.198). It is a type of growth, a truly 'fibrous' one that takes account of the fact that nothing has really changed in her context, except perhaps her own attitude. By the end of the novel Polly has ceased excluding herself from her aunts' religious community. She 'thanked God that from the purgatory with the works of old Defoe I had emerged with a sense of God and resurrection; and I went into church and sat myself down in a pew at the back' (Gardam, 1986, p.198). As she does so she observes the ladies as they sweep away the ever-encroaching sand-blow, 'Oh dear! Oh dear!' (Gardam, 1986, p.198) Meanwhile, Christ, the giver we hope of perspective on our suffering, looks down on the scene 'from beneath the thorns of Jersusalem' (Gardam, 1986, p.198).

The narrative of Polly Flint's coming of religious age prompts us to apply the story to our own lives and situations. What exactly of our attitude might change in a religious coming of age? Not far away from Polly's church and indeed Gardam's own birthplace on the North East coast of England, sits Durham Cathedral. Built in 1093, originally home to the Benedictines, the Abbey continued Hilda of Whitby's ecumenical Benedictine tradition of which Gardam has written (Gardam, 2014). Nearby, at Durham University in the Centre for Catholic Studies, is a remarkable project that began fifteen hundred years after the Abbey's founding. In considering in the 'pragmatics' of contemporary ecumenical community, Paul Murray, who launched the project at a conference in 2006, explained that the individual's attitude to other Christian faiths is fundamental to ecumenical religious community.

The essential principle behind Receptive Ecumenism is that the primary ecumenical responsibility is to ask not “What do the other traditions first need to learn from us?” but “What do we need to learn from them?” The assumption is that if all were asking this question seriously and acting upon it then all would be moving in ways that would both deepen our authentic respective identities and draw us into more intimate relationship. (Centre For Catholic Studies 2015)

This attitude is reminiscent of Chapter fifty-three of the *Rule*, ‘The Reception of Guests’: ‘Guests should always be treated with respect and deference. Those attending them both on arrival and departure should show this by a bow of the head or even a full prostration on the ground, which will leave no doubt that it is indeed Christ who is received and venerated in them’ (*Rule*, p.123). Receptive Ecumenism underscores the importance of receiving the other as Christ rather than in showing them their host’s worldly worth.

How does Word root itself in the post Christian world? As we have already described Murray and his colleagues have set about answering that question in what Murray describes as its ‘three key voices’: the ‘poetic’, ‘analytic’ and ‘pragmatic’.

For the purposes of Receptive Ecumenism *poesis* is both a metaphor and expression of the practical aesthetics of building ecumenical community. Murray describes Receptive Ecumenism as ‘an ecclesial *poesis* that is necessarily done in the middle of things’. In that sense, then, *poesis* occupies the Gadamerian playground or building site between our specific foreground of faith, our religion, and the horizon we share with other Christian religions. This fits the description of the site of *poesis* that is ‘poised between given

circumstances...on the one hand’ and ‘anticipated actualization... on the other’ (Murray 2010, p. xii). One imagines a backward and forward motion between foreground and horizon whilst ideas are played with, built and agreed upon in what Murray refers to as ‘a collegial process’ (Murray 2010, p.xii). This motion, ever building on the combined wisdom of experience and learning, is typical of the hermeneutic circle, one that moves constantly between the local specific and the distant general, the centre and circumference, and always rechecking.

The self-described *movement* of Receptive Ecumenism is also reminiscent of the Benedictine vow of *conversatio morum*, the constant motion a Benedictine makes between reading the Word and doing in words. *Poesis* belongs at the site of actualisation. It is found therefore in the space between foreground and horizon where communities are built and the Word integrated within the people’s present construction. Moreover, lest its theology becomes too complicated, it is important to remember that Murray says that at the heart of Receptive Ecumenism’s mission, ‘the motive is love’ (Murray, 2010, p. xv).

What might that look like in action? A small personal example might help. At a recent Receptive Ecumenism conference (Durham University, 2010) there was a short lunch break. A Quaker student, I found myself beside a man, Catholic, retired who had come from Ireland to live in Durham some time ago. We began talking and introduced ourselves to each other. When he heard I was a Quaker his response surprised me. There were tears and a firm shaking of the hand: ‘You people saved our lives’ ‘How?’ ‘During the famine at home’ ‘Our village was starving and you came and saved us. The important thing was that you didn’t just send food, you wrote it down, you wrote down what happened

and your people went and told the British parliament and help came. Now that would not have happened if you had not written it down.'

It can be bewildering and moving to be covered in a glory that is not yours, but it is also humbling to receive the oral history of an Irish village around one hundred and seventy years after the event, and to hear (as distinct from knowing) the roles that Quakers played in that event for the first time. Two things were important: listening and writing it down. Writing it down so that the people with power could read and send food. This writing down and speaking truth to power is a form of testimony, often executed with thoughtful, prayerful craft. It might also be called, in Murray's terms, *poesis*.

There is no reason such testimony should not be given in fictional experience poetically expressed. Poetry as Gardam has remarked defines the short story, that which is only after all a shorter story of the story's longer fiction, the novel. Such stories, parables, allow us to suspend our disbelief. They help us see how others build community. What is more they help us listen as Benedict says 'with the ear of the heart.'

However, there is far more to Gardam than this. In almost every novel we are invited into the religious lives as well as into the intra- and inter-dialogues concerning the compatibility or not of the protagonist's personal faith with what family or community requires of them. The resolution for Gardam in almost all cases includes not only an emotional, but a religious one. This settling may be with our original religion, but the same religion is experienced with more equanimity. There is an acceptance of what is required of the individual

concerned to make up the community, and an acknowledgement that, although certain parts of a religion may at times feel staged and we thus actors locked into rituals upon that stage, we are improved for that habit of taking part. For example, Polly Flint says to Paul Treece of the mixed blessings of habit:

‘I agree with you about the praying,’ I hurtled on. ‘It wasn’t love of God, like we’re meant to have. It was awe and fear and at last just habit. That’s why I won’t get Confirmed - it would be just habit, That’s why I think marriage is so dull - after you’re married it becomes just habit. But they’re both a sort of crutch to help you along. You get in a mess without them. Habits.’ (Gardam, 1986, p.133)

The fourth wall between Polly and the reader is permeable. In terms of Murray’s Receptive Ecumenism there is ‘poetry’, but there is also the prescribed result of the ‘analytic’ (‘habit’ and thus, as Polly decries, ‘marriage’). However, Polly is stuck between the alternatives of religion or marriage, both of which are received by her as ‘dull’. She cannot think of another ‘pragmatic’, a third way, both poetical and analytic.

Polly recognises that with her maiden aunts ‘the habit [of religion] didn’t work...It wasn’t strong enough. They missed out on marriage or they muddled it and the praying got - oh too important.’ The result was that ‘They both went mad a bit I think’ (Gardam, 1986, p.134). Polly is not saying marriage is the habit of solution, but she has seen that the habit of the lonely and individual ‘religious’ is not healthy either.

In a passage such as this, and there are many passages like it throughout the novel, Polly thinks things through as she speaks to her friend Paul Treece,

analysing and, in the process, discovering that speaking aloud reveals truth: ‘I had had no idea that I thought all this!’ For Polly, speaking out loud acts like the first stage of Benedictine *lectio divina* (we hear the words better when they are formed in our own body). This is like speaking or ‘ministering’ in Quaker meeting: we think we know what the Word means, what we shall say when we are ‘moved by the Spirit to speak’, to stand up and minister, but, brought to our feet, we may find ourselves speaking quite different words than expected. The words we had prepared were more interpretative and directed to the letter. The ones we may deliver have space to breathe Spirit and speak for themselves. We do not hear them until they are uttered. Word has formed us differently than we planned.

Such words, even in conversation, are borne on the winds of the Spirit of the Word, can give rise to second stage *meditatio*. They surprise us. We have rehearsed our text, said it to ourselves silently. It is only when we read or speak out loud that the surrounding words fall away and are replaced by other words, with only some in the original order. Word is contextualised for us in our body and our experience, and more profoundly than if we had prepared it entirely ourselves. By the same paradoxical method, if we speak as planned in our *meditatio* or Quaker ministry, Spirit does not speak and words dry up. But habit plays its part here too for listening to the Spirit requires habitual practice. In other words *meditatio* and Quaker ministry require both poetry and habit. So, as it happens, does good conversation. However, Paul Treece in his superior manner mocks Polly’s obsession with *Robinson Crusoe* saying ‘Defoe was a journalist. You’ve glorified this book into a gospel.’ (p.133). Well, as Gardam might phrase it, ‘perhaps she has, and perhaps it is.’ Certainly Paul’s comment

is a portent of what is to emerge from both Crusoe and Polly by the end of the novel.

Meanwhile, Polly Flint is now in her forties with two love affairs and the First World War behind her. The Second World War is approaching. She spends most of her time with the maid Alice in her deceased maiden aunts' enormous 'yellow house' by the marsh.⁴⁰ She has been steadily drinking whisky for some years alone 'on my island', translating *Robinson Crusoe* into German and then French. She continues 'in 1930 on an analysis of the book as Spiritual Biography.' (Gardam, 1986, p.176) She is 'as abstracted as a monk at a Book of Hours' (Gardam, 1986, p.176).

The Zeit family, German Jewish friends in England, urge Polly to apply for an Oxford scholarship. The process is never begun and is interrupted by the war and Mrs Zeit's internment. The opportunity passes Polly by. Alone in her study, Polly even begins to question the theological basis of the book she is translating: 'Why was it a sin for Robinson Crusoe to yearn for freedom, adventure and traveller's joy?' She 'envied Crusoe his sin, his courage', 'because Crusoe acted against God's decree, venturing on a mission contrary to his duty, like Balaam, like Jonah, like Job, the Ismael of *Moby Dick*, like St Augustine, he foundered. Until his repentance at last' (Gardam, 1986, p.174).

It is time for redress however. She finds herself brought round by an ultimatum from Alice, the only remaining maid, now housekeeper: "It stops or I

⁴⁰ 'The yellow house is still there I think, not far from Coatham Church. Coatham becomes more vivid as I fade out!' (Gardam, 2016c)

go” “What stops.” “The drinking stops”” (Gardam, 1986, p.182). At the same time Mr Benson, joining Alice in what would probably now be called ‘an intervention’ asks her to teach some German, French and English literature at the local boys’ school. Thus begins Polly’s first lesson. ‘I am over fiction, over drink’ she says (Gardam, 1986, p.222).

Theo Zeit, the son of Mrs Zeit, who has been interned, writes from Germany. His wife has left him. The Nazi occupation is closing in. Can Polly take in his two children, Hepzibah and Rebecca? They arrive in Paddington on the penultimate train out of Dusseldorf. Polly fetches them and continues teaching. Prophetically they are named after two biblical characters associated with deliverance to the Promised Land. Hepzibah appears in Isaiah 62: 4: ‘Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called Hepzibah, and thy land Beulah: for the Lord delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married.’ In turn, the young Rebecca Zeit’s arrival at the yellow house signifies the coming of Light into Polly’s life.⁴¹ This light was first symbolised by the telescope that flashed golden from the window and was thought by Polly as a child to be an angel. In a sense Rebecca is Polly’s angel, at least she certainly enables Polly to see her life extend into the context of ‘the Light of the world’ (John. 8: 12).

The occupants of the big yellow house now include the two Zeit family refugees and several boarders from the local boys school. The pragmatics of

⁴¹ According to Rashi, the three miracles that characterized Sarah’s tent while she was alive, and that disappeared with her death, reappeared when Rebecca entered the tent. These were: A lamp burned in her tent from Shabbat eve to Shabbat eve, there was a blessing in her dough, and a cloud hovered over her tent (symbolizing the Divine Presence) (Yesheva4me, 2016).

community do not necessarily have to be about marriage and Polly does go to church. As she says, she had ‘grown the past year, to love this music, to love the church, to begin to take part in this particular kind of song’ (Gardam, 1986, p.198). While she is singing Theo dies not in Auschwitz, but a short while after he joins them. A sign of Polly moving towards the pragmatism of community is that, rather than continuing to eschew her surroundings, Polly is taking what Murray calls her ‘situatedness seriously whilst continually opening it out, testing against what else there is and what else comes to light’ (Murray, 2010, p. 8). Indeed Murray could be describing Polly’s yellow house when he says that one image of the ‘pragmatics’ of Receptive Ecumenism is ‘the task of theology as one of therapeutic community...as being, in some respects, a process of family therapy...[where] the motive is one of love’ (Murray, 2010, pp. xiv-xv).

The book ends with a magical, but grounded, discussion about fiction between the character of Crusoe (whom we have not met before) and Polly. ‘My Creator was a great believer in memoirs’ observes Crusoe to Polly (Gardam, 1986, p.220) at the end. Crusoe is of course referring to Defoe, whose novels were often adapted and sophisticated versions of the memoirist genre (eg *Fanny Hill*), itself a common form of eighteenth-century novel. But the word ‘creator’ refers to the Creator in a larger sense, too. We are surely prompted here to think of the memoirs of Christ that are produced after his death by his followers, memoirs that despite early editing are strikingly different in their memories of Christ’s life. As Kermode points out in his discussion of Mark’s gospel, it is ‘a paradox applying to all narrative that although its function is mnemonic it always recalls different things’ (Kermode, 1979, p.45), and there can hardly be a better example of this than the four gospels. But the process of narrative

building had scarcely begun even with four different memoirs of the same person. Narrative begets narrative, interpretation multiplies, and characters are reborn, resurrected, in different narratives. Defoe's text gives rise to multiple Crusoes. In a significant autobiographical passage Gardam seems to refer to her mother as a type of Crusoe see p, 21. Her mother seems trapped in a landscape of Crusoes. There are other Crusoes - indeed Polly is a type of telegonic relation to Crusoe, as the novel's title suggests. Not for nothing is she an orphan, her birth obscure. As such, she possesses all the more narrative and interpretive potential. Kermode put this well when he commented that 'all narratives possess "hermeneutic potential", which is another way of saying that they must be obscure' (Kermode, 1979, p.45). Polly herself becomes a *figura* for narrative and its endless potential.

The remarkable discussion between Crusoe and Polly includes literary discourse, where Polly comments self-referentially upon her own life narrative and that of Crusoe. She says of the novel generally. "It won't fade out, but it will have to change. It's become quite canonically boring - all about politics or marital discord. The minutiae. You should see the fiction they have thought up about you and Friday' (Gardam, 1986, p.222). Gardam is breaking the fourth wall, to wonder aloud why the form of the novel has become so trivial and dull. It is significant that she wrote this in the 1980s at the time of the rise of the aforementioned middle-class 'Hampstead novels', (Margaret Drabble's *The Radiant Way* and Anita Brookner's *Strangers* for example). These flourished at the time Gardam had begun a quite different and new genre of religious writing in nearby Wimbledon. 'Novels aren't exciting now. Just writers rambling on'

(Gardam, 1986, p.223), says Polly, who the reader suspects speaks also for Gardam.

Polly continues to Crusoe, 'You were my bread. You are my bread' (Gardam, 1986, p.223) If the reader has wondered before, it is clear now that Polly's identification with the fictional Crusoe (who prayed twenty-four hours a day) has been with what she sees as a Christ-like figure, or at the least a fictional priest delivering the religiously sustaining bread of communion, the body of Christ. Polly observes of the comparison, 'Quite a few people see an affinity between you and Jesus Christ. They are given grants for theses on the subject.' Gardam continues through Polly's voice. For the researcher of Gardam, particularly a researcher of Gardam as a religious writer, the words are prophetic. Not only the reader, but also the researcher has been seen coming. Gardam the author, with unsettling omniscience, has predicted the subject of this thesis. Gardam has the hairs on her reader's (and researcher's) head already counted.⁴² It is also part of the Receptive Ecumenism of narrative. Murray describes 'prophecy' as one of the key voices of Receptive Ecumenism. In a footnote to the three core voices of poetic, analytic and pragmatic, he says they 'resonate with John Henry Newman's reflections on the threefold office of the Church - priestly, prophetic, and kingly.' Murray continues that 'for Newman...the prophetic represents its [the church's] critical reason, or formal theological function' (Murray, 2010, p.xi).

⁴² 'But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.' (12 Luke. 4: 30-31)

Here Gardam, through Polly, is prophesying that not only do ‘Quite a few people see an affinity between you and Jesus Christ. They are given grants for theses on the subject’ (Gardam, 1986, p.223), but that a new canon and new critiques might explore the link between Gardam’s fiction and religion, a link already implicitly understood by *Crusoe* and *Crusoe’s Daughter*, Polly Flint. Gardam’s favourite novel is *Robinson Crusoe* and it might be near the truth to say that she has hoped herself that it is continuing some part of *Robinson Crusoe*’s religious realism.

Finally *Crusoe* gives the nearest to a religious blessing, or at least certainly an affirmation of Polly’s vocation as part of pragmatic community: ‘You’ve been a good and faithful woman, Pol Flint, and children love you...A quiet life, But Godly ...Marooned of course. But there’s something to be said for islands.’ Polly’s life, on one level, is obscure to her, as all our lives are to us. Miller reports Hoare saying of Gardam “‘She hates explaining. She wants to keep the interpretation out of the books. She doesn’t want to tell the readers what it means, as if that would take the bloom off’” (Miller, 2005).

Gardam’s characters possess the obscurity that Kermode observed of fictional narratives, and it is only by narrativising them, interpreting their dark shapes that we begin to understand purpose, motivation, even, meaning, truth. *Crusoe* and Polly are isolated, but their remarkable conversation is a conversation, and Polly does achieve community around her. As Murray says of the community of Receptive Ecumenism, ‘The very process of engagement and conversation is revelatory in that we come to realize that God speaks not simply

in *my* tradition but in the very conversation and interacting that we share’ (Murray, 2010, p.55).

By the end of *Crusoe’s Daughter* the ‘fibrous strength’ of the story emerges as ‘the seed’ Word in protagonist, reader and thereby community. Word is come amongst us, for our ‘bread’ in the form of Gardam’s characters Crusoe and Polly Flint. Polly has been working out her life within ‘pragmatic’ community. Gardam’s ‘angle of light’ (Gardam, 1986, p.188), previously symbolised by the inanimate telescope that shines light like an angel, has shown us the societally ‘preposterous’, but redeeming ‘new quality’ in Polly Flint. Gardam has indeed carried the ‘form further’. It is born along not by marriage, but having analysed and discerned through this novel, by community. Community seems to be not only the poetic way forward, but the pragmatic one also. This is, as Polly Flint so succinctly says, ‘*The Final Point*’ (Gardam, 1986 p.188).

As Murray says, ‘some dreams are not simply subjective fantasy, ideal diversion, or bulwarks against the terror of reality, but given to us by an Other whose dreams they are, and given to us precisely in order to be born into being’ (Murray, 2010, p.xv).

The question then must be, has Gardam written us a dream in her novels not to ‘shore’ her ‘readers up against reality’, but to help them be born into being, not alone, but together as part of the religious readers interpretive community? As Philip Sheldrake put it, describing how Catholic persons learn to be Catholic people, ‘to commit oneself to the mystery of the whole - means

dealing with dilemma of engaging with the actual and contextual while doing justice to the eternal' (Sheldrake, 2010, p.61).

Yet Gardam's writing is like Defoe's: it is influenced by the school of 'realism' that can accommodate the mystical while (as we have seen in earlier chapters, notably chapter 5) remaining firmly grounded in reality and ordinary life and language. Thus she does not shy away from negotiating community in real time (*chronos*), that is the Church community. She also extends her horizon: opening her house to refugees from another place connected by historic rather than a present time. Sheldrake describes Receptive Ecumenism as 'both an interpreted way of living in relation to a tradition and at the same time an authentic and challenging interpretation of our own existential situation' (Sheldrake, 2010, p.61). It is a statement that in its self-referential, doubling nature is an apt description of how Gardam interprets Defoe's novel and its tradition. It is also, and this is not at all accidental, a moving description of Polly's own life, as its pattern unfolds and becomes clear to her, in the hospitality she offers others.

We are returning then to St Benedict whose *Rule* contains a long and specific fifty third chapter (*Rule*, p.123) on the importance of hospitality. Sheldrake says 'An important concept is 'hospitality'. That hospitality he reminds us is defined in both Hebrew and Christian scriptures (Sheldrake, 2010, p.55).

Hospitality and learning then are integral to the pragmatic community evident in Polly Flint's yellow house. Polly's approach endures because it is

rooted in Word in community, resilient and seamed with love. Polly has been devoted to the three core voices of Receptive Ecumenism: the long days working on the 'analytics', the translations into French and German of the novel *Robinson Crusoe* (with notes); the 'poetics' in the teaching of the novel's literary form to the school boys and last, the 'pragmatics' of extending herself into the wider community, received by the church and welcoming in the refugee community. As time goes on and she integrates into the community she tells Crusoe 'I cleared the shelves after all...sent all the books to Thwaite School', except *Robinson Crusoe* 'and a few others' (Gardam, 1986, p.222). Gardam says 'Over the years, Robinson Crusoe has become my best-loved novel. I feel happy when I see it on a shelf, on a bus, in somebody's hand, even my own, old copy now on the desk... Crusoe was never meant to be a children's book and I didn't begin to understand it until I had written novels' (Gardam, 2007b).

Polly sees her way clear. 'I ... thanked God that from my purgatory with the works of old Defoe I had emerged with a sense of God and resurrection; and I went into church and sat myself down in a pew at the back' (Gardam, 1986, p.198). Polly, though still 'at the back' has found a cautious seat within community. We hear echoes of Psalm 137:1 'By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.' Its question: 'how can we sing songs in a strange land?' is at once both pertinent and poignant. Perhaps also this is a reference to Gardam's mother, daughter of a sea captain. Gardam says of *Crusoe's Daughter* 'It is my mother's landscape, the novel is partly about my mother, who was never able to leave it for a fuller life and yet lived more influentially to her family, it seems to me, than any paid-up feminist' (Gardam, 1991, p.193).

Polly has moved from the deeply interior spiritual condition, that if it weren't for the whisky, would have been almost eremitic: living alone, translating and writing about Robinson Crusoe to a context that includes a more extroverted life as part of the religious community and it as part of hers. It is well here to remind ourselves of how far Polly has come since her early mid-life.

The fear rose from the fact that the book, being so much more than a book to me, might lie so deep in the bone that it would be difficult to lay bare. The solitary work I had done upon it as a spiritual biography, my later studies in the examination of it, not as fiction but as metaphysical landscape, had been written in the precious quiet of a study - a room I had made as remote from outsiders and as unknown to them as the texture and colour of the brain within the skull (Gardam, 1986, p.186).

Polly is insightful about her condition. On reflection she says, 'I was too deep down, too separate, too simple, too mad even to trouble myself with the distractions of publications or communication and I did not even think. 'Perhaps when I am dead' (Gardam, 1986, p.186). In the end however Polly takes the advice she herself has given on the construction of a novel for the construction of her own life. It has already been quoted at this chapter's epigraph (Gardam, 1986, p.188).

The last words of the novel are the homecoming call for the new family: Polly, Hepzibah and Rebecca. For the orphaned Polly and the refugee children they concern the metaphorical return implied in the children's names (Word disguised as words and laid amongst its adoptive textual family of words in plain sight). We are referred if we wish to the biblical light of Rebekah's tent and

Hephzibah's land 'where thou shalt no more be forsaken.' (Is. 4: 62)⁴³ As the little group approach the yellow house for the first time together, the torrid weather outside reminds the reader of the safety of the ark of the Old Testament (Gen. 7: 18)⁴⁴ or Christ's quietening of the storm winds in the New Testament (Mark. 6: 50-51):⁴⁵ 'Hepzibah, Rebecca and I... blew in through the great front door...The doors slammed and the sea crashed and the windows shook, and we were all safe home' (Gardam, 1986, p. 215).

In the literature review I spoke of Guerin's thesis, where, in a thoughtful and well-argued section on *Crusoe's Daughter* she suggests that Gardam 'attempts to establish an uneasy reconciliation between women and the Church' (Guerin, 1995, p.11-21 at p.11). This results in a novel that 'presents the lot of woman in Christian culture as extremely problematic' (Guerin, 1995, p.18). Guerin has understood the psychological 'coming of age', but misread the religious dimensions of the novel. She says that 'the resurrection to which Polly refers is the awakening into a new identity and sense of herself which she has refined and purified in the purgatory of her despairing alienation from life' (Guerin, 1995, p.20). Guerin's interpretation objectifies Christ, reducing his presence to a metaphor for Polly's psychological 'coming of age' and her integration in community. In appropriating religious experience for psychological metaphor Guerin implies that Gardam's intention is to make a psychological

⁴³ 'Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzibah, and thy land Beulah: for the Lord delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married.'

⁴⁴ 'And the waters prevailed, and were increased greatly upon the earth; and the ark went upon the face of the waters.'

⁴⁵ 'For they all saw him, and were troubled. And immediately he talked with them, and saith unto them, Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid. And he went up unto them into the ship; and the wind ceased: and they were sore amazed in themselves beyond measure, and wondered.'

rather than a religious point. However, Guerin may have misinterpreted the religious point. The resurrection is arguably the central part of the Christian story and, in Guerin's understanding at least, has been made into a humanistic metaphor for the resurrection of the self. Guerin concludes by hedging her religious bets and suggests that:

While Gardam does not hesitate to draw our attention to the problems associated with Christianity in our society, and particularly the conjunction of women, nature, body, sex and sin, *she by no means rejects Christianity out of hand* [my italics]. Instead she depicts a Christianity in which the message of love at its core can be a relevant and potentially empowering force for women today' (Guerin, 1995, p.21).

My understanding of Gardam, as both religious author and commentator on her own work, would put the Christian point of the resurrection more strongly than that. What Polly says in discussion with Crusoe is important: "Quite a few people see an affinity between you and Jesus Christ. They are given grants for theses on the subject." Crusoe replies, perhaps for Gardam, 'These are blasphemers.' Polly agrees that they are "Oh, quite often people confuse their fictional heroes with God. As they confuse their human lovers. Or themselves. It is a great hindrance to a happy life. Emily Brontë did it. So did Proust." If heroes and God are not the same thing then what has restored Polly is that whilst recognising that of God within (in the Quaker way), she has also recognised that of God without (in the community of the Anglo-Catholic church), and 'emerged with a sense of God and resurrection' (Gardam, 1986, p.198).

As Gardam herself pointed out the novel is a deeply personal one. She observed in personal correspondence that 'My characters - especially Polly Flint

have been a comfort all the years. Polly's life was very much my mother's - except that she never drank' (Gardam, 2016c). Polly joins an Anglo-Catholic congregation, one that is modelled on the women in Gardam's own childhood congregation at Christ Church, Coatham. Gardam is acutely aware of the effects of time and place on identity and its formation. In a recent email Gardam recalled our first interview. 'Do you remember our meeting at Christ Church Coatham? It was quite eerie - everything as steady as it had been since before my grandmother, mother and I were baptised there' (Gardam, 2016c). Gardam, in linking Polly Flint with her own mother, is making the case not only for Polly's psychological 'coming of age' as Guerin has suggested, but also Polly's religious 'coming of age'. Part of Polly's religious formation is that she joins at the Sanctus with all the religious women of her church, not only in the present, but in the past and future also. This, as Jasper points out, is a far wider and equally valid religious interpretive community: 'In the singing of the Sanctus the church's liturgy on earth already participates in the songs of praise sung in the eternity of heaven' (Jasper, 2012, p.6). It 'lies at the heart of the life of the sacred community, an assembly that transcends the boundaries of time and space at the sacramental meeting point of time and eternity, the particular and the universal' (Jasper, 2012, p.7). Polly Flint's religious coming of age is thus one of Gardam's several versions of the resurrection story in which 'there is no passage of time but only a dwelling in eternity' (Jasper, 2012, p.8), as we shall see in the conclusion. The novel does not adopt an essentialist view of identity - I was immature, now I am come of age - but takes seriously the endless present of the present participle. We are always coming of age.

Chapter 8. Conclusion

The evidence for Gardam as a religious writer

I began this thesis by stating the central claim of my argument, namely that Gardam is a religious writer. This is something Gardam has acknowledged in personal communication and it is by an appreciation of the sophistication and complexity of her treatment of religion that we can come to a proper sense of her achievement as a writer. She is not of course *only* a religious writer: she is for instance, a writer concerned with the place of women in the modern world; and she is an English writer concerned with the place of England at the end of Empire. But we are concerned with Gardam as a religious writer; and so before I conclude it might be helpful to restate briefly the arguments of the chapters.

In Chapter 2 I examine aspects of twentieth century reader response theory with particular reference to the work of Stanley Fish. I demonstrate that there are indeed as Fish suggests religious interpretive communities. However, I also observe that Fish devoted little time to exploring the permutations of what it means to be a reader in a religious interpretive community within past, continuing or current religious communities. Above all he does not explore what it is to be a member of a religious interpretive community that reads fiction.

In Chapter 3 I discuss the ancient practice of *lectio divina*. I show that this is a form of ancient religious reader response theory currently enjoying a revival in religious communities. The use of *lectio divina* is limited to the Bible and other sacred readings: how ‘the Book’ speaks to the ‘Book of experience’ (Robertson, 2011, p.231). Robertson points out that *lectio divina* has not so far

been considered as a form of reader response theory, nor, as I point out, a reader response theory that might be applied to fiction. Fiction, such as Gardam's, in which the Word dwells amongst the words of the novel is an example of this. This is a significant gap that I attempt to address.

In chapter 4 I begin with Gardam's observation that 'short stories are nearer poetry than anything. They are like a conversation, a dialogue. And besides, some of them are quite long' (Kean, 2015). With reference to theories of reading and composition adduced by Heaney we explore the role and resonance of the Word in poetry. We then consider the importance of some aspects of *lectio divina* that might be applied in our readings of poetry and fiction. For example, the reading theorists, Badley and Badley and the poet Blake Morrison help us consider 'slow reading' and 'reading out loud' as in the manner of *lectio divina*. We also consider the approach of the literary critic Frank Kermode who applied Aquinas's concept of the *aevum* (a 'third order of duration, distinct from time and eternity') to literary theory (Kermode, 1968, p.70). He observes that '*aevum* as you might say is the time-order of novels' (Kermode, 1968, p.72). Thus we have two critics, Robertson and Kermode, who express the hope that two important elements of medieval literary response theory, respectively *lectio divina* and the *aevum*, may be re-appraised in their application to literary theory and, in Robertson's work in particular, to reader response theory.

In Chapter 5 I begin to explore Gardam's art in depth, and specifically how the Word seeds itself in Gardam's fiction. I discuss Gardam's religious languages that influence Gardam: Anglo-Catholic, Quaker and Benedictine. I

discuss their stylistic history and features and demonstrate these languages of influence at work in Gardam's writing. I explore Gardam's use of one Biblical Word, 'spark', and the three religions variants of it. I analyse a Biblical metaphor that is used poetically in her stories, namely that of the 'pearl'.

In Chapter 6 I compare Gardam to other female English contemporary novelists: the Anglican-educated Rose Tremain, and the Quaker-educated Margaret Drabble. I conclude that, whilst Tremain and Drabble both offer experiences of magical realism and awe, both of which are close neighbours of religious experience, they do not offer what I term 'mystical realism'. The difference is that Gardam is a religious writer, whereas Tremain and Drabble are not. Gardam inhabits the Word, so that it and its resonances merge in the words of her fiction. She writes experientially, so that she writes of religion in her characters, rather than religion as a context for characters. I then discuss Gardam in relation to Charlotte Brontë and the idea of the origami common to Gardam, Drabble and Brontë, whether it be as a writing method for Brontë or as a way of collapsing and opening time, a religious concept familiar from the *aeon* for Gardam.

In Chapter 7 I suggest that Gardam, who is already recognised as a 'coming of age' novelist, is also what I term a 'religious coming of age' writer. I apply Paul Murray's theory of ecumenical religious community, Receptive Ecumenism (explored in chapter 2) as a 'religious coming of age' for religious communities: Christian communities in which each individual and the interpretive community is open to receive the Word from the variant ways it is expressed by the other churches. I observed that a literary 'religious coming of

age' in Receptive Ecumenism has so far not been explored, for example in coming of age novels, such as Gardam's.

I argue that a novel such as *Crusoe's Daughter* may not only describe this move from interior eremitic life to exterior one of community, but can also show how the individual is enabled to move back and forth between the two states in an integrated way. This movement is a 'religious coming of age' and its mark is the fruits it bears in both individual and community. It demonstrates that Gardam is a religious writer - her writing exhibits both 'the spiritual' *and* 'the practical effects of religion'. It is represented through an aesthetic that arises from Gardam's texts, where absences, gaps and indeterminacies, are used to engage readers to apply religious insights in their own lives.

If we are to summarise it could perhaps be said that Gardam is the start of a new religious literary direction, with new forms such as the 'coming of religious age novel.' It is a movement that necessarily places the ecumenical interpretive religious community in the foreground of the present, from where all our experiencing comes. Through Gardam's characters and the reader's identification with them we build in our imagination, a new ecumenical way of being. We learn not just about our own faiths, but a manner or way of being that is both authentic to individual actualisation, and also the ecumenical community's potential. There is death, but there is also friendship; there is difference, but there is also dialogue between characters about that difference and, whether or not it is as a result of duty, or respect for the other, there is reception of the Word from each other, and there is love. I suggest that Gardam is thus not only re-asserting the Word, but also that, in setting up three Christian

traditions to receive the Word equally from each other in her novels' religious communities, she is offering her readers the possibility of a literary contribution to the Receptive Ecumenism movement. This contribution is thus part of what Murray has called 'prophecy'. Gardam has, if not a mission, then certainly a vocation for the religious formation of readers through literature in an ecumenical readers' interpretive community whose foundation and source is the Word.

Gardam in the aevum

At the end of Gardam's novels and stories heroines often emerge either onto a station platform, as in *The Flight of the Maidens*, *The Summer After the Funeral* and *Missing the Midnight* or directly into a church congregation, as in *Faith Fox* or *Last Friends*. The scene moves from immersion in the introverted, eremitic process into one in which the heroine's life spills out through a narrow door, like 'windows of narrow light' (1 Kings. 6:4), extroverted by grace into community, where 'all the city was gathered at the door' (Mark 1:33). In *Missing the Midnight* Hester emerges from the train carriage, in which she has compared herself unfavourably to 'the trio, the most enviable human beings I had ever seen' (Gardam, 1998b, p.7) onto a platform, in which first and second class become indistinguishable in the release to the turnstile. It is an ecumenical and equal congregation, one that the Edwardian Christian Socialist solicitor and writer Harold Beaumont Shephard expressed a longing for in his discussion on first, second and third class rail travel in his book *For Middle-Class Christians*: 'Our safety is not in walling-off money or what it buys from us, but in knowing

what is worth while' (Shepherd, 1929, p.23), and it is, nearly one hundred years later, perhaps still beyond our grasp, available to us only in imagining.

But to imagine such spaces is to create them. The platform, the church, the old meeting house, these are symptomatic of the neglected spaces to which Kermode drew our attention in the recollection and expansion of Aquinas' *aevum* and which he revisited thirty years later in *A Sense of An Ending*. It is the space/time that Gardam reminds us of in *The Meeting House* where/when the Quaker George Fox had 'his vision of angels settling like flocks of birds on Pendle Hill' (Gardam, 1995 p.50). And it is also the place the Anglo-Catholic movement recreated in the architecture of their poetry and churches, present in the description of architectural detail by the Archbishops' Council of Christ Church, Coatham, and poetically so in its re-imagining in Gardam's fiction.

Such spaces are not only architectural: they are also architectonic spaces within literary fiction. Thus 'the play within the play' is a literary device employed at the beginning of *Old Filth* in 'Scene: Inner Temple' (Gardam, 2004a, p.3). In a less overtly directive way the same device signals three important conversational scenes in *Last Friends*: when Dulcie and Fiscal Smith are locked inside the church (Gardam, 2013b, pp.32-36); in a dialogue about fiction and feminism between the 'two old twins up the lane', Olga and Faery (Gardam, 2013b, pp.124-127) and in the final pages when Dulcie and Fiscal Smith discuss ecumenical possibilities as they join the church Easter procession (Gardam, 2013b, pp.204-205). Gardam's experimentation with the play within the play allows her a narrative voice without intrusion. It is an example of her belief, expressed through Polly Flint in *Crusoe's Daughter* that 'Fiction...will

have to change' (Gardam, 1986, p.222). Finally it is probably a deft allusion to the religious possibility that we are all players upon a stage of a more mysterious, and one might say Godly, play with all its inherent echoes of mystery plays past and revived. Such conversations allow in the novel a space between worlds, not unlike Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, in which characters can imagine, consider and play out characters otherwise inconceivable, a process that often enlarges not only the imagination, but also as with dreams the practical expression of its echoes in everyday life. This entrapment of characters locked within a play also occurs in *Missing the Midnight* in which Esther is caught in the railway carriage and undergoes a *metanoia* that is almost entirely do with the priest, and her change of heart. In a similar way Polly Flint in *Crusoe's Daughter* is trapped in the Yellow House, her island. In both Esther and Polly though, the Spirit is seen as working its understated way towards their integration and their freedom.

Fiction, Gardam's fiction helps the reader in the imagining of that shared space, in which the book of the Word meets the 'book of experience' (Robertson, 2011, p.231). The religious literary space, the *aevum*, a space of ecumenical reception, reveals itself to us between Gardam's origamic pages, in the *poesis* that is the result of both a religious ministry and a writer's craft. In Gardam's space of *poesis* lies the potential of a new religious interpretive community, offered to the reader. It is created through Gardam's years of *meditatio*, dwelling as a 'cradle-Anglo-Catholic' in the Word in the world, and then importantly creating it as a fictional space for us to find and inhabit.

Gardam's fiction is then a literary, religious space, one that is also occupied ecumenically by Anglo-Catholic Sanctus and silent and spoken Quaker ministry. Its motion is the Benedictine hermeneutic, *conversatio morum*, between the dynamic stability of the Word and its *poesis* in words. It exists *because* the Word is present there. Gardam's work is a paeon to that religious interpretive experience for reader and the ecumenical community of readers, a community in which we readers, strangers all, as Benedict says, are 'welcomed as Christ' (*Rule*, p.123).

Appendix A: Literature Review Tabulated Data

This appendix consists of tables referenced in the Literature Review in Chapter 1.

Table 1: Published commentary on Jane Gardam, 1971-2015.

	Search terms	Results
1	“Jane Gardam”	1671 items: 989 newspaper articles; 439 book reviews; 286 magazine articles; 64 journal articles; 5 trade publications
2	“Jane Gardam”, “religious writer”	0 items
3	“Jane Gardam”, “religious”	52 newspaper, 45 book review, 41 magazine, 18 journal,
4	“Jane Gardam”, “religion”	69 newspaper, 34 book review, 31 magazine, 7 journal
5	“Jane Gardam”, “Christian”	70 newspaper, 45 book review, 39 magazine, 16 journal
6	“Jane Gardam”, “Quaker”	17 newspaper, 8 book review, 5 magazine, 0 journal
7	“Jane Gardam”, “Anglo-Catholic”	2 newspaper
8	“Jane Gardam”, “Benedictine”	2 magazine, 2 newspaper
9	“Jane Gardam”, “Lectio Divina”	0 items

Table 2: Blog postings on Jane Gardam.

	Search terms	Results
1	"Jane Gardam", "religious writer"	1
2	"Jane Gardam", "religious"	242
3	"Jane Gardam", "religion"	478
4	"Jane Gardam", "Christian"	888
5	"Jane Gardam", "Quaker"	23
6	"Jane Gardam", "Anglo-Catholic"	1
7	"Jane Gardam", "Benedictine"	2
8	"Jane Gardam", "Lectio Divina"	1

Table 3: Unpublished critical commentary on Jane Gardam, 1971-2015.

	Author surname	Title	Date
1	Franková	The Subtle Art of Jane Gardam	2001
2	Good	Stories are For Telling and Foretelling: Jane Gardam's Use of Narrative in the Depiction of Her Characters	1995
3	Guerin	Sara Maitland and Michele Roberts: Religion and Spirituality in Contemporary British Women's Fiction	1995
4	Hiller	Narrative and the Development of the Literary Reader	1984 - 1985
5	Hook	Negotiating Space and recognition for the Childless in a Pro-natalist Society	2011
6	Peliskova	The Old Filth Trilogy	2014
7	Sleisova	Growing Up Novels	2007
8	Wylie	Engaging in First Person Narrative	1996

Appendix B. Jane Gardam: A Chronological Bibliography of Published Books and Awards.

Children's Books

A Few Fair Days (1971)

Bridget and William (1981)

The Hollow Land (1981): Whitbread Book Award 1983

Horse (1982)

Kit (1983)

Kit in Boots (1986)

Swan (1987)

Through the Doll's House Door (1987)

Black Woolly Pony (1993)

Tufty Bear (1996)

The Kit Stories (1998)

Ink Monkey (1999)

Coming of Age Novels

A Long Way from Verona (1971)

The Summer After the Funeral (1973)

Bilgewater (1977)

Short story collections

Black Faces, White Faces (1975): David Higham Prize for Fiction 1975 and Winifred Holtby Memorial Prize 1975

The Sidmouth Letters (1980)

The Pangs of Love and Other Stories (1983): Katherine Mansfield Award 1984

Trio: Three Stories from Cheltenham (1993)

Going into a Dark House (1994)

Showing the Flag and Other Stories (1989)

Going into a Dark House (1994): PEN/Macmillan Silver Pen Award for 1995

Missing the Midnight (1997)

The Green Man (1998)

The People on Privilege Hill (2007): nominated for the National Short Story Prize

The Stories of Jane Gardam (2014)

Novels

God on the Rocks (1978): Prix Baudelaire (France) (1989) and nominated for The Booker Prize Best Novel 1978

Crusoe's Daughter (1985)

The Queen of the Tambourine (1991): Whitbread Novel Award 1991

Faith Fox (1996)

The Flight of the Maidens (2000)

Old Filth (2004)

The Man in the Wooden Hat (2009): finalist Los Angeles Times Book Award

Last Friends (2013): shortlisted for the 2014 Folio Prize

Non-fiction

The Iron Coast (1994)

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