A social history of blindness

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A Social History of Blindness.

by

KATHLEEN BATES.

A Doctoral Thesis.

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Abstract

This thesis examines the belief that ideologies about blindness which have their provenance in religious, mythical and symbolic belief are 'infused into our literature and art' to become 'an important part of the way we perceive ourselves and others'. Depictions of the enduring power and influence of symbolic belief is examined in fictional and autobiographical writings from 1600-1995.

The history of theories of causation of disease in general is discussed in the first chapter. This is followed in the second chapter by an examination of the myths, meanings, symbols and ideologies which have become attached to blindness from pre-Christian times to the present day.

The third chapter is devoted to an assessment of the influential meanings given to his own blindness by the poet John Milton and to an appraisal of the responses, in the following century and a half, both by his adherents, notably Marvell, Dryden and the Romantic Poets, and his detractors, not least among whom was Samuel Johnson.

The following two chapters are given to an examination of the influence of ideology on depictions of blindness in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century literature. Special attention is given to portrayals of blindness in recent works for children, in view of the belief and recommendation that writings about and for handicapped children should be realistic and free from stereotype. Both chapters are underpinned by brief surveys of the then current social situation of the blind and of the state of medical knowledge at the time.

Finally, fictional representations of blindness are compared with a number of experiential accounts taken from autobiographies of blind people written between 1870-1990.

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It is impossible to measure the assistance given to me by Liz Johnson who taught me something of the intricacies of a word processor. Her patient instruction has been greatly appreciated.
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In recent times careful differentiation has been made between terms such as 'impairment', 'disablement', and 'handicap' (see *Handicapped and Impaired in Great Britain* [Amelia Harris 1971]). However, no such distinction is made in this thesis which is not predominantly sociological. I have therefore felt myself free to use the words interchangeably with 'disease' and 'illness' in order to denote a general state of 'dis-ease'. I am also aware that people who happen to be blind are all individual in character and not inevitably members of an homogeneous group. For the sake of convenience I use the term 'the blind'. This is not, however, intended to suggest that people so denominated all feel and act in the same way.

Finally, because of the fugitive nature of much of the material on which I have drawn, I have not always consulted first editions. Whenever I have used other editions I have indicated their dates and as far as possible have verified their reliability. Full details appear in the bibliography but the reader should be aware that the actual edition date appears in references in the text.
INTRODUCTION.

I would like to begin with a quotation whose truth was brought home to me many times when I worked as a medical social worker both in hospital and in a then County Welfare Department. Michael Taussig states that 'the signs and symptoms of disease do something more than signify the functioning of our bodies: they also signify critically sensitive and contradictory components of our culture and social relations' (1980:3).

After training as a Hospital Almoner in the immediately post-war period, before the advent of present-day Social Services Departments, the major part of my life as a practitioner was, by coincidence, spent with the long-term chronically sick and disabled. I was introduced to the somewhat esoteric world of the blind in my last post as a practising social worker before I moved into the field of Social Work education.

Few people, I think, can work with the sick and disabled without hearing the words 'Why me? Why now?'. Nor can they be unaware that handicapping conditions still attract certain beliefs as to causation and effect, to the detriment of patients and families alike. It is also impossible to work in, or with, any organisation or institution without realising that a similar range of beliefs, however unconsciously held, affect both the nature and degree of services and the ways in which they are offered.

These observations were brought home to me even more forcibly when I began to teach social work students. Here there was a need to evaluate theory and practice and the opportunity to remember and reflect on past
experience. It was a time to question much of what had been too easily accepted as received wisdom.

From the nineteen-sixties onwards there was also a great proliferation of books and articles about social work practice in all fields of work. These came mostly, it is true, from academics and practitioners, but there was an increasing number of contributions from the consumer. At the same time there was increasing pressure for equality from groups of disabled people themselves. They wanted not only better services to enable them to lead independent lives but the recognition that they were not 'an element apart' (J. Twersky 1955:54). They were fighting for a loosening of 'the mind forg'd manacles' (William Blake in London1.8) which shackled them to outworn ideologies.*

They looked for a time when the fact that they were physically marred did not mean that they were labelled as morally or mentally marred.

Though I was aware of the search for explanation and meaning and conscious of the presence of superstitious belief and stigma, I must admit that I was largely unaware of its provenance. It was only when I had the opportunity to fulfil a long held desire to study for an English degree that I became aware of the power of myth and metaphor to inform belief. I realised the added potency which comes from the written word. However, I learned that though 'literary texts' are able to 'illuminate the understanding of the living process' (Roy Porter 1993:1) they are also subject to the differing perceptions and interpretations of writer and reader alike.

*I am taking a cue here from Roy Porter who uses Blake's phrase in his book Mind-For'd Manacles, A History of Madness in England from the Restoration the to the Regency (1987) in which he describes the struggle of the insane to free themselves of a similar range of inhibiting ideologies.
Since I had from time to time been struck by the frequently angry and bitter comments of a number of people who, having become handicapped, had chosen to write about their experiences of stigmatising belief, e.g. Paul Bates in *Horizontal Man* (1964), Paul Hunt in *Stigma: The Experience of Disability* (1966), Jack Ashley in *Journey into Silence* (1973), I began to wonder if 'literary truths' really did 'illuminate the understanding of the living process' in all circumstances. I began to suspect that instead of illuminating understanding, many literary works promulgated symbolic belief and served only to emphasise and perpetuate habitual thinking.

Although I had originally intended in this thesis to examine the symbolic beliefs attaching to a number of diseases which have traditionally been 'encumbered by the trappings of metaphor' (Susan Sontag 1991:5) e.g. cancer, tuberculosis, syphilis and epilepsy, blindness eventually became the all absorbing topic. I therefore decided to test the validity of Michael Monbeck's statement that ideologies about blindness which have their provenance in religious, mythical and symbolic belief are 'infused into our literature and art' and so become 'an important part of the way we perceive ourselves and others' (1974:149). The following thesis is the outcome of this test.
If mankind's greatest enemies are Pestilence, Famine and War, those three Horsemen of the Apocalypse in whose train comes the fourth rider, Death upon his Pale Horse (F. Cartwright 1972:3) then, less dramatically perhaps, but insidiously ever present, and a close companion of Death, is the frequently implacable, unknowable foe, disease, that 'inability of performing function in a natural fashion' (L. S. King 1982:33), whose presence, even in an era of biomedicine and high technology still appears to encourage explanations and reasons beyond those which science itself provides. The age-old need to ascribe magical, mythical, metaphorical or religious meanings, even in the face of increased, and increasing, modern knowledge, appears to persist, in Western cultures at least, in an ever-present attempt to seek for explanations, to make sense of, to come to terms with what is often regarded as imposed, unwanted and frequently dreaded. The need to attribute responsibility, whether to self or others, to the gods or to God Himself is also a common response to that which is felt as a direct hazard to one's very being and sense of self. It can be seen as an attempt to exert some control over, master or even conquer that which, to the lay mind at least, is regarded as unknowable, imponderable, and sometimes irremediable. The fact that these 'explanations' still exist at the end
of the Twentieth Century, regardless of current scientific and rational knowledge, makes it the more understandable that when 'sickness was one of life's dominating threats and key experiences', 'making and breaking individual lives and social ties' and 'shaping a sense of the self' (R.Porter 1985:22), the less well instructed or earlier centuries should look to their own systems of belief and explication to make sense of the events of their lives. They employed beliefs which both fed into, and came out of, the cultural milieu of the times to find expression in imaginative writing (which) has always been relating inner experience to outward symbolic manifestations, feelings to behaviour, soul and body ... in ways that provide exemplars for interpreting the subjective and objective realities of sickness experience' (Porter ibid:21).

The intention, in this thesis then, is to show how these convictions and practices are embodied, demonstrated and promulgated, whether or conscious intent or not, in writings over a wide period of time but notably between 1600 and the present day, in the belief that 'literary texts illuminate the understanding of the living process, the meaning of health and sickness and the moral place of medicine in the social economy', creating 'fields of meaning' expressive of the current culture (R.Porter 1993:1). Porter suggests that the common ground shared by literature and medicine 'affords the opportunity for a dialogue between the history of medicine on the one hand and literary history and criticism on the other'. It provides an interchange which 'should enhance our awareness of the close if complex relationship between culture, natural knowledge and the imagination' (ibid:1).

This chapter will be concerned with the evolution of beliefs about the genesis of disease in general and will provide an illustration of
the extent to which these beliefs affected, at one and the same time, the treatment, both in medical and social terms, of the sufferers of disease and impairment. This said, it should be noted that the experience of trying to tease out the separate strands of medical knowledge and its social implications leads to a sympathetic appreciation of the statements by P. Wright and A. Treacher that 'medical knowledge is beginning to be viewed as a social construction' since it has been found 'throughout the ages' to be 'inseparable from social relationships and social experience' (1982:2/3).

Although Babylonian, Egyptian, Chinese and Arabian medicine had already grown to some degree of sophistication by the time of Hippocrates in the fifth century B.C., this chapter will, nevertheless, be concerned only with that period of medical thought which stretches from the time of the Greeks in the immediately pre-Christian era to the advent of modern, scientific medicine in the nineteenth century in Europe. I hope to illustrate how untutored explanations persisted (and persist still even against hard evidence which points to the contrary) to inform social attitudes, healing practices and, significantly, the lives of those who were subject to these beliefs.

1. Quest for Meaning.

Though beliefs about causation of disease and styles of healing have changed beyond recognition, some early ideas which informed these perceptions remain and are still reflected in attitudes towards those who suffer, particularly where the effects are highly visible and the cause of the stigmatizing of those who are 'different'.

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Thus, Herzlich and Pierret's comments about reactions to modern day illness are equally applicable to past belief. They suggest that 'while symptoms and bodily change are, of course, the means by which sick people know they are ill, they also wonder about the "causes" of their illness and look for explanations'. They point out that though 'our view of the body has become increasingly anatomical and physiological and structured through medical knowledge' age-old questions like 'Why me?' and 'Why Now?' are never wholly answered by medicine and require 'an explanation which transcends the individual body and the medical diagnosis. The response to these questions goes beyond a search for cause and becomes a quest for meaning' (1991:75).

They believe that to try 'to relate illness to the order of the world and to the social order' is no modern phenomena but that 'interplay and exchange between scientific and non-scientific modes of thought have continued throughout the ages' (ibid:75). Thus, they suggest 'the problem of the causality of biological illness is...at the heart of any society's system of beliefs and also at the heart of the history of medicine' (ibid:773).

A number of writers, notably here M. Stacey (1991), A. Kleinman (1980) and G. Helman (1990), underline the importance of the cultural constituents of any society in the delineation and treatment of disease. Stacey, in reiterating that 'all people, at all times, try to make sense of what otherwise appears as confusion around them' states that 'all concepts of health and illness, like all healing systems are social constructions which relate to their historically specific time or period' which 'are not neutral...they are associated with actions taken and with given sets of social relations' (1991:10).
Kleinman and Helman, however, are more specific in their identification of the patterns by which disease is perceived, labelled, explained and treated. For Kleinman, medicine itself can be viewed 'as a cultural system, a system of symbolic meanings anchored in particular arrangements of social institutions and patterns of interpersonal interaction' (1980:24). For him, 'in every culture, illness, the response to it, individuals experiencing it and treating it, and the social institutions relating to it are all systematically interconnected' to form the health care system itself, in which the patterns of belief, held in a way that is 'largely tacit and unaware' (ibid:26) are part.

Similarly, Helman insists that values and customs associated with ill-health 'are part of a wider culture and cannot really be understood in isolation from it' (1990:7). For him, cultures 'which are never static' (ibid:5) and never homogeneous' (ibid:4) are made up of historical, economic social and political elements as well as 'beliefs, perceptions, emotions, language, religion, family structure' which in turn inform 'attitudes to illness, pain and other forms of misfortune' (ibid:7).

Whatever the determinants of any given culture, however, it will be seen that in these 'never static', 'never homogeneous' systems, two dominant and inextricably linked themes emerge, either one of which may be dominant at any given time. These are the themes which encapsulate, on the one hand, lay and scientific attempts to discover, define and treat the physical causes of disease (no matter how unscientific to modern day thinking) and, on the other hand, metaphysical explanations which rely on magical, religious and symbolic beliefs.
That these stem from the desire to exert some control and power over life and its events (not least the advent of disease and its processes which may make the difference between life and death) can be seen from a study of the progression of medical thought from that of primitive man to the present day. It is a progression, H.E. Sigerist suggests, which "reflects the general history of civilisation" (1962:230) as well as its learning which in turn "reflects its general outlook on life, its Weltanschauung" (ibid:232). It constitutes "a mirror which reflects the entire cultural setting" (L.S. King 1963:4).


Though disease today is commonly recognized 'as a biological process' (Sigerist op.cit:70) it is still possible to perceive, alongside the rational and scientific approach, evidence of early beliefs and therapies which were rooted in magic and religion. These are the outcome of attempts to respond to the hazards of intensely insecure environments when there was no other sanctuary or remedy in the face of illness or other misfortune.

With the gradual realisation that many traditional and herbal remedies did, in fact, produce cures, the 'magical' (op.cit:131) blended with 'religious and empirical factors' (op.cit:132) to produce the first tentative steps towards the development of a scientifically based medicine. Though Western medicine is said to have had its beginnings in Babylon in around 3,000 B.C., the Edwin Smith Papyrus of 1,600 B.C. (a copy of a much older document) and the Ebers Papyrus of 1,500 B.C. demonstrate the rapidity of its growth in Egypt. The 'entirely rational' earlier document dealt with 'surgical affections' whilst the later
papyrus was 'a purely medical book dealing with internal disease' (F. Cartwright op. cit:5). Yet, though the Papyrus provided 'an enumeration of disease and disease symptoms with prescriptions for pharmacological treatment' it began 'with a prayer to Isis' (ibid:133). It also mentions three types of healers—physicians, priests and exorcists. It would appear that the seemingly inextricable and complex relationship between medicine and religion had an early beginning.

The ideas which were, however, to prove the most influential in medicine and medical thought for many centuries originated with the Greeks. Their teaching confirmed not only the ever-evolving division between the elements of science, magic and religion but provided 'a turning point' in Western thought and 'the history of medicine' (Sigerist op. cit:133).

3. Hippocratic Medicine

In Greece, legend had long held that it was the god Apollo who brought not only health but also pestilence to those whom he wished to punish. He was a god who must be both worshipped and placated (Cartwright op. cit:19). Legend had also intimated that it was Chiron who passed on the secrets of healing which had been entrusted to him by Apollo, to Jason, Achilles and Asclepius (Aesculapius) who was himself, as the supposed son of Apollo (King op. cit:11), worshipped and honoured as a god throughout Hellas (Cartwright op. cit:19). But, as in earlier civilisations, the mythical and religious were to be replaced by other, more formalized theories of medicine which, though to prove incorrect, were to co-exist influentially for many years with the truly scientific and rational.
Thus, Greek medicine already had a long history before the birth of its most influential proponent, Hippocrates, in Cos in 460 B.C. He was to be regarded by many as 'the founder of the art of medicine' (Cartwright op.cit:19), the one who was 'to dissociate medical care from both religious and abstract philosophy' and establish it as 'a genuine scientific discipline' (Herzlich & Pierret op.cit:76). He integrated causation into the natural order of things in opposition to the 'conception of illness as exclusively divinely caused' (V.Coleman 19d5:19).

Hippocrates' highly influential humoral theory informed Western medical thought until, and beyond, the scientific revolution of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Developed from the thinking of Pythagoras and his students, Empedocles and Alcmaeon, it was to be extended and augmented by Galen in the second century A.D. It defined belief about the genesis of disease until finally discredited by scientific discovery which established the true provenance of illness.

In his attempt to define disease as a natural process, comparable with that of health, and to divorce it from magic and myth, Pythagoras had already proposed that the world was made up of the four primary elements, earth, air, fire and water in perfect balance. He also believed that mankind was made up of the same four elements since 'his very anatomy corresponded with the physical ordering of the universe' (E.M.W.Iillyard 1943:86). Like his predecessor, Hippocrates also denied that disease was a punishment from the gods (Cartwright op.cit:20). He believed that 'the physician should look for natural and not supernatural explanations for disease processes' (Coleman op.cit:19). He insisted that health itself was determined by a state of homeostasis, of
balance since 'a due and proper proportion...was the standard of
efficiency' (King op.cit:31). Ideally, balance was to be achieved
between each of two pairs of the humours, blood, phlegm, yellow bile and
black bile. Each pair contained opposing qualities which reflected the
properties of the four cardinal elements. Thus, earth, the most basic
element, and identified as cold and dry, corresponded with the humor of
black bile (melancholy) which originated in the spleen; water, cold and
moist, was linked with the humor, phlegm, which originated in the
brain; air, hot and moist linked with blood (from the heart), whilst
fire, the most noble element, being hot and dry, corresponded with
yellow bile (choler) originating in the liver.

Although it has been long known that humeral theory was 'a
complicated inferential superstructure' embodying 'abstraction and
hypothesis' (King op.cit:28) it was in fact erected on a basis of
'brilliant and correct observation' (Sigerist op.cit:153) of the fluid
component of the body, since other examination of organs was at the time
extremely rare if not completely forbidden. It was 'a highly workable
theory which explained much' (Sigerist op.cit:151) being easily
understood by anyone with a modicum of interest, intelligence and a
smattering of philosophy' (Vivian Nutton 1985:31).

Though not scientific in the modern sense it was a 'logical theory'
which offered explanation for many phenomena of health and disease and
'gave valuable guidance to medical practitioners' (Sigerist op.cit:153).
Though there may have been elaboration of explanation through inference
and theory, nevertheless the rational approach of Hippocrates which
'encompassed all phases of scientific progress' (King op.cit:18) was
characterized by close and careful scrutiny, with a full realisation
that the patterns and regularities, as well as the seeming isolation of
events 'represented neither chance nor a capricious personal will' but
expressed 'the nature of things as they are, the physis (King ibid:41),
and implied 'an objective order of things which may be apprehended'
(King ibid:34). Hippocrates himself believed that 'the physician learned
from experience, but at the same time sought knowledge of cause'
employing 'not merely his senses but also the eye of reason to
understand physis' (King ibid:41).

But since, as already shown, scientific explanations in medicine
have never stood totally alone, always co-existing, informing and being
informed by contemporary religious and mythical ideas, it is not
surprising to find, alongside the empiricism of Hippocrates, religious
practises evolving which suggested a transition towards the natural
sciences and their application.

King suggests that the concept of an individualised response to a
sick petitioner, with the priest as intermediary, came from the worship
of, and supplication to Asclepius who was both mortal and a great
physician before being transformed into 'a god of medicine and preserver
of health' (op.cit:12). The ability to treat thus passed to the priest,
as physician, rather than being seen as a function of the god he served.
The process was also facilitated by a growing awareness of the efficacy
and predictability of drugs and the realisation that disease states were
not unique to any one person. Though the growing understanding of the
nature of illness, its effects and its cures, came through religious
practice, it nevertheless paralleled that of the 'scientific' approach
of the likes or Hippocrates. Importantly here, and for future
generations, 'the significant difference between the mythical and the
scientific approach lies in the explanation offered, the mechanisms involved, the basic attitude towards the universe' (King op.cit:17).

4. Galen and Medicine

Notwithstanding the contributions, in the first century A.D., of Celsius, (whose De Re Medicina provided detailed information on medical and surgical practice) and Dioscorides, a pharmacologist whose book was the basis of herbal therapy for the next fifteen hundred years (Coleman op.cit:22), 'the mechanics involved' and 'the basic attitude towards the universe' were to be the most powerfully invoked and determined by the advent of Galenic medicine (with its attempts at scientific analysis), and the Christian religion, both of which were to define disease and ideas of disease causation, informing attitudes and treatment systems, for many centuries to come.

Although Coleman (op.cit:22) asserts that Galenic thinking dominated medicine until the Renaissance, King refutes the commonly held belief that Galen shackled medical thought by 'exerting a stultifying influence that lasted into the eighteenth century' (op.cit:46). King does however admit that 'Galen did not distinguish adequately between what he saw with the corporeal eye, and what he saw with the eye of reason' (op.cit:54), because he, like Hippocrates before him, placed too much reliance on analogy and logical inference with too little questioning of evidence. He denied, for example, that blood circulated (a truth that had to wait until the publication of William Harvey's De Motu Cordis in 1628) but believed instead that three pneumata or spirits, natural, vital and animal, presided over bodily function.
Nevertheless, Galen, a prolific writer whose works covered the fields of medicine, surgery, anatomy and physiology (he had gained much experience as a physician to gladiators in Rome) as well as the philosophy of medicine, was a keen observer, systematizing knowledge and paying considerable attention to causation. Though no pioneer, Galen 'restored and dignified' (Coleman op. cit:23) an already 'established framework constructed of qualities and humours' (King op. cit:82), extending and elaborating the theories of Hippocrates into a widespread and persuasive scheme which, as a basic tenet of medical thought, remained in place until challenged by Paracelsus in the early sixteenth century and by the scientists of the early Enlightenment period a century later.

Two themes which influenced beliefs about the human condition in sickness and in health predominated. Firstly, it was assumed that one of the four humours, (along with their elemental qualities as already outlined), though not necessarily causing disease, nevertheless, dominated physiologically. They acted as determinants of temperament and character, since it had long been assumed that certain physical and mental qualities occurred in combination. Thus, then as now, stout people were usually regarded as good natured. Similarly, modern references to the sanguine, the phlegmatic, choleric and melancholic can be traced to old perception and appear not to be affected by modern knowledge of heredity and physiology. The very persistence of the theory over the years and the illumination it offers is demonstrated in such divergent descriptions as those of Shakespeare's Antony of Brutus as a perfectly balanced man (Julius Caesar, 1600:V.v.), Marlowe's depiction of the warring elements in Tamburlaine's nature (Tamburlaine)
and John Evelyn's delineation of his father as 'of a sanguine complexion, mix'd with a dash of choler... He was for his life so exact and temperate that I have heard he had never in all his life been surprised by excess, being ascetic and sparing' (L.M. Beier 1987:163).

Secondly, and more importantly, as far as the recognition and treatment of disease was concerned, the theory of elemental qualities relative to the four humours permitted Galen to develop an elaborate pharmacological system that was to be followed for fifteen hundred years. Since disease was thought to be caused by an imbalance of humours, it was thought that equilibrium could be restored by drugs made up of opposing elemental qualities. Thus, a disease described as hot and moist would be treated with drugs composed of cold and dry qualities. Further refinement of this system of drugs into groups of qualities and degrees of intensity was to provide the physician with a scheme of well defined instructions to assist in the diagnosis and treatment of disease giving, no doubt, at a time of actual uncertainty, every appearance of infallibility.

Roy Porter and L.M. Beier confirm that reliability on this apparent infallibility was widespread over a long period of time with credence given to Galen's dogmas, even in the race of genuine medical and scientific discovery. Porter indicates that 'maladies were still thought of as essentially constitutional and individual, explicated in terms of the scientifically moribund, but stubbornly resilient holistic humoral tradition' (1985:287) in an 'eighteenth century medical world... unfocussed and rather chaotic, still awaiting conceptual mapping' (ibid:286). Similarly Beier states that 'virtually everyone in
seventeenth century England had a humoral view of the human body, health and illness including those who 'employed magical healing techniques, those with an essentially religious approach to the cause and cures of illness, those adhering to academic orthodox medical theories and those espousing relatively new schools of medical thought, such as Paracelsians, Van Helmontians, iatro-chemists and iatro-mechanists' (Beier op.cit:163).*

Beier also affirms that 'humoralism was evident in prophylactic and remedial therapies' which were intended to rectify, 'by evacuation', 'the imbalance of the body's idiosyncratic humoral complexion' (ibid:31). She notes that these treatments were widely recognized and accepted 'whatever the intellectual orientation of the prescriber and the patient' (ibid:163) and regardless of whether they came from 'a traditional body of herbal and astrological lore [which] was directed at maintaining or restoring the equilibrium of the sanguine, choleric, melancholic humours' or from 'the great arsenal of medical texts by such sages as Hippocrates, Galen and Avicenna' (ibid:31). Bleeding and purging had long been common practice since 'natural vomiting, diarrhoea, sweating, expulsion of phlegm and even bleeding (from the nose, or in menstruation) may often have seemed the body's attempt to cure itself' (ibid:142).

However, though Beier cautions that the comments of a number of seventeenth-century diarists, notably here Pepys, Josselin and Hooke, may not be representative of either their social class (usually middle

or upper class) or of the general experience, nevertheless, she
suggests that they present 'a unique personal experience...providing...a
voice from the grave' which places 'suffering in its historical and
cultural context' (ibid:101). There is no doubt that these diarists
firmly believed in the need to restore vital balance and that they
rejoiced in the efficacy of the means to achieve it. Thus, Pepys, in
1663, convinced that 'a constipated state was unnatural and
fundamentally unhealthy', 'took an enormous amount of purging
medication', whilst Hooke expressed relief 'upon vomiting after eating
pullet and cheesecake'. Similarly, Josselin believed that 'the diarrhoea
he suffered from in December 1648 had done him much good' (ibid:142). He
experienced as much relief as he had earlier in the same year when he
reported that 'my water broke very ragged and a little red sediment [,]
it argued as I conceive a remainder of ill humors in me and that nature
was concocting and expelling them' (ibid:199).

Significantly, Beier comments that 'self-help was surely the most
common type of medical therapy in seventeenth century England'
(ibid:167) since 'licensed and unlicensed, educated and unlearned
healers shared both theories and therapies among themselves' (ibid:31).
They used 'the medical knowledge they gathered from their reading and
from oral tradition to treat themselves, their family members, and their
friends and acquaintances' (ibid:167). This is borne out, as will be
seen later, in Milton's attempts to secure advice about his
deteriorating sight and in the treatments he imposed upon himself. It is
important to note that, even in the presence of a physician, self-
diagnosis and treatment, continued into the eighteenth century, because
'medical knowledge was necessarily a currency common to both doctors and
patients rather than being the practitioner's esoteric monopoly, a "savoir" guaranteeing "professional dominance" (Porter 1985:287).

It is not then surprising to find that humoralism, this 'satisfactory basis for the explanation and treatment of illness' (Beier op.cit:164) remained unchallenged, on the popular level, until the nineteenth century. Its power was even further enhanced when it was allied with 'popular astrology which helped to explain variations in health and illness phenomena from person to person and time to time' (ibid:164). The very origins of humoralism provided for 'confident explanations of illness' since they suggested a relationship between the individual and the natural universe 'as well as co-ordinating the multidudinous parts of the human body into a comprehensive whole' (ibid:164). Though its therapies might be seen in some sense magical they were nevertheless accepted and embraced.

5. Christianity and Medicine

Whilst acknowledging Beier's warning (op.cit:31 & 163) about the unreality, and in fact impossibility, of trying to disentangle fully the intricate strands which informed ideas about disease causation, nevertheless, an attempt will be made here to trace the beliefs which influenced the Christian church and its attitude towards sufferers and their care.

Whilst the influence of Galenic 'scientific' medicine (except for a few vestigial traces evident in everyday speech [see p.12] has long been replaced by technological bio-medicine, the influence of Christian belief is still a pervasive and powerful determinant of attitudes which had their provenance in the earlier religious, mythical and magical
thinking which responded to the differing needs of the body, mind and spirit (psyche, soma and pneuma) of the human persona. The tradition of Christian healing, of divine intervention, with saint or priest as mediator, (still evident in present day Christian shrines) brings strong reminders of the Asclepian temples of ancient Greece, whilst the many gods of Rome (it was said that the Romans possessed an appropriate god for every function of life, for every part of the body [Cartwright op.cit:213]) can be seen to have their Christianized counterparts in the medieval saints who were similarly assigned patronage of various diseases, bodily parts or function and who must, to secure relief or cure, be placated by their own particular ritual. Thus, Febris, the goddess of fever, became St.Febrona whilst St.Vitus, 'a youth martyred under Diocletian, gave his name to the disease, chorea' (ibid:25), commonly known as St.Vitus' Dance.

Significantly, however, whilst believers sought divine intervention, believing that all health and disease came from God, Christianity itself not only moderated Old Testament ideas about the genesis of disease, but even more importantly, influenced thinking about treatment and care for many centuries by initiating a process which, like that of Galen's teaching, has been accused of inhibiting the growth of medical thought. Indeed, Cartwright (op.cit:19) goes so far as to say that not only did Christianity owe its influence as a world force to its presence in Rome at a time of multiple plagues in the first centuries after Christ's birth, and to the turmoil occasioned by the collapse of the Roman Empire, but that 'the thousand year history of medicine, from the fourth century A.D. until the fourteenth century A.D., would have been very different had it not fallen under the domination of the Christian
church' with its 'promise of physical resurrection and life after death, coupled with the surety of ultimate bliss for the sinner who truly repented' (ibid:23). Importantly, illness 'could only be alleviated by worship' (Coleman op.cit:27) since it had been determined by divine fiat. It was to be borne stoically as Christ had borne His suffering and was a necessary prerequisite for eternal life.

The belief that God plays a punishing hand in the imposition of impairment has a long history and one that can be seen to persist into the Gospels despite Christ's teaching. When He restored sight to the blind man, He attributed the affliction to the omnipotence of God and not to the sin or either the sufferer or his parents though it is clear from the disciples' questions that they shared the widespread assumption that to be less than whole was proof of sin (St.John 9:3). The Babylonians, Hebrews and Greeks had always held the ideal to be someone 'who is perfect in body and mind' whilst health itself was defined as 'well-being, wholeness, peace in body, mind and spirit' (D.J.Wiseman 1986:18), in harmony with the environment and with God. Thus to be imperfect and marred was to be marked and stigmatized.

Importantly for later traditional Christian belief two significantly influential tenets emerged from the Hebrew texts of the Old Testament, and continued to inform attitudes towards the impaired. Firstly, monotheistically, the Hebrew God was the true healer to whom all prayers must be directed (Genesis 20:17, Psalms 103:13) and resorting to divination, exorcists and the like was strictly forbidden (Leviticus 19:16). Secondly, as already indicated, since physical wholeness was seen as a necessary reflection of spiritual well-being, the deformed, disfigured and blind, being imperfect, were barred from the priesthood,
because a defective person, like a defective offering, detracted from
the wholeness (holiness) of God (Deuteronomy 15:21), (Wiseman
op.cit:22). This was a judgement which both alienated and degraded those
it encompassed and which invited ostracism. It was a belief which, no
doubt, informed the common practice, in biblical times and later, of
condemning enemy and criminal alike to those permanent reminders of
shame, the amputation of hands, noses or genitals.

It is also important to note that the care of disadvantaged groups,
then as now, was 'a benchmark in all societies of the way the rulers
exercised social justice in response to the divine call' (Wiseman
ibid:23). It was a benchmark which in the hands of King David indicated
that the disadvantaged were held in very low esteem (Samuel 11.5:6-8).

The fact that, in the Old Testament, some diseases more than others
appear to have been singled out as carriers of particular symbolic
meanings was to prove important in future medical thought. Just as
Apollo's arrows had brought pestilence on those he wished to punish,
(Cartwright op.cit:19) so God was deemed to have inflicted plagues which
were commonly regarded as expressions of divine anger, power and
punishment (Exodus 9:14, Numbers 11:33, Samuel 4:8). Blindness was seen
as a punishment both inflicted (Genesis 19:11, Kings 2 6:18) and cured
by the same Deity since, for the Hebrews, it was the Lord alone who
could 'open the blind eyes' (Isaiah 42:7). Significantly too, the eye,
the organ created by God Himself (Psalm 94:9) was used metaphorically to
express the idea of the power of His sight or perception (Psalm 33). It
is still possible to see representations of the all-seeing eye of God in
some churches.
Hebrew biblical records also contained teaching and advice which was to remain influential. Amongst the Hebrews the use of magic and omen was to be avoided in prognosis, diagnosis and therapy. There was evidence of the close integration of religious and medical thought, especially in the application of social and preventive medicine, and awareness of the part played by prayer, both by and on behalf of the patient (Wiseman op.cit:42). It is also interesting to note, particularly in the context of this thesis, that Wiseman records that blind people were associated with particular occupations, notably those of musician and singer, reed and mat-maker—clearly the beginnings of a very long tradition in the history of the work designated as suitable for one group of impaired people.

The close integration of religious and medical thought and the emphasis on prayer were to be continuing and key factors in the Christian teaching and practice which produced 'that religion of healing, the joyful gospel of Redeemer and of Redemption' which addressed 'itself to the disinherited, the sick and afflicted, bringing with it the most revolutionary and decisive change in the attitudes of society' (Sigerist op.cit:69). The progression from Old Testament moralization about disease to a New Testament 'popular notion of offence and retribution' was the outcome of influences in an 'extraordinarily complex culture' (C.J.Hemer 1986:49). Though these influences provided a continuous link between 'the rational and the religious' they were at the same time intertwined 'in a relationship not easy for us to enter into' (ibid:43). The healing practices of the early Christian church had not only to contend with the 'two-fold antagonism' of trying to separate themselves from 'the ideologies or the heathens of the Middle East,
Greece, Rome and later, Northern Europe and in particular from a special form of demonology' but also from 'the tensions and contradictions resulting from the relationship of Christian healing with the secular medicine of the Hippocratic and Galenic tradition' (P. Unschild 1991:62).

Thus, though the New Testament mentions three causes of illness, possession by demons (St. Mark 9:17-28), the sinning against God's commandments by the sick or by their ancestors (St. John 5:14), (both of which reflect older beliefs), and acts of God stemming from His omnipotence (St. John 9:3), it remained for Christianity to introduce the most revolutionary and decisive change in attitudes towards the sick, notwithstanding Cartwright's remarks about its inhibitory aspects. Christian tenet underlined the conviction that salvation and healing (both spiritual and physical) could be found in God alone, with Christ Himself advocating prayer and fasting, the laying on of hands and excorism. Importantly Christ, in effecting cures, indicated that disease was no disgrace, no punishment for sin, nor did it render the sufferer the more inferior.

Disease became a cross to be carried in the footsteps of the Master, a means of purification and grace through which spiritual capacities were enhanced, as well as a grace to be shared by the healthy in their attention to, and provision for, sick people. Yet, although the Christian church 'did little or nothing to improve the health or living standards of ordinary people', 'bringing medical research to a halt' (Coleman op. cit:27) it was nevertheless at the forefront of the provision of institutional care and shelter, whether in monasteries or in the early hospitals e.g. Hotel Dieu in Paris (561 A.D.), St. Bartholomew's in London (1123 A.D.), or in the philanthropic provision
of voluntary hospitals in this country in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The power of its ideologies remains to inform some of today's belief in causation, therapy and provision.

6. Tradition and Medicine

Yet, notwithstanding the pressures of religious orthodoxy, the multiplicity of belief about the causation of disease continued to flourish until 'medical remedies grew in importance in the eighteenth century at the expense of religious or magical means of healing' (J. Barry 1985:145). It was at this time that 'moral and religious explanations of disease', particularly in the 'key areas of witchcraft and mental illness' gave way, 'in official circles at least, to more secular, materialistic accounts' which, though accepted by the educated, left others, like the 'rural poor', still clinging 'to their traditional remedies and magical beliefs' (ibid:145). At the same time the elite rejected 'therapeutic eclecticism', along with 'spiritual folk healing' (associated in the previous century with 'religious enthusiasm and civil strife') for both social and religious motives, since the well-to-do patient willingly paid large sums to the 'socially respectable practitioner', not only as a member of the affluent classes, but also of his rejection of 'popular remedies' (ibid:146). It is significant that, at this point in the evolution of both medical knowledge itself and the professionalisation of its practitioners, that the sick themselves, in partnership (if not control) with their physicians 'determined the course of medical knowledge' (N.D.Jewson 1976:240). Barry (op.cit:172) confirms that there is 'considerable evidence' to support the view that 'patients in the eighteenth century still sought a spiritual
interpretation of illness' and that 'patient centred' (Barry op.cit:173) medical practice (the patient taking main responsibility for defining both the nature and treatment of illness) continued until 'the triumph of blind physico-chemical law over the idiosyncratic personal experience of the sick man' provided the 'medical investigator' with 'a degree of detachment from the demands of the sick' (Jewson op.cit:240).

That these trends were part, however, of an ongoing process in the evolution of belief and practice is indicated by A. Wear's comment that the seventeenth century had already shown that 'religion held no monopoly in explaining illness' since 'even thorough going Puritans often used medical or physically based explanations', there already being 'a standard perceived relationship between the two' (1985:78). This observation is supported by Beier's comment that 'the religious approach to illness favoured passive prayer and trust in God, while the secular approach was characterised by as active an attack as possible on the symptoms and causes of illness' (1987:155). The diarists again illuminate this point. Thus, medical remedies were seen 'as a gift of God', 'for men's use', and authorised 'by the word of God and Prayer', (Perkins 1612:506). Appropriate medicines were designated by God and made efficacious by prayer which was itself the 'expression of obedience to God' (Wear op.cit:79). In this way religion was 'placed on top of medicine' (Wear ibid:79) to avoid conflict with the word of God which was paramount.

Thus, Ralph Josselin (1616-1683), the Essex vicar who, as already indicated, was 'interested enough in medicine and disease to have read at least two works on the subject' (Beier 1985:183) and so 'unusually preoccupied with his own ailments' that 'he routinely examined his own
urine during times of illness' (ibid:199), nevertheless, rarely called on the services of a physician, relying on the belief that 'God's goodness cured him' (ibid:20). Though, like his contemporaries, 'he was involved in determining the diagnosis and prognosis of his own illnesses and in deciding the therapeutic "means" to be used' (Beier 1987:193), (usually 'herbal remedies and "simples" rather than the compound medicine favoured by apothecaries and physicians' [ibid:200]) Josselin was 'a man of his time who rarely mentioned health and illness without mentioning God. 'Whatever happened was God's will' (ibid:204). Sincerely believing that 'the best remedy was prayer and the best preventive medicine was a sinless life' (ibid:204), Josselin felt that he was the cause of ailments suffered by himself and by his children. Illness, for him was the result of 'folly' (Wear op.cit:81), God's punishment on those who 'broke the rules' (Beier 1985:115) and 'a way of testing the faithful' (ibid:122). It was to be met with constant propitiation.

It is interesting to note Beier's comment that Josselin's 'theoretical view dovetails nicely with his humoral orientation' since both approaches saw ill health 'as a personal, particular manifestation stemming from divine displeasure on the one hand, or an imbalance of the individual humoral make-up on the other' (ibid:123), either of which could be cured only by divine sanction.

Nevertheless, Josselin was deprived of his usual weapons of prayer and righteous behaviour when it came to outbreaks of plague and epidemic disease which, for him, were 'what cancer is for many modern Westerners' (ibid:126). Sharing the prevailing view, Josselin was convinced that epidemics which mutilated and killed were God's punishment for the 'collective sin' (ibid:126) of a community. His view was shared by his
contemporary, Richard Baxter, who also saw 'God as a judge handing out sentence and punishment' (Wear op.cit:97). Illness was 'one of the providential instruments and signs of God' and a means to 'acquire converts' (ibid:98). It is worth noting that Baxter believed that the "Religious sort" were protected from the plague until they boasted of it' (ibid:99). Significantly, the concept of the plague as 'God's punishment' for 'collective sin' reappears in as modern a novel as Albert Camus' The Plague (1947). Accepted as an 'allegorical presentation, not only of "la condition humaine" in general, but also of the particular experience of the German occupation' (P.Thody 1961:99), the novel was also said to show 'man as the innocent victim of a purely external evil for which he was in no way responsible' (ibid:101), a view which would not have accorded with that of Josselin and his peers. They would, surely, rather have accepted Father Paneloux's statements to his congregation that the plague was 'the flail of God' (1947:92), God's punishment, 'revealing the will of God in action' (ibid:95), and that 'you deserved it' (ibid:91).

However, Beier cautions that Josselin's experience 'can by no means be assumed to be typical of mid-seventeenth century England' (1985:126) even though the seventeenth century God, unlike that of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries 'was not yet the giver of immutable laws to be discovered by reason and by the scientist' as was thought later (Wear 1985:80). Beier cites Samuel Pepys, Josselin's near contemporary, as being 'both more secular in his attitude towards disease' and 'more likely to consult a licensed physician or surgeon' (op.cit:126). Yet, whilst there was growing recognition of the 'naturalistic' explanations which might be divorced from providence
 nevertheless, as has been shown, 'the seventeenth century mind, in its attempts to 'make sense of pain, disease and death' had been 'preoccupied through and through with finding particular personal providential explanations of individual visitation' (Porter 1987:6). The advent of disease was interpreted as 'a divine direct hit,' evidence of 'God's will, God's warning, God's vengeance, God's trials' which related 'to some particular crime or evil; both punitive but also remedial' (ibid:6).

This 'providential viewpoint' (ibid:6) persisted into the eighteenth century, overlapping with the 'enlightened empiricism' (King 1970:3) of the 'Medical Revolution' which completed 'the fall of Galen' (ibid:2) as truly scientific explanations slowly superseded religious or magical ideas of causation and the means of healing. The consequent 'medicalisation of life' (I. Illich 1976) and disease (particularly that of madness (Porter 1987:11)) and the increasing distance between patient and practitioner (Jewson op.cit:237) was to receive further impetus from the growth of the 'unprejudiced gaze' of doctors 'free at last of theories and chimeras' of thousands of years (M. Foucault 1973:19). Nevertheless, proof of the persisting power of religious belief is indicated by evidence which suggests that patients in one English town at least, eighteenth century Bristol, were still seeking 'a spiritual interpretation of illness' (Barry op.cit:172). Epidemics and plagues continued to be identified 'in the sermons of both Anglicans and dissenters as related to God's judgement on national sins, requiring the reformation of manners and the revival of religion', just as individual illness was still seen as a punishment and 'a salutary reminder...to look to the things of the spirit' (Barry op.cit:172). It might seem that
the infliction of such unpleasant treatments as bleeding, purging and emetics offered an appropriate opportunity for the expiation of the sin and guilt which had resulted in disease in the first place and that in this instance the doctor acted 'simultaneously as judge and comforter' (Barry op.cit:173).

Self help cures, often 'bizarre' (Jane Lane 1985:241), still abounded, no doubt aided by the plethora of medical advice books and 'medical information, comment and controversy in the press' (Porter 1985:289). The information was provided by practitioners and laity alike and indicated the degree of mutual interest between them when 'medical knowledge consisted of a chaotic diversity of schools of thought' (Jewson op.cit:227) and when sickness itself still 'inhered in the experience of the whole person' (Porter 1985:287). Maladies continued to be seen as 'essentially constitutional and individual, [and] explicated in terms of the scientifically moribund, but stubbornly resilient humoral tradition' (ibid:287). It is then not surprising that when medical information was common currency between doctor and patient alike that in polite society, and where money was a powerful factor, the 'sick themselves determined the course of medical knowledge' (Jewson op.cit:240). This was a pattern which continued until the medical investigator not only detached himself from those who were ill, but gained supremacy over other practitioners such as apothecaries, midwives, wise women and the like.

Lane reports that patients' ideas of why 'they were ill or well' was 'curiously unrelated' (ibid:241) to their education, class or sex. Her examination of diaries and correspondence reveals not only a very varied response to illness but that a 'strong fatalistic strand ran through
much of the eighteenth century material as well as a stoicism towards personal suffering almost incomprehensible to the modern reader' (Lane op.cit:217).

This fatalism, stoicism and dependence on God's will in the face of disease, so tellingly displayed by the diarists quoted by Lane and Beier, was gradually eroded, however, by the gradual secularisation of belief about causation and cure which was initiated by the scientific discoveries and values of the Enlightenment, that 'European intellectual movement of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in which ideas about God, reason, nature and man were synthesised into a widely accepted world view that integrated revolutionary developments in art, philosophy and politics' (Enc. Britt.1991 4:504).

7. Science and Medicine

King identifies the year 1660 as 'a useful landmark to indicate the approximate beginning of important changes in medicine'. Such changes were part of the 'newer concepts of science and philosophy' which pointed to 'a new critical acumen, a new regard for empiricism, a new approach to evidence and new concepts of validity' (op.cit:11). The period 1620-1700, designated by Patrick Trevor Roper as 'revolutionary' and accepted as such by King (ibid:11), had witnessed Harvey's discovery of the circulation of the blood in 1628 and the major writings of the philosophers Descartes and Bacon whose 'new science' was to influence significantly both the values and attitudes of physicians as well as those of theologians. Movement towards the desecularisation of the body received particular impetus from the deeply influential 'sharp dualism' of Descartes which clearly 'distinguished the corporeal part from the
spiritual and mental part' freeing the body, now identified as 'lying in
the province of science' (ibid:67) to be regarded as a machine for the
processes of dissection and somatic investigation, which had previously
been forbidden by Church edict. The soul being excluded by definition,
Cartesian dualism marked the beginning of the separation of science from
religion. Now, in the second half of the seventeenth century 'many
people saw God as the giver of laws rather than the Divine Providence of
the earlier century' (F.French & A.Wear 1989:3). The concept of
miracles, those 'swaddling bands of the early church' (K.Thomas 1971:3),
was killed by a revolution whose essence was 'the triumph of the
mechanical philosophy' and the notion that 'the universe was subject to
immutable laws' (ibid:643). It was inevitable that this same revolution
which weakened belief in the 'value of charms, spells, astrology and the
like', as well the 'physical efficacy of prayer', also 'diminished faith
in the possibility of direct divine inspiration' (ibid:643).

Changing ways of 'seeing and 'understanding' (Porter 1990:66)
instilled the belief that improvements to human life were both possible
and desirable, not least in the perception and treatment of illness.
Beliefs which had been encouraged by the discoveries of Harvey in
physiology were enhanced by the insights of other great innovators of
the seventeenth century. Sydenham, Willis, Boyle, Leeuwenhoek and Locke
(King op.cit:2) were followed by the medical leaders of the early
eighteenth century, notably Baglivi, Hoffman, Stahl and 'above all,
Boerhaave' who 'dominated medical theory for the first half of the
eighteenth century' (King op.cit:3). Proof of the tenacity of old
theories and the overlapping of evolving systems of belief is however
clearly demonstrated in the comment that Boerhaave 'synthesized into a
satisfactory whole' the various strands derived from 'the new mechanical philosophy, the new chemistry and the remnants of classical Galenism' (King op.cit:3).

But whilst in the mid-eighteenth century 'a vigorous experimental and empirical approach struggled with the dogmatic systems of the earlier part of the century' (King op.cit:3) the interplay between religion and medicine continued. However Porter warns that it would be 'a mistake to view these relations as essentially ones of conflict or linear development' since the values which underpin them have 'socio-cultural, ideological and practical dimensions which are vitally important' (1987:14). He adds the caution that 'the Enlightenment was not monolithic...no single blueprint...for absolute modernity' (ibid:53). Since both had 'in common the human soul' (French & Wear op.cit:2/3) 'religion and medicine were seen to augment, rather than to challenge each other' (Porter 1987:5) in the cure of the soul and the body. There were exceptions however. The Scottish Calvinist fundamentalists still held to a providential viewpoint. Here 'religious hostility' rejected innovations, such as smallpox inoculation, 'on the grounds that affliction was predestined' (R. Porter 1990:66) and that 'to tamper with illness was to arrogate to oneself the prerogatives of God' (Porter 1987:8). Nevertheless, fewer people resigned themselves to the idea that plague and epidemic were God's will or just punishment for sin, prepared to think, in 'enlightened England with its more rational belief, that 'God helps those who help themselves' (Porter 1990:66). Providential views were increasingly superseded by the secular theories of 'contagion, miasmas, humeral imbalance and so forth which vied for supremacy' (Porter 1987:8) since they offered cogent explanations for
the increasing 'diseases of civilisation' caused by the rise of towns, the 'filth diseases' of overcrowding and poverty and the 'sequelae of overconsumption of the rich' (Porter ibid:8). Providence may have given way to progress, but it was the progress of disease rather than 'medicine's ability to conquer it' (Porter ibid:8) since improvements in therapy remained 'negligible' (Thomas op.cit:658). It is not then surprising to find, with the 'stifling of grass root associations between the miracle-working powers of religion and the healing of the sick' (Porter 1987:12) that these same sick people turned to cures offered by quacks, confirming Thomas' view (op.cit:648) that there is only recourse to magic, superstition and the like in the absence of satisfactory alternatives.

Inevitably, perhaps, the many alternatives of the eighteenth century 'golden age of quackery' (Porter 1987:44), that seemingly 'long arid period in medicine' (King op.cit:3), persisted into the first half of the nineteenth century since medicine itself was 'not much more effective than in the seventeenth century' (Porter 1987:54). Actual causes of disease and the nature of the body's morbid responses were to remain 'deeply obscure and much contested' (Porter ibid:63) until the second half of the nineteenth, and into the twentieth century when theories of asepsis and anaesthesia (also countered by providential arguments that God given pain was of necessity beneficial and not to be avoided) became commonplace and the provenance of such diseases as anthrax, tuberculosis, syphilis, cholera and the like proven beyond doubt, and public health measures taken to either inhibit or prevent their occurrence.
It might be thought then that an upsurge of knowledge as influential as that experienced in the 'Medical Revolution' (L.S. King 1970:2), and beyond, would destroy the need for providential, mythical and symbolic explanations of disease, particularly those which were linked with 'the metaphysics of evil' (Foucault op.cit:196). It might also be anticipated that ideologies which had their origins in symbolic belief would disappear in the light of reason and information.

However, as I hope I have shown, mythical and religious explanations have deep roots and continue to retain a powerful hold on the human imagination, not least where the impairment is visible, seemingly intractable and a possible threat to independent living. I intend, therefore, in this thesis, to examine the degree to which the symbolic meanings which have long been attributed to one particular condition, blindness, persist in our literature to inform our understanding and attitudes.
If, as I have argued in the last chapter, ideologies about disease, and disability in general, have long been born out of a lack of knowledge about their true provenance and a seemingly compelling need to search for, and then impose, explanation, interpretation and meaning, then it can be anticipated that impairment of such an important sense as that of sight, 'the queen of the senses' (Jessica Langworthy 1930:271) will attract as least as many of the mythical, magical and religious beliefs which have, at times, been imputed to other traditionally meaning-laden illnesses such as plague, syphilis, epilepsy, tuberculosis and cancer.

This second chapter, then, will be devoted to tracing the development of those ideas which have informed and influenced beliefs about blindness and the blind and which, in their turn, have shaped attitudes and behaviour toward a minority group which only in the past two centuries has made significant strides in its own defence.

Three recent writers, the blind Donald Kirtley, Bernard Lowenfeld and Michael Monbeck, all writing in a period which saw a great outflowing of literature both about and by blind people themselves, have defined three main stages or 'historical phases' (Monbeck 1974:23) which, they suggest, mark the moves in the Western world from separation, isolation and dependency toward integration and independent living. They identify these stages as 'annihilation, veneration, or
beggary' (Lowenfeld 1975:viii) in 'the primitive period' (Kirtley 1975:1) of early civilisation when blind people were regarded as liabilities and a burden to their communities, the 'era of asylum' (Kirtley op.cit:1) or 'Ward Status' (Lowenfeld op.cit:viii) which was encouraged by Judeo-Christian compassion in early Christendom and the Middle Ages, and the still only partially achieved age of 'self-emancipation' (Lowenfeld op.cit:viii) and 'social integration' (Kirtley op.cit:1). They suggest that this last stage was initiated, toward the end of the eighteenth century, in the period of the French Enlightenment, by the philosopher Diderot, Hauy, the founder of the first school for the blind in Paris, and then continued by Hauy's pupil, Louis Braille and the work of the other European schools and workshops.

Monbeck points out, however, that these were never strictly discrete periods in which the blind were uniformly treated as either pariahs or protected members of society, valued for their humanity and for the notable gifts which some evinced. He maintains that all social roles existed at one and the same time alongside the roles occupied by the sighted population. Nevertheless he believes that ideas about blindness and blind people have shown 'very little significant alteration over the last several thousand years' (op.cit:24), a view endorsed by Kirtley who states that 'current expression [of attitudes toward the blind] differ little from those prominent during the distant past, except that presently negative evaluations of the blind are more likely to be stated indirectly, merely as innuendo or under the camouflage of various rationalisations to justify social or vocational reactions' (op.cit:84). As will be seen later, this observation is amply confirmed by those blind people whose autobiographical writings are examined in the final
chapter of this thesis. There is no doubt that the persisting strength of frequently instilled, but less often challenged, belief continues to influence their lives.

I intend therefore, as already indicated, to examine in this chapter the origins of some of those ideas which, though opened up for discussion and analysis over the last hundred years, still remain to colour belief and attitude toward those who lack sight.

1. Sight: The queen of senses.

It was no doubt inevitable, in earlier times, that any attack on the integrity of the organs of sense, 'the body's gateway to the mind' (W.F. Bynum & Roy Porter 1993:1) would have been seen, not as the outcome of disease or 'mechanical' failure, but rather as a clear threat to existence itself. This would have been particularly true of impairment of the sense of sight which, reputedly for St. Augustine and Plato respectively, was 'the principal sense by which knowledge is acquired' (Bynum & Porter ibid:1) and 'our chief source of intellectual gains in order that we might observe the rational and orderly revolution of the heavens and contemplating them, come to reproduce the movements in our turbulent souls' (ibid:28). Bynum & Porter state that traditionally, when the hierarchy of the senses was considered, the 'palm' was given to sight which lies 'near the top of our heads, nearest to heaven' (ibid:2). It is the sense which makes the concrete world immediately accessible, a window on the world (as well as, commonly, the window of the soul), the 'first sense by which shape, size, length and width are distinguished and without which an enormous amount of detail is missing'
(Thomas Cutsforth 1933:4). It is 'the chief sense of orientation'
(Richard S. French 1932:9), the sense which allows the spatial awareness
through which we learn to recognize and place objects in our
surroundings and without which, it was commonly believed, the sufferer
was incomplete, powerless, helpless and dependent, an object of both
pity and revulsion, an economic liability, a threat to the living and
deemed, at times, to be unworthy of life itself.

It is worth noting, however, that although most lay people today
still think blindness implies total absence of light and sight, both
Robert A. Scott and E. Boulter make it plain that modern medical
categorisation as 'blind' (no matter how 'arbitrary' or 'capricious'
[Scott 1969:42]) no longer means a complete lack of vision but indicates
rather, a condition which 'prevents [a blind person] relating directly
to his distant environment' (Scott 1974:109) but which still enables him
'to perceive light and even larger objects' (Boulter 1982:113). June
Rose also points out that 'the broad legal definition' of blindness in
the United Kingdom today means that for registration purposes (with the
Local Authority Social Services Department) a person must be 'so blind
as to be unable to perform any work for which eyesight is essential'
i.e. 'a person cannot read a test card at a distance of three feet which
a person with normal sight would be able to read at sixty feet' (Rose
1970:12). She notes that nine-tenths of those registered blind in
Britain have some residual sight and could be more accurately described
as 'people with very poor sight' (Rose ibid:12).

Nevertheless despite these statements which give a more refined and
accurate definition of the current physical assessment of blindness, it
is a commonplace that misperception and myth still surround a state
which continues to be seen as 'the worst misfortune' (Lowenfeld op.cit:25), 'unique' and 'uniquely disabling' (Martin Whiteman & Irving Lukoff 1965:135) and seared as 'so complete a tragedy that it cannot be overcome' (Thomas Carroll 1961:88). Carroll comments that 'it is not strange that some say "I would rather be dead than blind"' though this modern advocate for the blind goes on to say that he hopes to show, 'in the course' of his book, 'how unjustified this feeling is' (Carroll ibid:11).

Blindness is commonly perceived as giving rise to 'attitudes and evaluations different from those aroused by other physical handicaps'. (Whiteman & Lukoff op.cit:135) since it is seen as inevitably bringing with it 'a world of darkness' (French op.cit:16) which 'engenders misery and unhappiness from which the blind cannot escape' (Hector Chevigny & Sydell Braverman 1950:145). Thus the assertions of those who state that 'the difference of the blind lies solely in their experience of visual defect and certain limitations inherent in that defect' (Kirtley op.cit:ix), and 'who claim that blindness is a mere inconvenience, a nuisance, or annoyance' (Lowenfeld op.cit:239) seem to carry little weight when posited against the power of the world's 'fixed notions' (Hector Chevigny 1947:55). Blindness remains as a condition which 'tends to be an identifying mark' (Scott 1970:28), overshadowing all other characteristics and inhibiting the ability of sighted people to think of the blind 'in common sense terms' (Chevigny & Braverman op.cit:2). It is a 'bodily affliction 'which has 'always had a mystic aura'. It is 'the source of limitless philosophic conjecture', and 'a useful symbol of the limitations of man's power and of his ability to welcome truth' (G. Norman Laidlaw 1963:97).
It is perhaps, therefore, unsurprising to find blindness defined in largely metaphorical and symbolic terms in dictionary definitions of both the present and the past. The fact that the causation of this bodily malfunction is now largely understood and treatable does not appear to have reduced the wealth and weight of myth and meaning which it has garnered over the years. It is notable that many definitions indicate the large number of negative beliefs which continue to append to blindness, the origins of which will be discussed later.

2. Dictionary Definitions of Blindness

Blind — 'to render dark (hence) to confuse'.

From Old English 'blenden — to dazzle or blind.
Akin to Middle English 'blunderen — to confuse, to move clumsily, to blunder' and German 'blenden — to blind, to deceive'. (Eric Partridge 1966:50).

Since etymological study of the word 'blind' shows that it has long carried meanings which extend beyond the factual one of lack of sight, it is not surprising to find a wider ranging and developed pattern of actual and figurative meanings of blindness in more recent dictionary definitions where it is evident that the wealth of transferred meaning far exceeds that of the literal.

It follows, then, that the literal definition of blindness in Samuel Johnson's Dictionary of the English Language (originally published in 1754 but quoted here in the fourth edition of 1799) is succinct. He states that blindness means 'deprived of light; wanting the sense of seeing; dark'. This brief statement is followed however by a number of other definitions which go far beyond the actual and in so
doing indicate many of the symbolic meanings which are attributed to the condition of blindness. Phrases such as 'intellectually dark; unable to judge; ignorant; unseen, out of the publick view; private; generally with some contempt or censure, not easily discernible, hard to find, obscure unseen; something to mislead the eye or understanding, to hinder the sight' point to the supposed relationship between lack of sight and ignorance, lack of ability and perception and become loaded terms with which to characterise the condition and those who suffer from it.

Although the literal definitions of blindness in The Oxford English Dictionaries of 1888 and 1989 show more diversity than Johnson's brief statement they remain limited in number. They range from 'destitute of the sense of sight by natural defect or deprivation', 'render insensible to light or colour' to 'temporarily deprived of sight as when dazzled by a bright light'.

However the definitions which immediately follow illustrate the fine line which exists between both literal and figurative meanings since they appear to suggest many of the traits which are thought to be inherent in the state of blindness. Ignorance, lack of knowledge, judgement and perception are all implied in definitions such as 'flying blind' i.e. by instrument and not by direct observation, 'to go it blind' i.e. to act without previous investigation of the circumstances, to plunge without regard of the risks involved, 'blind bombing' and 'blind landing or approach'.

The two modern dictionaries show a similar outstripping by figurative definition and demonstrate an even greater range of symbolic representation and meaning. Thus blindness is defined figuratively in the 1888 edition of The Oxford English Dictionary as meaning 'to close
the eyes of the understanding or moral perception', 'to deceive', 'to hide from the understanding, to obscure, to deprive of light': to eclipse'. The 1989 edition of The Oxford English Dictionary defines blindness even more clearly as indicating a state 'lacking in mental perception, discernment and foresight, destitute of intellectual, moral or spiritual light', 'undiscriminating, inconsiderate, heedless, reckless'.

Many other examples of figurative and transferred meaning continue to promote the idea that the physical state of visual impairment also implies a state of ignorance and lack of purpose, judgement, morality and spirituality and discrimination. Phrases such as 'blind ditch, blind drunk, blind spot, blind prejudice and blind alley' (Brewer 1981:127) all reinforce the supposed relationship between lack of sight and lack of clarity of thought and foresight.

It is notable that all the dictionaries contain definitions of blindness which highlight the perceived relationship between lack of sight and lack of light and thus with inevitable darkness. Darkness is seen here in negative terms only in contrast with the positive qualities which appear always to be ascribed to the quality of light. It may be remembered however that darkness did not inevitably signal disaster since out of its infliction was said to have come the prophetic and creative powers of the likes of Tiresias, Oedipus, Demodocus and the poet John Milton.

Thus, dark (from the Old English deorc, to hide, render obscure' [Partridge op.cit:140]) is defined, in Johnson's Dictionary, as 'not light, wanting light, blind; without the enjoyment of light, opaque not transparent, obscure; not perspicuous, not enlightened by knowledge'.

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Significantly, the definition of darkness includes the phrase 'internal gloom; wickedness, the empire of Satan or the devil' as well as the more usual 'absence of light, want of perspicuity, difficultness of the understanding'.

In the modern dictionaries the literal definition of dark is brief and bears close resemblance to the definition of blindness. Thus dark is said to be 'characterised by (absolute or relative) absence of light, devoid or deficient in light' (O.E.D.1989:1V:250). The many and varied figurative definitions are similar to many of those ascribed to blindness itself. Here dark is described as 'characterised by absence of moral or spiritual light, evil, wicked', 'devoid of that which brings brightness or cheer', 'obscure in meaning, hard to understand', 'hidden', 'void of intellectual light, mentally or spiritually blind; unenlightened, uninformed, destitute of knowledge' (ibid:250). Significantly the verb to darken is defined literally as 'to deprive of sight, to make blind' and figuratively as 'to deprive of intellectual or spiritual light' (ibid:252).

Just as beliefs about blindness are reinforced in common usage, everyday phrases such as 'to keep dark—to lie perdu; to lurk in concealment', 'to keep it dark—to keep it a dead secret; not to enlighten anyone about the matter', 'to darken counsel—to confuse an issue (Brewer op.cit:313) serve only to strengthen the negative meanings which are implied in the above definition.

Definitions of light, on the other hand, with its many synonyms and metaphors derived from its Latin and Old English roots of lux, lucere (to shine, daylight) and leoh (illumination) (Brewer op.cit:355) point to its affinity with life itself, to God and creation, enlightenment and
clarity of thought and, importantly, its relationship to the sense of sight.

Johnson describes light as 'that material medium of sight; that body by which we see; luminous matter, state of the elements in which things become visible; opposed to darkness'. He also defines it variously as 'that natural agent or influence which...evokes day, life, illumination of mind; instruction; knowledge, reach of knowledge; mental view, explanation. Similarly, the verb 'to light' is defined as meaning 'to kindle, to enlame, to give light to, to guide by light, to illuminate; to fill with light.'

In the later dictionaries light is defined, in literal terms, as 'that natural agent or influence which...evokes the functional activity of the organ of sight, and is 'viewed as the medium of visual perception generally...opposed to darkness' (O.E.D. 1989 VIII :926). Figuratively, light is seen as 'mental illumination, or elucidation, meaning to shed light on, to have need of light...to need explanation, to provide 'illumination, or enlightenment, as a possession of the mind'. Thus, the much used expression, 'I see', which denotes comprehension, both confirms the perceived relationship between sight, light, understanding, reason, insight and perception, and also implies that the darkness which results from the inability 'to see the light' also means the inability 'to reach a full understanding or realisation' (ibid:926).

Finally, and of particular significance in the context of the oppositions of 'blind and sight', 'dark and light', the remaining figurative definition of light refers to the quality of light as symbolic of the divine. Light is described as having 'a spiritual reference' since it is seen as a sign of 'the brightness of Heaven, the
illumination of the soul by divine truth or love' and 'applied to God as the source of divine light and to men who manifest it' (ibid VIII:926). Thus, the phrase 'inner light' is indicative of 'inward or spiritual light; knowledge divinely imparted...the light of the soul', whilst 'to bring to light' means to expose; to reveal'. Lastly, 'to see the light' means 'to be converted; to come to a full understanding or realization of something' (Brewer op.cit:668).

Daily reminders of the embodiment of light as signifying God continue to underline the affinities between sight, light and spiritual values, whilst lack of sight is left to convey despair and lack of hope. Thus, the psalmist, requesting divine approbation, prayed 'Lord, lift up the light of thy countenance upon us' (Psalm IV.6) whilst Christ Himself is referred to as 'the true light which lightens everyone that cometh into the world' (John 1:9). The prayer 'Lighten our darkness we beseech thee, 0 Lord' (Book of Common Prayer) is both a petition for safety from the realities of the 'perils and dangers of this night' as well as, metaphorically, a request for spiritual enlightenment. In a more banal fashion John Henry Newman's hymn 'Lead Kindly Light' expresses similar sentiments as does William Holman Hunt's painting 'The Light of the World'. This Pre-Raphaelite example of Victorian piety with its 'didactic emphasis on moral or social symbolism' (Harold Osborn 1970:552) depicts Christ as Light Intrinsic, carrying an illuminating lantern as a symbol of all that is opposed to darkness and evil.

* The 1853 version of this painting is in Keble College, Oxford. A later version, completed by Hunt's nephew, Edward Hughes is in St. Paul's Cathedral, London.
I hope to have shown that dictionary definitions confirm that 'for man, his visual apparatus has always entailed more than mere physical seeing' (Kirtley op.cit:17) since both literal and figurative definitions of blindness and sight, light and dark, go far beyond the bare description of a sense or value. They emphasise the persistent power of those ideas stemming from the dichotomies of light and dark which in themselves have given rise to so many of the archetypal themes about blindness and in so doing have become an enduring part of language expression. Indeed Kirtley is convinced that 'fantasies about the eyes as expressed in the common language constitute a critical factor in determining emotional reactions to blindness, both among the blind and the sighted' (op.cit:17). It is also clear that however potent words have become as representative of the value of sight or lack of it there have long been other symbols which continue to confirm Kirtley's view that 'more than mere physical seeing' is involved in the world's perception of eyesight.


Like Kirtley, both the psychologist T.Thass-Thienemann (1968) and Patrick Trevor-Roper believe that there are factors other than physical limitations and a complete shift in sense modalities which set the blind apart from the sighted. They believe that other explanations which relate both to the physical world and to facets of human experience have become attached to the important sense of sight and thus to sightlessness. Thass-Thienemann suggests that some symbolic beliefs come from the fact that 'the human body and its functions are the primary frame of reference in naming objects of the perceived world' (in Kirtley op.cit:18) whilst Trevor-Roper states that 'sight has become intimately
associated with all our spiritual and sexual needs' (Trevor-Roper 1970:145). He goes on to maintain that 'from this derives all the mythology and folklore that starts with the sun-gods and spreads through the concept of second sight and the evil-eye' (ibid:145) since to primitive man 'worship of the sun must have been instinctive when he embarked on his first brave moment of conceptual thinking, along with an awareness of the existence of his destiny, and the hope or presumption that this was guided by some external force' (ibid:146). Trevor-Roper goes on to maintain that the idea of a sun-god as the 'primordial giver of life, the source of heat and light that sustained the life he had created' has 'remained supreme in almost every nascent civilisation, and has never, in some cultures, been replaced' (ibid:146).

Thus, whilst for the Hebrews it was God who, in the beginning, made the Light, for the Egyptians and the Japanese it was the eyes of their gods which became powerful symbols. The Egyptian proto-god, Ptah, was said to have fathered all the other gods through his eyes (and human beings through his mouth), whilst for the Japanese it was God who gave birth, 'while washing his eyes, to the Sun Goddess who in turn begat Japan and its race of God emperors' (Trevor-Roper op.cit:124).

The importance of the sun-eye symbol and belief in its power and omniscience are noted by Donald Kirtley, Michael Monbeck and H. Chevigny and S. Braverman in their respective studies of blindness and its meanings. Monbeck notes the seeming universality of the association of eyes 'with the idea of fertility, creative energy and magical power' as well as the prevalence of the circle as a symbol of the sun, comparable with the iris of the eye with the pupil at its centre. He links this
perceived relationship to the 'ancient mystical idea that light and energy of some sort is emitted by the eyes' (Monbeck op.cit:124).

Both Kirtley and Chevigny note that in ancient Egypt and in Greece the sun itself was thought to possess the power of vision. Horus, the Egyptian sun god, was commonly represented artistically in the form of an eye whilst, for early Greeks, 'the sun became the vigilant god Helios' (Kirtley op.cit:19). The depiction of the eye of God as symbol of both creative energy and 'divine omniscience' (Monbeck op.cit:126) is still widespread, and the potency of the image pervasive enough to have appeared in such diverse places as the Bible, ('The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good' [Proverbs 15:13]), and an old German proverb, ('the sun sees everything' [in Kirtley op.cit:19]). Similarly, in his poem 'The Sun Rising' (1633), John Donne attributes the ability to see to that 'busy old fool' the 'unruly sun'. The same symbolism can be seen even in current psychoanalytic theory. Kirtley, for example, quotes Thass-Thienemann as likening the sun to the 'all powerful, all knowing super-ego' i.e. 'the omnipotent father-authority of early childhood' (Kirtley op.cit:19).

In many mythologies great symbolism was also placed on the possession of a single eye or multiple eyes, although Monbeck notes that the single eye attracted ambivalent beliefs. Whilst some gods, e.g. Shiva, Horus, Zeus and Odin were often portrayed as having one eye only, 'non-divine beings' with only one eye were frequently regarded as subhuman. At the same time the single or 'pineal eye' could be 'symbolic of inner vision...the eye of the spirit' (Monbeck op.cit:128) whilst possession of a third eye was thought to be a sign of the divine and intuition (Monbeck op.cit:127). Monbeck states incorrectly that
Descartes thought that 'the seat of the soul' was in the 'pineal eye' (op.cit:128). Descartes believed, rather, that 'the soul is joined to the whole body' in the brain, in 'the most inward of all its parts, to wit, a certain very small gland...in the middle of its substance' i.e. the pineal gland (Descartes 1649 1.30-31 quoted in Copleston F.1964 1V:137). Interestingly enough in this context, Trevor-Roper notes that the pineal gland 'is our own vestigial third eye' (op.cit:129).

As well as the vigilance indicated by the presence of a single eye eternal watchfulness and perpetual attention were signified by open staring eyes, such as those of fish (a symbol much used by alchemists) and by those of the hundred-eyed giant, Argus Pantoptes, of Greek mythology.

Location of the eye in the forehead, as in the Cyclops, appeared to indicate 'extra-human power'. Monbeck adds that 'unity as symbolized by the uroboros serpent (also a circle) is a characteristic of the non-differentiated state of the unconscious' so that, in mythology, 'the darker, negative aspects of the unconscious state are encountered as terrible one-eyed giants, e.g. Polyphemus, a cyclops (wheel-eye) faced by Odysseus' (Monbeck op.cit:128).

Both Kirtley and Monbeck draw attention to those other perennial beliefs that the eye is both the window of the soul and an indicator of other character traits e.g. shifty-eyed people are untrustworthy, squint-eyed are dishonest, blue-eyed people are gentle and yielding whilst the possession of brown eyes is a sign of strength of thought. Monbeck points out that eyes do not, in fact, 'dance', nor are they 'merry' but suggests that this kind of evaluation is 'a complete displacement of what is actually perceived elsewhere about the
physiognomy of the rest of the body' (op.cit:129). Kirtley, too, notes
the analogies made by psychoanalysts between window shades or blinds and
the eye-lids. Thus a down cast look (closed blinds) can be indicative of
shame or guilt or the desire to hide away from inspection. He notes that
small children, playing games, commonly cover their eyes in the belief
that they then render themselves invisible.

Importantly, Kirtley thinks that these beliefs about hidden and
unseeing eyes contribute to assumptions that blind people are
inscrutable, immoral and without conscience since they are 'cut off from
an inner "searchlight"' (op.cit:20). Since he is convinced that such
ideas, which have their genesis in myth and symbol, survive to
contribute to 'popular fantasy' (op.cit:20) it is inevitable that myths
about eyes which are imperfect and without sight become even more
negative and destructive.

4. The Impaired Eye

Unlike the unimpaired eye which provides the ability to see, and all
that that implies both factually and symbolically, the presence of the
impaired eye, as already indicated, has long been associated with ideas
which suggest the opposites of creative energy, fertility and light with
all their attendant symbols. Nevertheless, despite the pervasiveness of
negative belief, Kirtley points to the existence of a 'paradoxical
bipolarity of attitudes' (op.cit:65) which surrounds the condition of
blindness. He quotes G. Schauer who in 1951 analysed the symbolism of
eyes in fairy tales, mythology and folklore, religious and proverbial
sayings as well as the fantasies of both normal and neurotic
individuals.
Schauer identified a number of common, if not universal, themes ranging from 'the eye as identification with the thing seen, the act of seeing as something forbidden or forbidding, blindness as punishment for sin or conveying rare moral virtue and a view of the blind as immature or childlike' (Kirtley op. cit:21). Many of the themes overlap or feed into other beliefs about blindness and some, clearly, have been more influential than others in supplying explanation for the advent or existence of blindness. Thus, the concept of the eye as a devouring mouth is connected with belief in the power of the evil eye, and punishment for sin, particularly sexual sin, can be linked with the sin of looking i.e. scoptophilia or voyeurism, 'a way of obtaining sexual gratification without embarking upon the complexities of a real relationship' (Anthony Storr 1964:95).

a). The eye as devouring mouth.

Kirtley (op. cit:21) suggests that the fantasies which endow the seeing eye with consuming and destructive powers go far beyond the stuff of such everyday visual metaphors as 'feasting the eyes' on a beautiful landscape or object or 'taking in a movie' or a book since, by implication, those who cannot see are inevitably deprived of such powers. He believes that this is both one source of the belief that the blind are impotent but, even more influentially, that the eye itself can be used as a sadistic weapon with the magical ability to 'confer absolute power over the object looked at' (Kirtley op. cit:21) i.e. the evil eye.

b). The Evil Eye.

Belief in the evil eye, 'one of the oldest and most prevalent superstitions in history' appears to come from 'that most curious and
widespread development of the relationship between God and the eye and sex' (Trevor-Roper op.cit:148). Monbeck explains that 'symbolically the eye has both an active, penetrating, fertilising or wounding function and a passive receptive mode in which it can be fertilized or wounded' (op.cit:131/132). Both of these aspects are exemplified in 'the communio', the highly personal communication between the eyes of two people or the means of communication between the living and the dead, between the idol and the people, 'a point of contact between inner and outer worlds' (Monbeck op.cit:131). 'Since the eye can both take and project' (Chevigny & Braverman op.cit:66), receive and transmit impressions of evil, the negative aspects of the communio were represented by the evil eye which was credited with great power. Thus, in classical legend, the Medusa and the basilisk, a sort of hooded cobra and the animal equivalent of the Medusa, could, by a glance, turn offenders to stone.

Much in the way of disease, disaster and disability has been attributed, over the centuries to the evil eye. Not only was it said to be responsible for the Black Death (Chevigny & Braverman op.cit:66) and such varied conditions as 'eye diseases, cholera, syphilis, abortion, congenital defects, small pox' (Monbeck op.cit:134/5) but its influence was thought to be most marked in matters of 'the inhibition and destruction of fertility' (Chevigny & Braverman op.cit:67). It was believed 'that periods of particular vulnerability occurred at sexual climacterics of circumcision, puberty, marriage and childbirth' (Trevor-Roper op.cit:148) and that the birth of deformed babies was the result of its influence. Women in the last stages of pregnancy were thought, in popular folklore, to be especially susceptible. It was not uncommon for
an amulet or other talisman to be carried as protection, not least of which was the caduceas said to have been carried by Mercury and designed to protect him from the evil eye of Juno (Trevor-Roper op.cit:148). In the course of time 'any abnormal or unusual condition of the eye' whether it be inflamed eyes, a squint or even a missing eye came to be as feared as the 'so-called "natural" or involuntary evil eye' (Honbeck op.cit:134). At the same time the 'voluntary evil eye' which gave power to the malevolent to cast spells was thought to come from 'possession' or a pact with the devil (Monbeck op.cit:134).

In this way the impaired eye, in the absence of other knowledge, became the scapegoat for much that occurred in the way of mishap, ill-luck, and natural disaster.

c). The eye and the act of seeing something forbidden.

Although Chevigny and Braverman state that 'sight is an instinctive action playing a part in both self-preservation and the procreational sphere' (op.cit:57) they nevertheless maintain that it is 'not true for everyone' that 'the act of looking is indispensable to sexual performance' (op.cit:55). Trevor-Roper, on the other hand, says that since 'the association of sex with almost every aspect of religion is a commonplace...the association of the eye and sight with sex would be a natural sequel' and 'the eye might readily become (as the Freudians have held) the organ of projection or displacement by the genitals whenever fear, guilt, inertia, impotence or despair barred a normal sexual outlet' (op.cit:146).

Chevigny and Braverman explain that Sigmund Freud, had defined 'the role of sight in sex as a "partial instinct,"' providing a pleasure in itself, a matter of natural curiosity and interest in early childhood, a
part of the 'realm of things sexual' but 'closed by the edict to prying' to become part of a 'child's awareness that sex exists in some sort of separate compartment of reality' (Chevigny & Braverman op.cit:57). That many people remain, at least to some degree, at this infantile level, 'fixated on the drive to peek at what is forbidden' (Chevigny & Braverman op.cit:57) is obvious from the widespread interest in 'Page 3 girls', 'Girlie magazines,' strip tease shows and other sexually explicit material, all proof of Trevor-Roper's contention that 'seeing of sex acts or images can become almost as exciting, or as guiltful (depending on taste or inhibitions) as actually participating'. He goes on to suggest that 'the group who find it exciting tend to become exhibitionists or voyeurs, just as those who are guiltful tend to become scoptophiliacs' (Trevor-Roper op.cit:146). He notes that Peeping Tom was blinded through looking at the naked (and exhibitionist) Godiva (op. cit:147).

A number of stereotyped ideas about blindness and its causes stem from this perceived relationship between the eye and sex and the forbidden pleasure of looking. These range from the perennial belief that the 'solitary vice' (French 1932:16) of masturbation destroys sight to the Tiresian and Oedipal archetypes which embody the dichotomous positive and negative images of blindness and castration anxiety. These archetypes have clear links with the belief that blindness comes as a result of sin.

d). Blindness as punishment for sin.

The 'paradoxical bi-polarity of attitudes' recognized by Kirtley (op.cit:65) can be seen as having at least some of its origins in those opposing views which, on the one hand see blindness as a punishment for
sin (particularly that of a sexual nature) and, on the other hand blindness as a condition which brings with it spiritual or moral compensation.

Thus, although in Greek mythology Thamyris was said to have been blinded by the daughter of Zeus simply for defeating her in a song contest, both Oedipus and Tiresias were blinded because of forbidden knowledge, the former at his own hand because of incest and patricide, the latter (in one fable) by Athena whom he had seen bathing naked. In another fable, after having been changed temporarily into a woman for seven years, Tiresias 'was called upon by Jupiter and Juno to settle an argument as to which of the sexes derived the greatest pleasure from the married state'. Speaking from experience, Tiresias declared in favour of the female 'whereupon Juno struck him blind' (Brewer's Dictionary op.cit:1120).

Tiresias, however, was compensated by Athena, for his lack of sight, by the gifts of extended life, 'the power of soothsaying, of understanding the language of birds' and 'a staff with which he could walk as safely as if he had his sight' (ibid:1120) whilst Oedipus was denied divine favour as was deemed 'commensurate with the heinous crime of patricide and incest' (Monbeck op.cit:49). He remained 'broken and utterly wretched after many years of blindness' (Sophocles quoted by Monbeck op.cit:49).

Significantly, it is the story of Tiresias' gifts which appears to have provided an early instance of the 'perennial fantasy' and seemingly unassailable belief that the blind have occult or unusual abilities since he is 'characteristically portrayed as wise, virtuous and
parapsychologically endowed, a spiritual supremo who knew all the secrets of life and death' (Kirtley op.cit:52).

Proof of the enduring nature of this legend can indeed be seen in the work of two relatively recent poets, Alfred Tennyson (1809-1892) and T.S.Eliot (1888-1965). Tennyson's poem Tiresias was published in 1885 although Christopher Ricks suggests that it had its origins in 1833 after the death of the poet's friend, Arthur Hallam, when the poet himself 'looked to a classical story for an insight into mortality' (1969:569). Now in his last years, and 'much diverted by thoughts about prophecy and soothsaying,...Tennyson easily identified with the figure of Tiresias who...had been punished with blindness for seeing too much...but recompensed with the power of divination' (Michael Thorn 1992:478). Charles Tennyson notes that his grandfather 'was no doubt drawn to the old legend by the feeling that he was very much in the position of its hero. He could see so plainly where materialism and lack of faith were hurrying the world, yet he was beginning to feel that all his warnings were in vain' (1968:483). Thorn also notes that 'more and more in his last years Tennyson's poetry would carry a message or tackle questions of faith and despair' (op.cit:478). This perhaps explains why Tennyson 'adapted the story of Tiresias so that it becomes a kind of foreshadowing of Christ's sacrifice in that Tiresias finds strength and consolation in deliberate self-sacrifice' (Ricks op.cit:569). Thus, though there is no suggestion in the original legend that Tiresias' prophecies are doomed to disbelief,* Tennyson superimposes his own version of the myth to convey his own message of redemption.

The poet tells how Tiresias, blinded by Athene, is indeed gifted with prophecy but Cassandra-like is fated never to be believed:

'Henceforth be blind, for thou hast seen too much,  
And speak the truth that no man may believe'. (1.48-49)  
And as it were, perforce upon me flashed  
The power of prophesying—but to me  
No power—so chained and coupled with the curse  
Of blindness and their unbelief, who heard  
And heard not when I spake of famine and plague. (1.55-59).

Though, as Ricks points out, 'the sacrifice of God and His Son' is only 'tenuously adumbrated here' (op.cit:569), it is significant that it is the blind Tiresias who addresses Menoeceus as 'My son' (1.9) and who advocates the giving of a life in order to bring belief both in his gifts and in his promise of salvation for Thebes. Thus, Tennyson uses the example of the blind and gifted, but unheeded Tiresias, to draw attention to the Christian message of redemption through sacrifice. It is not clear whether Tennyson was aware of the plight of the blind of his day, but their gifts were as ignored in their time as were those of Tiresias and Christ in theirs.

By contrast, though Tiresias is without doubt of importance to Eliot as a figure of androgenous sexuality in _The Wasteland_, his blindness
is not seen as having any other significance here and so is not explored in any detail.

Biblical and legendary instances of the imposition of blindness as a punishment for sin in general, and sexual license in particular, are many and varied. St. Lucy (Santa Lucia, Holy Light), the patron saint of ophthalmology, was said to have torn out both her eyeballs because she had looked lustfully on a man, although 'God in His wisdom subsequently gave her replacements'. Her Scottish and Irish equivalents, Saints Tridnana and Medana, are also said to have sent their 'offending eyes' (on a skewer in the case of the former) to 'lustful admirers' (Trevor-Roper op.cit:147).

The Old Testament, in Kirtley's view (op.cit:88), offers a 'thoroughly disdainful view' of the blind. Zophar, one of Job's comforters tells him that 'the eye of the wicked shall fail' and that they (the blind) will be 'without hope' (Job 11:20); again in Zephaniah 1:17 blindness is deemed to be the outcome of sin 'against the Lord' and the bringer of 'great distress'. As already indicated in the first chapter, blind men in ancient Hebrew cultures were disqualified from serving as priests (Leviticus 22:22 whilst in Samuel 5:8 it is written that 'No blind or lame man shall come into the Lord's house'. In the Bible as a whole, in addition to its punitive aspects, blindness is often depicted as an instrument of the power of God. Thus, Samson who had been punished for lust, was able, as the servant and helpmeet of God, to bring down the temple whilst avenging himself on the Philistines who had imprisoned and blinded him to reduce his might against them (Judges 16). In the New Testament, and as already indicated in Chapter 1. Jesus denies that a man's blindness is due either to his sin or that of his...
parents. Instead He teaches that the condition, and its cure, are evidence of God's omnipotence (John 9.1-15). Similarly, St. Paul (who had become an advocate of Christ following his sudden blinding on the way to Damascus [Acts 9.1]) calls down a heavenly curse on Elymas, the sorcerer, in order to demonstrate both divine power and Elymas' false ways [Acts 13.8-1].

In the secular world too, blinding became a common punishment, not only for sexual licence and crime in general but also for those taken prisoner in war. As a further example of the 'displacement' (Chevigny & Braverman op. cit:61) which, in psychoanalytical terms is said to take place between the eyes and the sexual organs, the blinding of Gloucester, in Shakespeare's King Lear (1608) becomes a symbolic castration, retribution for his complacent acknowledgment of adultery (ibid:1.1:985, 3:170-173). Jay Halio notes that Edgar uses the word 'stones', a then common slang term for testicles, to refer to his father's lost eyes. She adds that the word 'traitor' (used frequently to describe Gloucester) may be a synonym for illicit lover (1992 Vol.43:221-223).

Similarly Samson's reference to himself as a 'tame wether' in Milton's Samson Agonistes (1671 1.538) is a further pointer to the perceived connection between visual loss and emasculation, all part no doubt of the 'occasional irrational meanings' which 'seem to spring from deep in the psyche of men, transcending his cultures and his civilisations to remain fairly stable throughout the centuries' (Chevigny & Braverman op.cit:71).

Thus, a threat of, or actual damage to, the validity of the eyes and sense of sight can result in 'castration fear' which 'Freud held is
present to some degree in all' and 'aroused by almost any threat of
physical deprivation...but...most strongly aroused when the threat is to
an organ, sense or function, actually or symbolically, allied to the
sexual processes' (Chevigny & Braverman op.cit:168/9). These authors
suggest that through a process of 'pure projection' (ibid:171) 'loss of
sight must be emotionally equated by most with what amounts to at least
partial castration', and the precipitating factor in the supposed 'gloom
and melancholia which man associates with fear of loss of sexual
potency' (Chevigny & Braverman ibid:169/170). They believe that 'without
this conclusion' much of the mythology about blindness is 'without
meaning' and particularly so in relation to those ideas which have long
seen 'the unsexed, whether so through physical operation or through
spiritual renunciation,... as being apart' and as 'less gross and
materialistic than the fully sexed' (Chevigny & Braverman ibid:170).

Whether the same unconscious mechanisms influenced the habit of
blinding criminals and prisoners of war is unclear but this punishment
was introduced in England, in 600 A.D., as an alternative to the death
penalty. The Byzantine Emperor Basil was said to have sent back fifteen
thousand blinded prisoners to the king of the Bulgars (Trevor-Roper
op.cit:149) whilst L'Hopital des Quinze-Vingts in Paris, which still
provides services for blind people, was founded in 1254 by Louis 1X to
house three-hundred Crusaders who had been held by the Saracens as
hostages for the king. It was claimed that twenty soldiers per day were
blinded during the fifteen days prior to the receipt of the ransom and
the release of the king and that it was the cry of 'Ste.Tierre' (Holy
Land) from the blind beggars which impelled Louis 1X into granting
shelter, 'freedom from taxation, the right of asylum and the privilege
of wearing a distinguished garb' (Gabriel Farrell 1956:147). Although the full truth of the account is now said to be 'open to conjecture', the establishment of L'Hopital des Quinze-Vingts 'set a pattern for the asylum and care of the blind' (Farrell ibid:147) which was emulated by many other European countries from the thirteenth century onward.

e). Identification with the thing seen.

The idea, initially, that the sight of an object or a person may then promote identification with it (e.g. fellow feeling with a character in a play, film or book) appears easier to understand than a complex explanation which relies on unconscious motivation and a displacement of affect. Nevertheless, Kirtley quotes Schauer who suggests that 'sighted people sometimes eschew empathizing with the blind out of the unconscious belief that to do so could render them similarly blind'.

This widespread tendency to avoid the blind (or indeed any other handicapped person) appears to come from both the idea of contagion, (contamination through looking or touching an impaired person) or from the folklore belief that to 'look at an object often means to acquire its properties and be forced to imitate it' (Kirtley op.cit:23).

Thus, the myths persist that those affected by the evil-eye become evil themselves just as those who are victims of Dracula also become vampire-like. Since, superstitiously, it is often thought that those without sight possess similar powers, it is not surprising that 'many sighted people react to the fact of blindness with revulsion fear and avoidance, responding not to the individuals concerned, but 'rather to the archetypal patterns that are aroused in them' (Monbeck op.cit:145).
f). The blind as immature and childlike

In view of the many other archetypal ideas about blindness and the blind implicit in, and consequent upon, a belief in immaturity and childlike-ness I intend to extend this section to include an examination of those ideas which influenced assumptions of helplessness and dependency and their inevitable concomitants of over-protection, gullibility and that most pervasive and demeaning of all attitudes toward the blind, pity.

1). Helplessness, dependency and gullibility.

The disparaging and misleading belief that 'the blind person's brain [is] bemused' and 'in perpetual torpor' (Pierre Villey 1930:180) is still widespread despite evident proof of the talents and ingenuities of a number of very able blind people, two hundred years of increasing appreciation of the need for, and provision of, education, training and employment, and a vociferous protest in recent years by a number of articulate writers (some blind themselves) who refute any such belief.

This belief has no doubt been founded on such stories as that of the deception of the old and blind Isaac by his son Jacob (who put on the clothes of his older brother Esau to trick him out of 'his birthright' and 'his blessing' [Genesis 27:36]) and the cuckolding and mockery of January, the old knight in Geoffrey Chaucer's 'The Merchant's Tale' (part of The Canterbury Tales). To add to the stereotype, January is depicted, not only as blind and therefore easily deceived, but also as stupid and sexually impotent since he is naively persuaded that he had not, in fact, seen his young wife, May, and her lover copulating in a tree. She insisted that he had been dazzled and misled by the gift of sight which had been vouchsafed to him by Pluto, 'kyng of Fayere', so that he might indeed see 'the tresons which that women doon to man'.

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Chevigny's statement that there has been a slow 'recognition that the blind are not also made intellectually deficient by their condition' (op. cit 1947:97) appears to have been a too confident conclusion in view of the observation, made three-quarters of the way through this century, that the blind are still seen as 'fools' (Kirtley 1975:34 and Monbeck 1974:25). The assumption that there is a 'mental void' [which] precludes any real intellectual development or performance is strongly criticised by Robert A. Scott (1964:4) because of its negative and limiting influence in the 'making of blind men' (ibid:vii) and because it encourages 'imputations of inferiority, disbelief in the blind man's ability to function physically and doubts about his ability to understand' (Chevigny & Braverman op.cit:174). These authors, indeed, go so far as to state that 'so many people assume that the blind person is stupid that after a while he begins to fear that he may be and withdraws effort lest he prove the allegation true' (ibid:174).

Nevertheless depictions in literature of such archetypal figures as Oedipus and the blinded Gloucester in King Lear continue to promote belief that the blind person is 'essentially helpless and essentially tragic' (Chevigny op.cit:128), pitiable, dependent and in need of protection. Jacob Twersky notes, for instance, that Oedipus is portrayed as almost wholly dependent on his daughter, Antigone, whilst Gloucester is depicted (unrealistically in Twersky's view) as 'forlorn, utterly helpless and disorientated', and 'easily deceived over his appearance and supposed suicide' (Jacob Twersky [1955]) quoted by Kirtley op.cit:61).

It is, however, the powerful and paradoxical elements of pity, that omnipresent emotion evoked by the condition of blindness, which have
both triggered compassionate attitudes toward the blind whilst at the
same time contributing to the destruction of their 'integrity as human
beings' (Chevigny op.cit:81) by infantilizing and demeaning them as
helpless, incapable and dependent.

Pity

A number of authors suggest that the motivating forces behind displays
of pity are not, as might be assumed, simply the outcome of compassion
and sympathy for someone who is facing 'what the whole world tells him
is the most tragic misfortune that existence can offer' (Chevigny
op.cit:8) but rather a complex and dichotomous mixture of factors which
arise as much from guilt, fear and aversion as from admiration and
desire to help. Thus, Job's claim of being 'eyes to the blind' and feet
to the lame (Job 29:15) might be seen as much a protestation of his own
integrity and religious devotion as it is pity for the impaired
although the pity and mercy shown in Jesus' healing of blind men (Matthew
9:27-34, Mark 6:22-25) can be seen more clearly to have motivated
Christian ideals of charity and Church protection of the blind.

Nevertheless the 'idealization' (Monbeck op.cit:25) of the blind
which results in 'exaggerated pity or in a great show of admiration'
(Villey 1930:30) is said to come as much from a kind of 'sublimation'
(Chevigny & Braverman op.cit:148) or 'reaction formation' (ibid:148 &
Kirtley op.cit:30) against 'an original cruelty impulse' (Chevigny &
Braverman op.cit:148), activated by the 'deep insecurity within
ourselves', (Chevigny op.cit:188) when faced with disability and
impairment as it does from sheer pity. It is suggested that the
unimpaired individual identifies himself 'with the person undergoing
suffering' and that this 'gives rise to...feelings of fear and so of
cruelty'. Thus pity becomes a 'magical gesture to satisfy the conscience when confronted by objects arousing instinctual aggressive wishes, no doubt to banish the object from sight and destroy it' (Ludwig Jekels [1930: Vol 16] quoted by Chevigny & Braverman op.cit:148).

Pity, then, is 'born...of the need to master fear' (Chevigny & Braverman op.cit:149), the fear which in this context is said to come from a confusing and often unconscious mixture of dread of personal injury (e.g. castration) or contamination, abhorrence of what we do not understand (and dread to emulate) and both guilt and revulsion at the sight of 'what can happen to all of us' (Chevigny op.cit:88). It is a powerful mixture which tends to compound into aggressive tendencies toward those who seemingly inflict these conflicting emotions upon us.

Chevigny notes that though 'Aristotle had a great deal to say about the cleansing effect of pity on the man who feels it' (a cleansing which is in fact guiltful relief and 'secret satisfaction' [Chevigny & Braverman op.cit:149] that one has been spared the suffering) 'he has very little to say about its effects on the man who must endure a lifetime of it' (op.cit:136) particularly when this so often results in overprotection or unreal expectations and a 'general inability to treat blind people as normal' (Villey op.cit:378).

It appears, then, that it is this powerful fear of blindness, and all that the condition implies to both blind and sighted people, which is the motivating force behind the myths, fables and explanations which contribute to Schauer's themes. Sighted people continue to 'invest blindness' with their own feelings even though it is increasingly less true that they '"sell" their ideas to the blind individual whether he wants to acquire it or not' (Chevigny & Braverman op.cit:171). Negative
ideas about blindness, particularly those which relate to darkness and despair, seem to preponderate though it is noticeable that these are frequently accompanied by belief in the sop of recompense by way of 'special senses'.

5. Darkness and Light

1). Darkness

Although Kirtley notes that on a world-wide basis darkness has traditionally been linked with the Tiresian archetype and seen in fiction, mythology, legend and folklore 'to have power to evoke a sense of mystery or an awe of being' (op.cit:86) Fr.T.J. Carroll is only one of a number of authors who believe that the all too-common equation of blindness with both darkness (that 'symbol of the unconscious' [Monbeck op.cit:121]) and lack of light is to give it 'a symbolic meaning which it should not have' (Carroll 1961:32). He believes that attributions of values such as ignorance, despair, evil and sin are not only 'inaccurate' (ibid:28) and 'harmful' (ibid:32) but 'a serious barrier to both the understanding of blindness and the acceptance of blind persons in society' (ibid:32).

Despite the fact that, throughout this century, an increasing number of writers have attempted to explain the facts about blindness by challenging common myth and by identifying the potentialities of the majority of blind people, it appears to have been left to such recent writers as Dobree and Boulter to inject some clarity into a situation which continues to be delineated in emotive terms. Whilst it may be surmised that, until eye-sight testing became a more precise art, those regarded as blind were, in truth, entirely or almost entirely without
sight, Dobree and Boulter point out that the majority of those who are 'listed as blind' today are not inevitably shrouded in darkness but are, in fact, still able to 'perceive light and even large objects'. They confirm that even those who are deprived of sight are 'not necessarily without light' (Dobree & Boulter 1982:113).

However, old myth dies hard, particularly when utilised by two much quoted writers of the 1930s. Richard S. French, for instance, writes of 'the world of darkness' (op cit:16) in which the blind live, whilst Villey, a clearly capable blind professor of Literature, tells of the paralysing effects of darkness which 'nail to the spot' (op.cit:129). It can only be surmised that, aware of the strength of belief, they still felt it necessary to use arresting, even if negative images, in the desire to engage interest in, and awareness and sympathy for, the effects of blindness.

Cutforth, on the other hand, though writing around the same time, appears to have been something of a lone voice. In a work which bluntly tackles much of the then current belief he deplores the 'popular attitude which demands that the blind be filled with sadness and despair' and which, he says, has found 'dramatic expression in the artistic phrase "the world of darkness"'. He refutes as 'untrue psychologically as it is physically' the conviction that the blind person who does not perceive light lives in a 'world of complete darkness' which is 'filled with all the horrors of gloom, fear and loneliness and whatever else the timorous seeing experience in the dark' (op.cit:129).

The sheer persistence of the fear of the 'darkness concept' (Chevigny & Braverman op.cit:130) by the 'timorous seeing', and their
refusal to believe in the evidence of Cutsforth and the numerous other writers who follow him, is however made very clear in the exchange of letters between Bryan Magee and the blind philosopher, Martin Milligan, published as recently as 1995. Magee responds with some surprise and disbelief to Milligan's statement that 'the blind-from-birth do not inhabit a world of darkness at all' because 'the concept "darkness" has no experiential content for them, just as the concepts "light" and "sight" have no experiential content'. Milligan had pointed out that it is 'the sighted [who] think of them as living in permanent blackness and of this being a terrifying affliction' (Bryan Magee & Martin Milligan 1995:14).

The fact that such statements and explanations still need to be made is proof of the seemingly ineradicable fear of, and instilled belief in, 'permanent blackness', particularly when one notes that fifty years ago the newly blind Hector Chevigny himself had stated that 'no blind person "sees" darkness' because 'to live in a "black world" is a physiological impossibility' (Chevigny op.cit:147). He and his colleague, Sydell Braverman, were to note later that 'with the exception of Cutsforth' the psychologists had paid little attention to 'the notion that under blindness there is constant conscious awareness of absence of light and therefore an awareness of darkness'. They concluded at the time that 'literature is so deeply imbued with it that it is questionable if the concept can ever be eradicated' (Chevigny & Braverman op.cit:130).

In recounting his own introduction to the world of blindness Chevigny had remarked on 'the prevalent use of variation of the word darkness' in the literature of the blind themselves. He thought that the
use of titles such as *The Beacon*, *The Search Light*, *The Illuminator*, *The Light Bringer*, was indicative not only of blind people's view of themselves as 'objects of pity' (op. cit:147) but also evidence of the supposed relationship between darkness, blackness and tragedy—both of which he eschewed. He also comments (in his later study with Sydell Braverman) that the same sentimental and pity-evoking practice holds in both the naming of 'The Lighthouse', 'the nation's most famous agency' for the blind and in the dedication over the doorway of the New York Guild for the Jewish Blind which reads 'For all who in a world of untold beauty are consigned to darkness, here is sight' (Chevigny & Braverman op. cit:131).

In view of this long held assumption that darkness is 'the dwelling place of terror and uncertainty' (Chevigny op. cit:147) and that blackness and lack of light equate with ignorance, lack of understanding and evil, it is small wonder that the opposite concept of light is, as already seen in the examination of dictionary definitions, taken to be synonymous with knowledge, understanding and all that which promises a more fulfilling life.

ii). Light

Because I have already discussed many of the symbolic meanings accorded to light, the other element in 'the powerful primary pair of opposites' (Monteck op.cit:120) and the 'symbol of consciousness' in contrast to 'the darkness of the unconscious' (Monteck op.cit:121), I intend to examine only briefly here the genesis of some of those seemingly transcendental beliefs which, whilst linking light (and by implication sight) to ideas of creativity, hope, redemption and the divine, coincidentally consign darkness to sin, ignorance and damnation.
Because so many Western cultural attitudes have been influenced by Judeo-Christian teaching, I shall use quotations from both old and new Testaments, though acknowledging that 'basic symbols of light and darkness are present in the mythology of every culture past and present' (Monbeck op cit:122) and noting Monbeck's particular reference to 'the tensions between light and darkness portrayals in Teutonic mythology' (op.cit:123).

Light becomes a metaphor, throughout the Bible, for creation itself, for spirituality, truth, illumination or enlightenment, redemption, for God Himself. From the days of Creation when 'God saw the light, that it was good' and 'divided' it 'from the darkness' (Genesis 1:4) through to Christ's description of Himself as 'the light of the world' (John 9:5), its teacher and Saviour, light becomes equated with all the positive aspects of life-giving force and the opposite of that which reduces its quality and essence whilst darkness, as already indicated, is confirmed as the quintessence of sin and evil. This distinction between darkness and light is strengthened by such teachings as that of St.John who says that though 'light is come into the world...men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil' (John 3:19). St.John also emphasises the purity, perfection and redemptive aspects of God when he declares that 'God is light and in him is no darkness at all' (1 John 1:5) now that, after Christ's death and resurrection 'the darkness is past and the true light now shineth' (1 John 2:9).

Clearly the psalmist's conviction that 'the darkness and the light are both alike to thee' (Psalm 139:12) did little to influence either the Manichean-like polarisation of attitudes about dark and light or the analogies of darkness with ignorance and lack of reason and light with
the seeing eye, increased understanding and enlightenment. In 
Ecclesiastes (2:13-14) it is said that 'wisdom excelleth folly as far as 
light excelleth darkness because 'truly, light is sweet and a pleasant 
thing it is for the eye to behold the sun'. Similarly, Isaiah (29:18) 
promises that the faithful will be rewarded so that the 'eyes of the 
blind' see out of obscurity and out of darkness' whilst in the New 
Testament St. Paul undertakes to pray that the 'eyes' of the 
understanding of the Ephesians will be 'enlightened in the knowledge and 
faith of Christ' (Ephesians 1:15-18). St. Luke also uses the seeing eye 
as a metaphor for mental and spiritual life when he asserts that 'the 
light of the body is in the eye'. He warns 'when thine eye is evil, thy 
body also is full of darkness' and cautions 'take heed that the light 
which is in thee be not darkness' (Luke 11:35).

In view of this powerful reiteration of ideas about darkness and its 
importance to those who lack the vital sense of light-confirming sight 
it is understandable that they were assumed to contain a 'void' 
(Chevigny & Braverman op.cit:142), an emptiness implying a lack of 
ability which could not be supplemented, or compensated for, by the 
remaining senses. At the same time, paradoxically, where it was obvious 
that some blind people were, in fact, very able and not unduly 
impeded by their impairment, it was all too easy in the absence of 
other explanations to look to suggestions of special gifts, additional 
senses or even possession of supernatural or occult powers.

Extra Senses

Chevigny and Braverman are only two of a number of recent commentators 
who have challenged 'the fantasies which have arisen about the blind
[which] stem from the sighted person's inability to think of the blind in common sense terms' (op.cit:2). They note that 'no variety of human experience seems to be less accessible to ordinary understanding' than that of blindness particularly since 'the paradox of the position of the blind is that the more they do to behave in ways approximating to the usual, the more they seem to deepen the mystery surrounding their manner of acting, thinking and feeling' (op.cit:1).

It seems to have been inevitable that no matter how much the 'established blind' protest that they are 'but ordinary men with the ordinary proportion of personality patterns' and 'to whom blindness is just an inconvenient accident' (Trevor-Roper op.cit:151) their behaviour, no matter how individual in character, will attract yet another set of polarised views which identify them through 'either unrealistically favourable interpretation' as 'superhuman or at least extraordinary owing to psychical and physical compensation' (Kirtley op.cit:81), 'making heroes out of those who do ordinary things' (Carroll op.cit:247) or as 'subhuman, or at least inferior, either physically, spiritually, cognitively or ethically' (Kirtley op.cit:81).

Chevigny and Braverinan also suggest that whilst it has always been easy for the sighted to accept the many stereotypes which depict the blind, amongst other things as 'the idealized and abnormally good; the repugnant and abnormally bad; the extremely clever and the normal' (Langworthy op.cit:271), 'incapacitated' (Scott op.cit:16), 'helpless' 'unhappy and tragic', 'aloof and self-pitying', 'docile and tractable' (Konbeck op.cit:8,6,15,18), 'timid' (French op.cit:14), 'of limited understanding' (Chevigny & Braverman op.cit:174), 'frustrated, cursing their darkness', 'infused with spirituality' (Scott op.cit:4), or
'extremely courageous and brave' (Chevigny & Braverman op.cit:174) it has, nevertheless, been impossible to believe in 'the blind man's ability to function physically' (Chevigny & Braverman op.cit:174). These authors suggest that it is the disbelief and unease in the presence of the able blind which impels the sighted, in the absence of articulate and understandable explanation, to 'impute strange and extraordinary powers' to those blind who are not helpless but who 'demonstrate physical competence' (op.cit:174).

Thus, not only has the condition of blindness been suffused with 'moral meanings' but additionally attended, out of 'wonder and awe' (Chevigny & Braverman op.cit:1) by a number of fables which suggest such gifts as super-acuity of the senses of hearing and touch, an uncanny ability to both divine colours and orientate the self, a universal talent for music and belief in occult or supernatural powers. Yet, despite the conviction, held as late as 1930, by an American bishop that 'a special grace' is 'vouchsafed for the blind' (Chevigny & Braverman op.,cit:20) and Monbeck's assertion that 'beliefs about blindness and blind people have shown very little significant alteration over the last thousand years' (op.cit:23) recourse to magical explanation has, in fact, been slowly eroded over the last century by insights and explanations provided by medical, psychological and technical research and development which has led to a more realistic appraisal of the true abilities of blind people.

Monbeck (op.cit:59) and Kirtley (op.cit:83), for instance, trace belief in the 'mysteriousness' of the blind, with its intimations of second sight and prophetic gifts, to the legends of Tiresias and Oedipus whilst attributing suggestions of musical talents to the story of
Homer's Demodocus, who was said to have 'received the gift of song directly from the Muses' (Monbeck op.cit:46). French however, reviewing the history and the then current conditions of the blind in the earlier part of this century (op.cit:70), denies that musicality is an inevitable concomitant of blindness. He states simply that there is 'no sixth sense' (op.cit:11). He denies that the blind can distinguish colour and says that it is not true that 'loss of one sense renders another keener' (op.cit:10), an opinion shared forty years later by Trevor-Roper who states that any additional intensity is due solely to 'a concentration of attention and awareness' (op.cit:150).

In a similar challenge to old myth Chevigny and Bravernian go to some lengths to explain how theories of 'compensation' and a 'vicariate of the senses' (op.cit:133) evolved in the attempt to make explicable the achievement of seemingly phenomenal activity. They note that the 'compensation theory' (op.cit:126) of increased sensitivity was proved wrong by an understanding of the constant and increased attention paid by the blind to their environment, whilst the belief that a 'vicariate of the [remaining] senses' made up for the supposed 'empty compartment' in the brain was corrected by an appreciation of the operation of the 'interrelationship of the senses' or 'synaesthesia' (op.cit:133).

These writers also explain that so-called 'facial vision' is not the result, as Romain proposed in 1924, of the development of 'little eyes' (op.cit:128) in the skin of blind people which enabled them to see, but rather, as was made clear by research at Cornell University in 1944, 'a matter of experience and practice in the estimate of time in sound waves reflection' (op.cit:161).
Chevigny and Braverman conclude that this attribution of extraordinary ability (they include the belief that blind people can identify colour by touch) is in fact 'intellectual romance invented by man to explain what he could not otherwise understand' (op.cit:126). This seems singularly apt when one compares the sophistication of the explanation of 'facial vision' with the picture of sheer incompetence, helplessness and confusion in Peter Brueghel's painting 'Parable of the Blind.* This depicts a group of five blind men who stumble and fall as they attempt, by clinging to a pole, to find their way along. (There are also poignant anticipations here of the painting of a line of young men who, blinded by gas on the Western Front in World War 1, and hand on the shoulder of the next man, are led to the dressing station).* Interestingly enough, Trevor-Roper notes that I.M. Torrilhon describes Peter Brueghel the elder as having been 'the arch diagnostician of eye ailments' since 'the five beggars from his parable of the blind represent, from left to right, ocular pemphigus with secondary corneal opacities, photophobia from an acute kerato-uveitis, phthisis bulbi and corneal leucomata' (op.cit:103).

The fact that Chevigny and so many other writers throughout the past century have gone to such lengths in an attempt to dispel the 'intellectual romance' which 'was invented by man to explain what he could not otherwise understand' (Chevigny & Braverman op.cit:126) is evidence enough that 'old concepts are far from dead' (Trevor-Roper

*Parable at the Blind. Peter Brueghel 1568. Museo dei Capodimonte, Naples.
op.cit:150) and remain as 'part of the cultural heritage' (Monbeck op.cit:63) to inform the 'individual's mazeway' (Monbeck op.cit:69) of understanding.

Because, as has been shown, the utmost importance, both actual and symbolic, has always been accorded to blindness it is not surprising to find that Monbeck concludes that attitudes toward it 'lie in the very fabric of man's existence' (op.cit:149). Significantly, he also believes that 'as enduring symbols of perhaps the most vital aspect of human evolution and the human condition__consciousness__sight and blindness are infused into our literature and art'. He says 'they influence the conduct of our daily lives, as they have apparently done throughout man's past' to become 'an important part of the way we perceive ourselves and others'.

It is the nature and degree of this 'infusion' into literature which will be the focus of the following study, bearing in mind the bi-polarities, paradoxes and stereotypes which appear to have been for so long, and so universally, ascribed to the condition of blindness.
PART 11.

Depictions of Blindness in Literature 1600-1995.

Chapter 3.

Milton and the Miltonic Tradition of Blindness.

Although my intention in this thesis is to examine the extent to which symbolic beliefs about blindness are 'infused into our literature and art' and thus 'an important part of the way we perceive ourselves and others' (Monbeck op.cit:149) the focus in this chapter is a much narrower one since my concern here is with the greatest exemplar of the blind genius within English literature, the seventeenth century poet, John Milton.

However, before I come to this I need to recall that I have previously argued that many of the ambivalent attitudes which appear to be unassailably attached to the condition of blindness stem from the 'paradoxical bi-polarity of attitudes' (Kirtley op.cit:65) which identify lack of sight either as an outcome of sin or as a condition which bestows certain beneficent gifts. From this it might be assumed that there are as many accounts which depict the blind as prophets and seers as there are those which define them as evil and sinful.

Kirtley asserts however that this assumption is far from the truth. Basing much of his comment on the researches of Jacob Twersky (Blindness in Literature 1955) Kirtley states that, with the exception of Sophocles' Tiresias and Homer's Demodocus, attitudes toward the blind in Western literature, from ancient times to the eighteenth century, are
'predominantly negative' (op.cit:63). He singles out for particular comment the writings of John Milton which he says not only promote a negative view of blindness but show the poet accepting the defamatory stereotype levelled at him 'almost as fully as his political enemies who ridiculed him by means of it' (op.cit:62/63).

It should be noted however that Kirtley's comments about depictions of blindness comprise only a small part of a larger book which deals with many aspects of blindness, so that his brief comments, generalised as they are, give an extremely limited and misleading view of the works of Milton. Kirtley's comments pay scant justice to the effects of blindness on the poet himself and on his work, and ignore particularly the great influence Milton's view of himself as a prophet, poet and priest was to have on some of his contemporaries and on many poets who followed him. It was a view which was to place him as the 'great exemplar' (J.A. Wittreich 1975:99.) of the 'true line of vision' (as opposed to the 'line of wit' of Donne, Dryden and Pope) that 'encompasses, among others, Chaucer, Sidney and Spenser, the major Romantics, and many moderns' (ibid: preface xiv.). In this way, Milton came to be seen as the 'great prophet who stands between the ancient world' and 'at the centre of a poetic tradition that, extending from the Middle Ages into the modern world, also reaches beyond national boundaries to form cultural ones' (ibid:142).

To come to some understanding of how Milton came to 'arrogate to himself' (ibid:112) the role of prophet and priest, one in a line of blinded seers, compensated by God, or the gods, and regarded as the 'great prophet' in the 'line of vision', can only be achieved by an appreciation of his particular life, lived at a time of singular
political and religious upheaval, and of the impact of blindness upon it.

1. Education, Preparation and Blindness.

Milton held 'a high view of the poet's mission' (David Daiches 1963:7/8) from his earliest days. For him 'poet and prophet were combined in a very special way' (ibid:10). As he declared in Reason of Church Government (1641) he believed that poetic abilities though 'rarely bestowed' were 'the inspired gifts of God' and a power beside the office of a pulpit, to inbreed and cherish in a great people the seeds of vertu, and publick civility, to allay the perturbation of the mind, and set the affections in right turn' (quoted in Daiches op.cit:28). Since he 'eventually came to think of himself as a Spokesman, as a Chosen One, not by whom, but through whom, Truth was to be made known' (William R. Parker 1968:Preface vii) it was inevitable that, after the onset of blindness and the failure of all his political hopes, he should cast himself 'into the role of witnessing to providence, and arrogate to himself the power attributed to God's witnesses in Scripture' (Wittreich op.cit:112).

Milton was born in 1608 and prepared steadily from his early years to be a great English poet. Described by John Aubrey as a poet at 'ten years old' (Daiches op.cit:7), Milton says that his father 'destined me from a child to the pursuit of learning' (Defensio Secunda 8.11). Educated at St. Paul's School in London (noted for its Christian humanist curriculum) and at Cambridge University, he was awarded a B.A degree in 1629 and left Cambridge in 1632 with an M.A.

As a child Milton learned French, Italian and Hebrew. He claimed that from the age of twelve he pursued his literary studies voraciously,
hardly ever going to bed before midnight. This, he says, 'was the first thing which proved pernicious to my eyes, to the natural weakness of which were added frequent headaches'. It did not, however, abate his 'instinctive ardour for learning' (ibid 8.119).

On leaving Cambridge Milton returned to his father's house in Hammersmith but moved, 'in about 1635' (J.Hollander & P.Kermode 1973:707) to the family's estate at Horton determined to continue, 'at his own pace' (Daiches op.cit:56), with his programme of learning and self-preparation. Convinced that he was 'being led by God toward some significant destiny' (Daiches op.cit:55/56) he remained at Horton for nearly six years studying Greek and Latin classics. He added studies in 'history both ecclesiastical and political' in order to further his 'growing interest in civil and religious freedom' (Daiches op.cit:57).

Milton explains, in The Reason of Church Government, that he had originally been destined for the Church 'by the intention of my parents and friends'. He had however decided, in his 'maturity of yeers', not to submit to the 'tyranny which had invaded the Church' (Daiches op.cit:28) but to nurture instead that 'rarely bestowed' poetic ability, the 'inspired gift of God' (op.cit:58). He nevertheless retained the 'high Protestant idealism' (Daiches op.cit:28) which had been evident from his Cambridge days.

Though Milton returned from the completion of his studies in Italy with high ambitions to write a national epic and the desire to follow his chosen path as a poet, his plans were put aside due to his growing involvement with the religious and political controversies of the time.

Milton became both an outspoken and fervent supporter of church reform and religious freedom and a supporter of Oliver Cromwell and his
Commonwealth. He was appointed Latin Secretary to the Council of State in 1649 and was 'the official apologist of the regicides' who had been responsible for the execution of Charles I. He had 'postponed writing his greatest poetry until he was sure that his period of self-preparation was complete and now history had caught up with him and he had to postpone it further' (Daiches op.cit:124).

Although Milton had continued to write poetry in the period of his pamphleteering and throughout the Commonwealth ('mostly "occasional" poems about his own circumstances or some contemporary event or poems of compliment to friends or public figures [Daiches op.cit:130]) it was only after his abrupt return to private life, following the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, that he was able to resume his vocation as a poet and take upon himself the role of prophet and priest. By now completely blind, and disillusioned at the failure of the Commonwealth, all his political hopes destroyed, Milton gave his time to his long-planned epic on the Fall of Man, Paradise Lost. He found that blindness induced in him 'an unexampled intensity of thought and feeling' which he used 'as a spiritual discipline, rationalised it as evidence of divine favour, converted it into a weapon against enemies and made it the theme of immortal verse' (James H. Hanford 1944.32:23).

It is from some of the works of his mature age, both poetry and prose, that it is possible to assess and appreciate Milton's reactions and responses to his loss of sight, reactions which were to place him, as already said, in a line of visionaries and seers and which informed not only his own writings but those of many others who were to follow him.
Although Milton himself commented on the effects of childhood study on his eyes it is not surprising, in view of the insidious nature of the condition which was destroying his sight, that there appears to be some confusion over the dating of his blindness. Daiches (op.cit.129) and Hanford (1944:25) both state that Milton became totally blind in 1652, when he was forty-four years old. Parker however says 'Milton became blind, as he told Mylius, when he was forty-two years old' (op.cit 11:1043). The uncertainty is understandable if, as is supposed, Milton suffered from cataracts which would become progressively worse over time.

Hanford indicates that in Milton's own time 'the trouble was confidently diagnosed as amaurosis or "gutta serena", an affection of the optic nerve' and not to be confused with "gutta obscura" which was 'visible as a clouding of the eye' (1944:24), a cataract. Hanford says that Milton himself was well aware of the difference between the two conditions as he makes plain in Paradise Lost.

So thick a drop serene hath quenched their orbs,
Or dim suffusion veiled. (Book 111. 25-26.)

Milton's letter to Leonard Philaris, in 1654, is also indicative of the precision with which he noted his symptoms which were to be transmitted to a French physician in the hope of a cure.

Milton was widely read on the subject of eye disease and went to painful lengths to preserve his sight, though his nephew, Edward Phillips, noted after Milton's death that 'tampering with physic had done more harm than good' (Hanford 1944:29). Another biographer thought the attempt to preserve the sight of Milton's left eye by the use of 'setons' had, in reality, 'hastened the loss of the other' (ibid:29/30).
Parker also notes that Milton 'was subjected to the operation of setoning which was standard for chronic headaches and severe inflammation of the eyes' (op.cit:992). It was a treatment which must, as Hanford suggests, have had an indescribable effect on 'a temperamental person, overwhelmed with work and responsibility, and none too comfortable in his home' (1944:31). Hanford quotes Thevenin (Royal oculist at the court of Louis XIV of France) who describes setoning thus:

The patient is seated on a stool. He bends his head back a little so that the skin and fleshy panicle may be loosened. Then an assistant, taking the skin with both hands just below the hair, either vertically or horizontally, lifts and pulls it up, and the surgeon with the seton pincers, formed like a waffle iron, broad at the end and pierced, pinches the skin hard to deaden a little for the patient the burn of the burning, then passes through the holes in the pincers a hot cautery, having a diamond point; and when he draws out the cautery he passes with the needle through the same holes a four or five ply cotton thread dipped in white or egg and rose oil and puts a compress over it moistened with oxecrat and charged with the same remedy, continuing this till the suppuration is made and the inflammation past (1944:31).

Hanford concludes that 'the only refuge from this horror which Milton or anybody else found, before modern science....learned to mitigate it was stoical endurance and religious hope' (op.cit:33).

Endurance and hope were not to be enough to save Milton's sight. Yet despite his grief and despair at the advent of blindness Milton claims, in Sonnet XV11 (the more familiar title On His Blindness was given by Newton in 1752) to be ready to acquiesce with God's will as he returns once more to his 'vocation as a prophet' (Joan Webber in Wittreich op.cit:251).

The sonnet was composed in 1655, though Parker (op.cit:II.1041) suggests that this date is still uncertain. It was written at a time of difficult decisions for the poet, when he looking for assurances in his life. Now he had an abundance of leisure in which to reflect on his past.
life, his earlier goals and subsequent activities. Nevertheless, a too-
-easy reading by the ighted, misled by Newton's title and familiar
reference to 'spent light', 'dark world' and 'death', can result in
blindness to its true meaning.

When I consider how my light is spent
Ere half my days, in this world and wide,
And that one talent which I death to hide
Lodged with me useless, though my soul more bent
To ever e therewith my Maker, and present
My true account, let He returning chide,_
Doth God exact day-labour, light denied?
O fondly ask: But Patience, to prevent
That murmur, soon replies: God doth not need
Either man's work, or His own gifts; who best
Bear His mild yoke, they serve Him best. His state
I kingly; thousand at His bidding speed
And po to r land and ocean without rest:__
The alo o erve who only stand and wait.

Parker suggests that the poem is, in fact, more 'a dramatic rejection or
qualification of the parable on the talents' than a lament for lost
sight. He ay that Milton was complaining 'not of his blindness but of
his own misuse of time, of his failure to employ fully his God-given
powers as a poet' (op.cit:11:469).

Catherine Belsey points out, however, that Milton himself appears to
be 'blind' to God's intent and to His message. She notes that, even as
the 'doubting, distrustful speaker' of the poem fears for his loss, 'in
practice the one talent is being employed' as 'an affirmation of God's
unsearchable ways' (1988:16). Though Milton had allowed himself, out of
patriotism, to be diverted away from the writing of his epic poem, he is
in fact, with fortitude and patience, already serving God's purpose.

Parker says that the parable of the talents (Matthew XXV:14-30) held
particular significance for Milton and that it would have been given
added poignancy by the poet's awareness 'of the scriptural (and poetic)
meanings of the terms 'light' and 'dark' (op.cit:469). The 'outer darkness' (Hell) into which the 'unprofitable servant' was cast (and with whom Milton identified) must have posed a dire threat to a man who had hidden his talents for so long in the service of his country and who now, newly bereft of sight, feared that his poetic talents had left him. Thus, 'light' in the Sonnet is symbolic of more than sight since it signifies the creativity and inspiration which Milton fears that he has lost after so many years of study and valiant efforts to save his sight.

Though it might be thought that Milton is taking refuge in symbolic language rather than using the unambiguous term 'blind' it should be remembered that others of his circle and beyond would be well aware of the significance of his words and the circumstances which precipitated them. It should also be remembered that in Defensio Secunda, which had been published a year earlier in 1654, Milton defends himself and his lack of sight in straightforward terms which leave no room for misunderstanding or prevarication.

However, as Belsey points out, 'light' was not denied to Milton, and the 'day-labour' exacted produced the long-planned and long-delayed epic poem which brought together Milton's conviction that he was not only the direct recipient of God's message but a peer, with and alongside, the seers and prophets of ancient and biblical times. He likened himself to Moses but claimed particular affinity with those who had also been blind—Maenides (Homer), Thamyris, Phineus and Tiresias. Alistair Fowler notes that in
his Latin poem 'De Ideia Platonica', Milton refers to Tiresias as 'the Dircaean augur, whose very blindness gave him boundless light'

whilst in Defensor Secunda he refutes the suggestion that Phineus' loss of sight (presumably like his own) 'is to be considered as the punishment for any crime' (Fowler 1968:145).

The theme of obedience to God's will which had appeared in the Sonnet addressed to his friend Cyriack Skinner in 1655

...Yet I argue not
Against heaven's Hand, or will, nor bate a jot
Of heart or hope; but still bear up and steer
Right onward

is again an overriding one in Paradise Lost even though the poem ends with disobedience and a retreat from Eden. Both Daiches and Michael O'Connell suggest that this move to a life of human toil and achievement is symbolic of Milton's own turning away from a lost life of 'public virtue' to a life of 'private virtue' (Daiches op.cit:211), to a 'paradise within' (O'Connell 1990:186).

Now, with the aid of his 'Heavenly Muse' (Book 1.1:6) Milton takes upon himself the powerful role of justifying 'God to men' (1:26) in ways 'unattempted yet in prose or rhyme' (1:16). Though this sounds, to modern ears, like 'an arrogant presumption of knowing God's mind', Georgia Christopher points out that 'within the Puritan ethic' such a claim was seen as a 'witness of faith'. She says that 'Milton's confident tone signals his depth of conviction' (1989:203).

It is unclear whether the 'arrogant presumption' comes entirely from 'depth of conviction' or whether from an admixture of bravado, rationalisation and self-justification (in view of his own feelings

55
about lost time, and the villification of his enemies because of his blindness); whatever the cause, this kind of explanation adds weight to S.K. Heninger's belief (in Wittreich op.cit:87) that 'we must read Paradise Lost as a personal statement as well as a universal statement [since] the poem in its entirety is a comprehensive projection of the poet'. Similarly, Joan Webber (in Wittreich op.cit:232) says that 'Milton provides a remarkable precedent for the poet's power to accept the loss of all that sustained him, to create anew.' She, like Daiches, and O'Connell, suggests that 'he was increasingly, sharply dissatisfied with all political and religious models' after his careful preparation and twenty-year attempt to bring into being a different political state, now apparently come to nothing. She notes that in his poetry and prose 'there is a movement away from the older forms and beliefs, away from public assumptions, to an emphasis on the subjective struggle of the individual' so that 'the God without becomes the God within' (op.cit:236). Now, 'deprived of outward vision he is enabled to see more clearly in the world of the spirit' (Hanford op.cit:23) so that 'both in his poetry and prose Milton uses himself to support his own argument, binding together public and private, personal and universal' (Webber op.cit:236).

ii. Paradise Lost

The first edition of Paradise Lost was published in ten books in 1667, its publication delayed because of the Great Plague in 1665. Thought to have been planned before the Restoration as a dramatic tragedy (Daiches op.cit:114) it was completed as a Christian classical epic in 1665. It was based on the biblical story of the Fall of Man, written when Milton was completely blind, and dictated to a series of
amenuenses, chief among whom was Milton's nephew, Edward Phillips. The second edition, in twelve books, appeared in 1671.

Though Stephen Prickett states that Milton believed in the 'absolute literal truth of the story he was relating' there are, as already indicated, 'many levels of meaning encoded in his narrative' (1990:958) e.g. his blindness, his belief in his prophetic vision, 'his reverence for freedom' (J. Broadbent 1972:80), and his now lost belief that 'Heaven on Earth could be restored by a regenerate, fully reformed England' (Daiches op.cit:211).

It is, however, in Book 3 of Paradise Lost, (described by Fowler as 'the richest in theological, philosophical, and artistic implication, which [yet] keeps the autobiographical in proportion' [op.cit:141]) that Milton makes the most personal statement about his condition. Here, making the claims which so influenced his admirers and follower and so alienated his detractors, he identifies himself as a poet, priest and prophet and claims to be God's messenger. The Book begins with an invocation, a prayer for divine inspiration, which is directed to the 'Holy Light,' then as now a symbol, a metaphor for the Holy Spirit or God Himself, knowledge, understanding and insight. This is in contrast to the invocation to the 'Heavenly Muse' of Book 1 who is not, Helen Gardner suggests, a metaphor for the Holy Spirit, but rather 'inseparable from the poet...the poetic embodiment of Milton's belief in his vocation' (1968:19). In Book 3, however, 'the Muse who inspired Moses is implored to help the poet rise above his classical predecessors' since he wishes 'to go beyond the limits of human history and to participate, instead, in the divine view-point' (L.M. Johnson 1989:71). This is the
Muse of sacred song and of prophecy who inspired the poets and prophets of Israel, the Muse of divine inspiration who was before the world began' (ibid:17). She is also 'the source of all human knowledge of divine things and of human power to utter them' and, in invoking her aid, the poet is 'declaring the importance and the truth of his subject'. He is declaring that 'inspiration is a reality, not a subjective fancy' (ibid:19) and in so doing is deliberately and passionately countering the Hobbesian rejection (made in *Leviathan* [1651]) of 'any claim on the part of private individuals to be independent channels of divine revelations or of divinely inspired messages' (Coplestone 1964:44).

Hanford suggests that *Paradise Lost* was intended primarily as a reply to Hobbes whose views 'would have been anathema' to Milton. Thus, in setting out 'to justify the ways of God to man he 'consciously directed his inspired utterances against the great antagonist of the faith' (Hanford and Taffe 1970:198).

For Milton however, Book 111. contains more than a plea for inspiration, but becomes a 'movingly personal lament for sight lost' (K. Williams in Wittreich op.cit:48). As with many other people who have lost their sight in mid-life, in the midst of busy and successful careers, Milton's blindness involved other significant losses—loss of employment, influence and power—so that mourning for loss of sight would have been compounded by the loss of a series of other meaningful roles. He lost, above all, access to the written word though he was fortunate to have a number of amanuenses, which included his nephew, Edward Phillips and one of his daughters to whom he dictated the work he had memorised during the previous night.
It can however be surmised that he relied on a memory trained, at least to some extent, in the classical tradition. Though the art of memory had 'dwindled' during the Renaissance it was transformed, in the seventeenth century, to survive 'as a factor in the growth of the scientific method' (Frances Yates 1966:355). Milton's record of commitment to study shows that he would have had no need of the 'exhortation' of Ad Herennium's author to employ 'industry, toil and care' in order to develop a memory for words. (ibid:31).

In Book 111. of Paradise Lost Milton appears to be emerging from the depth of mourning and depression, 'from the Stygian pool'...that obscure sojourn...through utter and middle darkness' (potent symbols of depression) to 'reascend' to the life giving properties of his Muse's 'vital lamp' (13-22), that symbol of light and creativity. There is a sad and resigned realisation that sight is not to be restored

......but thou
Revisit'st not these eyes, that roll in vain
To find thy piercing ray and find no dawn;
So thick a drop serene hath quenched these orbs,
Or dim suffusion veiled.

and an elegaic reflection that he will no longer see the passage of the changing seasons, but instead, faces the prospect of being

.....from the cheerful ways of men
Cut off.......

There is an awesome finality and feeling of rejection, of being left in 'ever-during dark', (the heavy alliteration emphasising the burden of irrevocable sightlessness), 'quite shut out' from the works of nature and from the 'book of knowledge fair' which from childhood had meant so much to him. It is not surprising to find evidence here of the pervasive
ideas about the isolation and despair of blindness which could only have been accentuated in this case by Milton's separation from his books.

And yet, in his acquiescence to God's will and in his belief 'that grace will help loss if loss will surrender its undauntedness' (Broadbent op.cit:157) Milton found new hope and a new vocation believing that he was 'nightly' (Paradise Lost 111:32) inspired by the Holy Spirit. Importantly, Milton believed, as had Gloucester before him ('A man may see how the world goes with no eyes' [King Lear Act 14.6.165]), that external blindness brings an opportunity to gain inner illumination, insight and wisdom. He entreats the 'celestial Light [to] shine inward' so that his mind, his 'inner eye', now freed of 'all mist' (unlike his corporeal eye) will be 'irradiated' so that he

...may see and tell
Of things invisible to mortal sight. 54-55.

Book 111. continues on a rising note, evidence of Milton's increasing confidence in his long-held destiny of poet as priest, and his conviction that, now blind, he was like 'those old poets, ancientest and wisest whose calamity the gods are said to have recompensed with far more exciting gifts' (Defensio Secunda Vol VIII:63).

iii. Samson Agonistes

The theme of 'confident submission to whatever God had in store for him' (Daiches 1963:232) is repeated in Samson Agonistes, a work, like Paradise Lost, long planned and long delayed. It was published in 1671, presumably shortly after its completion though Parker argues for the earlier date of 1647, the year of Milton's 'greatest agon', as 'he reflected bitterly on the reception of his best ideas, as he struggled to recover from a broken marriage, as he contemplated his intellectual
unreadiness to write an epic, as he reluctantly abandoned his teaching career, as he faced the threat—by now terribly real—of approaching blindness' (op.cit 11:970).

It is tempting to see in the drama reflections of Milton's own life experience,—his blindness, the internal struggle to throw off despair, persecution by his enemies; and indeed, Daiches confidently states that 'Milton, of course, brought to his treatment of the theme his own interest in the temptations of the dedicated man and in the conflicting claims of public and private life' (op.cit:231/2). Parker however will accept no argument which challenges his theory, and criticises those who 'generally and uncritically assume that Milton's Samson was his last poem'. He does not believe that there are 'personal and political allusions to Post-Restoration events' in Samson Agonistes and believes that to insist on them is to 'seriously detract from the poem' (op.cit.11:904).

Milton's themes in the poem are in fact both personal and universal in the sense that they transcend Pre- or Post-Restoration arguments. The poem illustrates the poet's contempt for fair-weather friends, the clash of political loyalties and 'the pitiful and painful consequences of blindness' (op.cit.11:909). It is 'a bitter poem, [and] a dark poem' (op.cit:910) in its depiction of demeaning helplessness and dependency, mockery, rejection, and loss of status, all of which we can only think were lived experiences for Milton. Here the blind person is placed not in the esoteric world of Paradise Lost but in a world we can recognize, a world of family and friends, belief in values, and 'glimpses of our intersection with the divine' (Joan Bennet 1989:227). Samson Agonistes' life, like that of Milton after blindness, is also one of
'personal discovery,' of a search for meaning out of spiritual suffering and growth and 'of exhilaration in the achievement of goals against the odds' (ibid:227). Even the poststructuralist Belsey describes it as 'a story of human failure and renewal' (op.cit:16).

Samson's 'personal discovery' and search for meaning come through the blindness which he eventually accepts as a justified punishment for lust, sexual sin and hamartia: 'through mine own default/Whom have I to complain of but myself' (11.45/46). Samson's father, Manoa, unrealistically hopes that, with repentance, physical sight will be restored. Samson, however, makes no attempt to evade punishment, and although there is an initial questioning of God's ways there is eventual resignation and reliance on His just will and his 'final pardon' (1.1171). 'His faith has become blind' (Bennett op.cit:229) and unquestioning:

...I must not quarrel with the will
Of highest dispensation, which herein
Haply had ends above my reach to know. (ll. 60-62.)

The helplessness of blindness and the mockery which it attracts are underlined in the first two lines of the poem in the unknowing-ness and disorientation of these 'dark steps', whilst the comparison between sight and the powerlessness and vulnerability of its lack are highlighted in

...I dark in light exposed
To daily fraud, contempt, abuse, and wrong,
Within doors, or without, still as a fool,
In power of others, never in my own. (Lines 75-78).

The reader is left in no doubt, with the 'great lyric cry' (Daiches op.cit:234) which follows, of the power of the actual and symbolic meanings which attach to 'darkness'. Darkness and light, life and death
are here vividly opposed. The impact of the heavy alliteration of 'dark, dark, dark' leaves no question about the hard reality of the effects of unremitting blindness; and the despairing hopelessness of 'Irrecoverably dark...without all hope of day' (1.81-82) contrasts with the brilliance and illumination of the 'blaze of noon'. 'Light' here becomes a metaphor, not only for factual day, but for life itself, physical and spiritual, -'that light is in the soul' (1.92); to be 'exil'd' with the moribund spirit and mind is

To live a life half dead, a living death,
And buried: but 0 yet more miserable!
Myself my Sepulchre, a moving grave,
Buried, yet not exempt
By priviledge of death and burial
From worst of other evils, pains and wrongs:
But made hereby obnoxious more
To all the miseries of life,
Life in captivity
Among inhuman foes. (ll.100-110).

Belsey describes Samson Agonistes as 'a drama of interiority' (op.cit:93). Like Milton, Samson is also 'deprived of outward vision (and thus) enabled to see more clearly in the world of the spirit' (Hanford 1944:23). Similarly forced inward into a 'kingdom of the mind', (Belsey op.cit:85) Samson experiences the 'inward intervention of divine grace' (op.cit:93) which is to lead him from 'spiritual death' to 'brief but brilliant life' (James Freeman 1989:64). Blindness, for Milton, causes a movement inward, a discovery of 'the God within'; in this sense Milton's blindness is not just insight but foresight since it causes him to anticipate twentieth-century theology.

At the beginning of the play Samson is isolated by blindness from the external world. 'The outward object of his gaze annulled' (1.27), he retreats into his own subjectivity' finding 'nothing but restless
thoughts' (Belsey op.cit:93) that rush upon him 'like a deadly swarm/Of hornets around' (1.19-20) In despair, because he has failed to fulfil the promise of 'a special destiny' (op.cit:93) of a life 'separate to God' (1.31) Samson describes himself as 'worse than dead' (Belsey op.cit:93). Now, however, able to face his 'tremendous sense of guilt,' Samson also 'proves capable' of 'a relentless belief in the existence of that justice which includes within itself the mercy of a chastising Father' (Bennett op.cit:231). This belief, though hard won, is to result in 'some rousing motions' (1.1382) and the 'divine imperative' (Belsey op.cit:93) which drives him to destroy the Philistines, their temple, and himself.

J.H. Hanford also believes that Samson Agonistes is 'a work of art and not a disguised biography (in Crump [ed]. 1968:22), since the 'passionate precision with which Samson's blind state is described' (Daiches 1968:247) suggests real and bitter experience which goes beyond just that of blindness and the apparent failure of a cause. The phrase 'For inward light alas Puts forth no visual beam (1.162/3) implies both a challenged faith and, importantly here, a diminished poetic ability. Parker also suggests that Milton's poem has meaning beyond that implied by Samson's lack of sight. He believes that 'blindness is the pervasive metaphor of Samson Agonistes since every character, including the Chorus is blind' until visited by God-given insights (op.cit:11.909).

Thus, through faith and true humility, the God without again becomes the God within. Both Samson and Milton were to find some recompense for their blindness in inward illumination even though Samson's insight was to result in death. Milton, however, was to become the emissary of God's
will, since 'Light, the prime work of God' was, for him, no longer 'extinct' (1:70). Unlike Samson, however, Milton did not ascribe his blindness to punishment for wrong-doing or for his religious views; he was, though, aware of Salmassius' assertion (which was shared by other adversaries) that his affliction had come about as a result of crime (Defensio Secunda: 21).

Milton rebuts all ideas of punishment: 'I remained fixed, immovable in my opinion: that I neither believe, nor have found that God is angry' (ibid: 21); he also makes a spirited defence of his earlier writings which, he insists, are still 'right and pleasing to God', written not
from ambition or the wish for money or glory, but 'solely by a sense of
duty, of grace, and of devotion to my country' (ibid:67). Importantly,
Milton says that he knowingly risked the loss of his sight. In choosing
'a sovereign duty which would necessarily incur the loss of my eyes'
(ibid:69) he exemplified the precept that through sacrifice, (like
Samson), something new and great can emerge and proved to his own
satisfaction at least, that loss of sight need not equate with loss of
ability or control. He tells his 'slanderers' (ibid:71) and the
'revilers of my blindness' (ibid:77) that 'as the use of light would be
allowed me for so short a time it ought to be enjoyed with the greatest
utility to the public'. Milton derived consolation from the fact that he
had lost his eyes 'in an honourable cause' (ibid:77), (this is also
evident in the sonnet to Cyriack Skinner) and remained 'fixed,
immovable' in his opinion that his blindness was not a sign of God's
anger towards him. He felt, indeed, that he preferred his own physical
blindness which 'takes not from the mind's contemplation' (ibid:71) to
the metaphorical blindness which so blinkered his opponent's views.

Milton did not, in fact, behave either in conformity with those
stereotyped ideas about blindness which imply, as already indicated,
that sightless people are amongst other things, miserable, dependent,
stupid and gullible. On the contrary, in Defensio Secunda (11:73), he
states that he is not concerned at being classed 'with the blind, with
the afflicted, with the sorrowful, with the weak', insisting that
'through this infirmity should I be consumated, perfected' and,
moreover, that 'through this darkness (he) should be enrobed in light'
since' God beholds us '(i.e. the afflicted) 'with greater clemency and
benignity'. He goes on to assert that 'We who are blind are not the
least regarded of the providence of God' and warns 'Woe be to him who makes a mock of us; woe be to him who injures us; he deserves to be devoted to the public curse' (ibid II:73.)

Moreover, Milton further insists (ibid II:75) that he is not 'by this misfortune...rendered altogether a nullity' since 'all which belongs to man of sense and integrity is (not) situated in his eyes'. He asserts that 'To be blind is not miserable, not to be able to bear blindness, that is miserable' (ibid:63). He insists that he is still active, 'not grown torpid by indolence since my eyes have deserted me' (ibid:75) and points out that he had, like most other sighted people grown blind, continued with as nearly a normal life as possible in accordance with past patterns. Milton states that not only is he 'still active' but makes it plain that he is 'still ready to advance among the foremost to the most arduous struggle for liberty. I am not therefore deserted even by men of the first rank in the state. On the contrary, such men, considering the condition of humanity, show me favour and indulgence, as to one who had completed his service and readily grant me exemption and retirement. They despoil me of no dignity, they deprive me not of any public office I before held...'(ibid:75). It should be noted that these words were published in 1654, in the early days of Milton's blindness and well before the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660. It was never likely however that Milton's blindness would result in beggary or deprivation as it did for so many others since apart from his one-time influential position within the State, he had come from a comfortable background (his father was a Scrivener [Parker op,cit:685]) and money had bought a good education (aided by assiduous study), foreign travel,
and what medical aid was available at the time, even though this was to prove unavailing.

Milton also makes it clear that, apart from his lack of sight, he is like all other men. He says 'at this day, I have the same spirit, the same strength; my eyes only are not the same; yet to external appearance they are as completely without injury, as clear and bright without the semblance of a cloud, as the eyes of those whose sight is the most perfect. In this respect only am I a dissembler, and here it is against my will' (Defensio Secunda 11:61). It was apparently difficult to detect Milton's lack of sight. Thomas Newton confirms that 'at a distance it was not easy to know that he was blind' since his eyes 'appeared without spot or blemish' (1749:X11). It is also difficult to discern blindness in the portraits which appear in the Life Records of John Milton which depict the poet at different life stages. They appear to show a move from a youthful direct, serious, if wary gaze, to a more indirect, suspicious and somewhat downcast look. These apparent changes may, of course, be nothing more than an artist's interpretation portrayed in a bust, fashioned in classical style, of an ageing Milton.

This is not to suggest, however, that Milton was unaware of other and darker views about blindness as is evident in the lament in Book III of Paradise Lost, the very direct comments expressed in Defensio Secunda and in the description of Samson as helpless and despairing. It is clear, too, from Samson's comparison of himself as a 'tame wether' i.e. a castrated ram, that Milton was also familiar with the identification of visual loss with emasculation.

Milton, then, a poet who both experienced and wrote about blindness, appears not only to have been subjected to existing stereotyped views
and beliefs about blindness but to have accepted, and indeed promoted, other equally stereotyped views which were, and have continued to be, influential in determining attitudes towards sightlessness and the sightless. His poetry and prose are both suffused with persisting symbols and metaphors which equate blindness with darkness and death, whilst sight is seen as synonymous with light, life and hope. At the same time it is hardly surprising, given his education and wide knowledge of biblical literature, and his long sustained view of himself as a poet/priest, with a pastoral and educative mission, that Milton should identify and proclaim himself as one with the seers of old. In claiming the role of compensated prophet, he inevitably dismisses any idea or divine retribution and his comments, particularly in Defensio Secunda, indicate a healthy refusal to accept stereotypes which would place him, unthinkingly, as a member of a demeaned, possible guilty, homogeneous group simply because of sightlessness. Indeed, his down-to-earth comments and direct and articulate attacks on his detractors suggest a realistic (if understandably defensive) adjustment to, and accommodation with, the actuality of blindness which provides something of a contrast with the rather exalted views expressed in Paradise Lost. The views which persist in literature however are those which confirm and stress the Tiresian archetype rather than those which illustrate the prosaic actuality which Milton appears to confirm in his everyday life and which appear so infrequently in depictions of blind people and their sightlessness.

Paradoxically however, it is the view, promoted by Milton himself, of a poet/priest, divinely inspired and compensated for blindness ('at once blind and of the most piercing sight', 'illumined by an inward and far
surpassing light' ([Defensio Secunda 11:73]) which has lived on to place
the poet, as already indicated, at the centre of a tradition of English
poetry 'which is more exactly the tradition of prophecy' and is 'a way
of seeing, and a way of writing...a way of relating (Wittreich
op.cit:Preface.XV.)

Milton's Influence

The accentuation of the idea of a positive outcome of creativity and
direct inspiration arising from the patient acceptance of disability, a
theme which Milton stresses particularly in Paradise Lost, 'Sonnet
XVIII' and Defensio Secunda, (I acquiesce in His divine will, for it is
himself who comforts and upholds my Spirit'[11:71]), was accepted by
many writers and critics who followed Milton, not least among whom were
Blake and Wordsworth. At the same time the theme constituted a source of
dissension and contention for others who attacked and censured the poet
for it.

Significantly, it is Paradise Lost, 'by far the mightiest element of
Miltonic influence' (John Good quoted by Wittreich 1975:Xlll), the work
in, and for which Milton claimed God's guidance, which appears to
attract either great praise or opprobrium and it is in these divergent
views that we see reflected the common inability to accept a blind
person as 'normal'. As I have already argued, assumptions and beliefs
about the causation and consequences of blindness appear to provide
barriers to impartial assessment and analysis and these in turn result
in over-evaluation of achievement or condemnation because of prejudice
or unreal expectations. Blindness itself becomes the ever-present, over-
riding factor which cannot apparently be disregarded, though here it
must be acknowledged that it is Milton himself who pushes it to the
forefront of attention since he claimed God-given compensation for
blindness and made himself vulnerable to comment. Parker comments that
Milton 'has paid dearly for asking us to recognize the artist along with
his art' but suggests that as 'the didactisim of the major poems became
increasingly unpalatable, and the theology of the epic unacceptable, the
supposed autobiographical elements received even greater stress, making
it possible to continue admiring the poem as the achievement of a
courageous blind man, or a great patriot, or a staunch advocate of
religious and political freedom'. He concludes 'The paradox has proved
timeless; noisy partisanship is still awed by Paradise Lost' (op. cit:646).

However, although Hanford and Taafe (op.cit:273) suggests that,'the
taste and temper of the Restoration were all against a proper
understanding' of Milton's work, they nevertheless note that Paradise
Lost was both read and admired from the first 'and not alone by the few
men of Milton's own circle who, like Andrew Marvell, shared his moral
and political views'. Marvell had been one of the first admirers to
endorse the poet's claim that 'Heaven had rewarded, with prophecy, the
sacrifice of his eyes in the service of God'. His 'dignified defence',
born of a 'deference for Milton which was almost servile' and 'the
culmination of over twenty years of discipleship and friendship'
(Christopher Hill 1978:17), appeared in 'The Rehearsal Transposed' and
in the 'commendatory poem', 'On Mr. Milton's Paradise Lost', which was
affixed to the second edition of the poem 1674. Nevertheless, Masson
says that Marvell 'trembled for his [Milton's] failure, great as he knew
his powers to be' since he did not believe that 'the blind man [could]
compass such a union of grandeurs' (1880.VI:713). It is however clear, that though Marvell initially feared that Milton, out of revenge for his blindness, 'would ruin (for I saw him strong) / The sacred truths to fable and old song' (ll.7&8), he did indeed confirm the poet's own view that

> Just Heaven thee, like Tiresias to requite
> Rewards with prophecy thy loss of sight. (lines 43-44.)

A number of modern critics however seem anxious to suggest that Marvell's acknowledged awe at Milton's achievement was not as whole-hearted and unquestioning as it might appear and that his initial hesitation indicates misgivings about Milton's intent. They suggest that the 'delicate ambiguities' which 'mark the poem on Milton' (Wittreich op.cit:282) stem from ambivalences in Marvell himself who, though loyal to Milton (and attacked for it) nevertheless had reservations about Milton's religious orthodoxy, his claim to be a second Moses and his belief in his prophetic powers. Marjorie Nicholson suggests that in this influential area of their lives the two poets 'stood at opposite poles in theological interpretation' (quoted in Wittreich op.cit:286).

Unlike Milton and other Cambridge Platonists, Marvell made nothing of the doctrine of the 'inner light' (Harold Tolver 1965:17) and for him the 'transforming power of art' was 'considerably scaled down from traditional Platonic practice' (ibid:32). He was also uneasy at suggestions of 'analogies between contempory history and cosmic order' (ibid:33).

Thus, it is suggested, his 'guarded posture' (Louis Marz 1978:210) and his 'cautious distrust' (Lawrence Hyman 1978:286) of the claims in *Paradise Lost* are symptomatic of his reluctance to abandon traditional
beliefs in world order, whereas Milton, 'more Protestant than Platonist' (Tolver op.cit:10), though having 'no desire to break the bounds which they had built for their own restraint' (Nicholson 1960:174) 'stood on middle ground between the poets who preached content and the "soaring souls that sailed among the spheres" to whom the new universe [of Copernicus and Newton] taught a lesson of never ceasing aspiration' (ibid:173). Though Milton 'denied the idea of infinity', as an artist he 'felt aesthetic gratification in the new vastness which as a metaphysician he did not accept...His universe in Paradise Lost is not infinite, yet it is indefinite, immense and majestic' (ibid:188).

It is then not surprising that Stein should see Marvell's poem as 'simply anxious ...and uneasy' and observing 'a careful distance which seems to be more than a ceremony of good manners' and which 'in its cautious distrust...contrasts with the visionary grandeur of Milton's poem' (quoted by Wittreich in Patrides 1978:286). Yet, though Masson also senses the same ambivalences and reluctance to criticise, he acknowledges Marvell's final acceptance of Milton's work since he says 'the poems must have been written expressly for the second edition for their very peculiarity consists in their being a studied combination of eulogy on Milton for his Paradise Lost with a rebuke to Dryden for his impudence in attempting a dramatic and rhymed transversion of such an epic' (1880.V:715). Marvell had taken the opportunity, whilst defending Milton's use of blank verse, (incidentally not in blank verse but in 'trim couplets' [Marz op.cit:210]), to attack Dryden who had, with 'astounding temerity' (Wykes 1977:33), obtained permission from Milton himself, in 1673, to 'tag' (i.e.render into heroic couplets) such parts of Paradise Lost as could be turned into an opera. This opera, 'The State of
Innocence and Fall of Man', was written in 1674 but not published until 1677.

This 'sniping' (Parker op.cit:637) from one of Milton's devoted friends did not however deter Dryden from his continued and growing admiration for the creator of Paradise Lost, an admiration all the more remarkable for the dissimilarity of their beliefs. Dryden is said to have been 'the leader in critical admiration and the true founder of Milton's literary reputation' (Hanford & Taafe op.cit:274), a reputation that was to be confirmed and enhanced by Joseph Addison in the early years of the next century. Dryden described Paradise Lost as 'one of the greatest, most noble and most sublime poems which either the age or nation has produced' (quoted in Hunter 1980:202.) and indeed went further when, as the then Poet Laureate, he nominated Milton, 'in a conventially extravagant epigram' (Parker op.cit:662) for the folio edition of Paradise Lost, as a 'great national poet' thus fulfilling, Parker suggests, an 'instinctive need' created by the coming of age of English literary criticism in the decades following the Restoration.

'Blind Milton with his sublime themes, his uncommon but intelligible English, and his explicit claim to divine inspiration' (Parker op.cit:662) became the 'obvious candidate' for the 'empty pedestal which patriotic critics carried in their hearts'.

However, Parker suggests that when Dryden wrote the epigram

Three poets, in three distant ages born,
Greece, Italy and England did adorn.
The first in loftiness of thought surpassed,
The next in majesty; in both the last.
The force of nature could no further go,
To make a third, she joined the former two.
'a generous instinct perhaps caused him to go beyond his own sober judgment and the judgment of his contemporaries' (op.cit:662). Dryden, like many others, had contended that the subject of *Paradise Lost* was 'not that of an heroic poem, properly so called...his event is not prosperous like that of all other epic works' (Hanford & Taaffe op.cit:276). It was understandable that Dryden, educated like Milton as an humanist, and himself the 'interpretive' (Wykes 1977:116) translator of Virgil's *Aenid* in 1697, would link the writer of *Paradise Lost* with Homer and Virgil, those representatives of Periclean Athens and Augustan Rome, so revered by the Augustans.

As already suggested, *Paradise Lost* was not unappreciated, as is so commonly supposed, until 'Lord Somers or Joseph Addison caused a laggard public to notice it' (Parker op.cit:662). The 1688 edition of the poem was an event of both 'social and patriotic significance'. Milton's poetry and some of his 'unpoetical causes [were] at last on the verge of triumph' (Parker op.cit:662) due to the political, religious and literary changes brought about by the Glorious Revolution of 1688. The 'maligned Augustans' were to give Milton 'his due', 'classing him with the great poets of antiquity' (R.D.Havens 1922:20). *Paradise Lost* was accorded the unique 'honour' (ibid:5) of printing in the format usually reserved for the classics and was printed in folio, in 1688, with engravings and an impressive list of subscribers. A 'monumental tribute' by Patrick Hume followed in 1695 in the form of ' 321 closely printed folio pages of annotation', a 'desirable supplement to a sumptuous first edition' which 'made Dryden's likening of Milton to Homer and Virgil seem almost unrhetorical. England now had her national poet, her classic...' (Parker op.cit:663).
The attribution of classic status to Milton's epic was finally and influentially sealed by Joseph Addison in what G.K. Hunter describes as 'probably the greatest critical exercise on any English poem' (1980:202). Here Addison concluded that 'it is a work which does an honour to the English nation'. It was, he said 'the noblest work of genius in our language and therefore deserves to be set before an English reader in its full beauty' (Addison 8.3.1712). Samuel Johnson however, denying Milton the honour, awarded the accolade, in his *Lives of the Poets*, to Dryden for his translation of Virgil. His words imitate those of Addison as he maintains 'the nation considered its honour as interested in the event' of the publication of Dryden's poem (quoted in John Lucas 1990:15).

Joseph Addison 'as the leading neo-classical critic of the times' (Havens op.cit:14.) was to 'rescue' (Hunter op.cit:203) *Paradise Lost* from the Augustan charge of 'irregularity', but his comments, contained in the series of essays published in 'The Spectator' during the Spring of 1712, do not entirely accord with Haven's statement that he (Addison) proved to his contemporaries that the poem 'conformed to the laws laid down for the epic and lost nothing in comparison with Homer and Virgil' (Havens op.cit:14). In fact, although Addison repeatedly describes *Paradise Lost* as a 'divine poem' and says that 'Milton's chief talent, and indeed his distinguishing excellence lies in the sublimity of his thoughts', he concluded that these 'excel all the poets ancient and modern, Homer only excepted' (19.1.1712) who it will be remembered was also blind.

Importantly, Addison's critique of *Paradise Lost* is addressed to the content and style of the poem and to the 'several defects' which he says
appear in the table— the character, the sentiments, the language, and
the 'unsuccessful hero'— rather than to the supposed influence of
Milton's blindness, the only acknowledgement of which is contained in
the oblique reference to 'that celebrated complaint' with which Part III
opens and which Addison describes as an 'excrescence' (1.3.1712) rather
than an essential part of the poem.

Bishop Newton, however, was to be less critical than Addison of the
'excrescence'. Still regarded as 'one of the most acute and dependable
commentators on Paradise Lost' (Hunter op.cit:203), Newton agrees (in
his notes to the seventh edition of the poem which was published in
1749) that it may not be 'agreeable to the rules of epic poetry', but
concedes, nevertheless, that 'one is pleased with a fault, if it be a
fault, that is the occasion of so many beauties and acquaints one so
much with the circumstances and character of the author'.

At the same time, Newton treats with some reservations Milton's claim
of divine inspiration, though taking care not to deny it entirely. He
says that 'Invoking the Muse is commonly a matter of form...But the
Holy Spirit here evoked is too solemn a name to be used insignificantly'
(1747:11). Conscious that Milton did 'really look upon himself as
inspired' Newton, with some disfavour, concludes 'I think his words are
not without a spirit of enthusiasm',* that trait which together with
'fanaticism' was 'the bugbear of public and scholarly restoration
society' (Hill op.cit:355). The imputation of 'enthusiasm' by Newton, a
Bishop of the post-1688 established Church, indicates the prevalence of
unease at suggestions of private revelation and not least when these
*enthusiasm: extravagant religious fervour (Collins Concise Dictionary
1990).
were made by a radical, anti-Royalist member of a discredited regime. Newton would doubtless have agreed with Shaftesbury that 'Inspiration is a real Feeling of the Divine Presence, and Enthusiasm a fake one' (Fairchild 1939:569) — a fine line indeed.

It is clear, then, that though both Addison and Newton were aware of the fact of Milton's blindness, one seeing it as an 'excrescence' in *Paradise Lost*, the other questioning Milton's claim to divine inspiration, both were able to give due deference to the value of the work without reference to either blame or praise for the onset of disability.

The fact of Milton's blindness and his subsequent claims of supernatural intervention in his poetic creativity loomed large however in the judgments of Richard Bentley, 'probably the greatest classical scholar England has produced' (Hunter op.cit:203.) and Thomas Gray, the poet whose own verse was 'often a remarkable tissue of the phrases of other poets' (Lonsdale 1969:XV), a fact which is clearly evident in the composition of 'Progress of Poesy' which was 'written by fits and starts at very distant intervals' (ibid:156) between 1751 and 1754. Whether this kind of 'literary kleptomania' (ibid:XVII) was plagiarism, lack of originality, poor memory (as Gray himself claimed [ibid:XVII]), or a subtle kind of compliment is difficult to ascertain, but it appears to be used here in some mockery of Milton's style, before the stark condemnation of an importunate claim.

Although John Broadbent (1972:60), apparently dismissively, states that Gray has 'none of Marvell's hesitations about *Paradise Lost*, Gray himself, whilst ostensibly acknowledging Milton's status in literary history and his inspirational power
'Nor second he, that rode sublime
Upon the seraph wings of Ecstasy,
The secrets of the abyss to spy.

suggests that Milton's intrusive incursion into Heaven to

The living throne, the sapphire blaze,
Where angels tremble while they gaze

was to result in his blinding since

He saw; but blasted with excess of light,
Closed his eyes in endless night.

The explosive strength of 'blasted' suggests a violent punishment for

Milton 'who has dared too much' (John Lucas 1990:46). Lucas suggests

that though Gray had indicated, in 'The Bard', that he wanted to 'uphold
the poet's right to voice unfettered truths', he nevertheless found it
difficult 'to sanction the truths' (ibid:45) which the radical Milton
uttered which were out of keeping with the times. By comparison, in the
next line of the poem, Gray draws attention to 'Dryden's less
presumptuous car', the royalist, conservative Dryden clearly being a
more acceptable model for poets than the poet who had supported the
regicides.

Richard Bentley's attempt to impose his own reading on Paradise Lost
was a singular failure. He applied the same critical judgement to the
poem which he, as a classical scholar, had been accustomed to apply to
ancient authors. Convinced that the 'lapses in taste' (Hunter
op.cit:203), which in his opinion blemished the poem, were due either to
Milton's blindness or to the carelessness of an editor at the time of
printing, he effectively rewrote the poem, in his annotated edition of
1732, 'making it "correct" by eighteenth century (or his own) standard
of taste' (Parker op.cit:283). This display of 'extraordinary bad taste
and judgement' (Hanford & Taafe op.cit:283.) and 'pedantic folly
...embalmed as such in the Dunciad' (Havens op.cit:30) however did more harm to Bentley's reputation than it did to that of Milton. His 'classic example of misapplied scholarship' (Parker op.cit:665) became the subject of ridicule, both then and later whilst the poet's reputation was enhanced rather than harmed by Bentley's intervention. Milton's own words received closer attention than ever before as he became 'a force to be reckoned with' (Hanford & Taaffe op.cit:275.)

The 'force' of Milton's reputation and legacy as a poet/prophet, a poet of the imagination, of radical and anti-authority inclination, was to be embraced and enhanced by the Romantic poets, but not before his work and reputation were again attacked (indeed perhaps savaged is not too strong a word) by Samuel Johnson 'the most famous author and conversationalist of his time' (Montagne 1965: Intro.) in his 'Essay on Milton' in Lives of the Poets (written between 1779-1781)

Despite the continued and growing acclaim for Milton's work, Samuel Johnson, Anglican and arch-Tory, whose 'cultivation of the truth was very much part of his general adherence to rationality' (John Wain 1988:16), not only attacks Milton's character, his politics, his support for the regicides, his ingratitude at being spared at the Restoration, his integrity even, but importantly in this context, Milton's arrogant claims, 'his high opinion of his own powers' (ibid:25) which showed 'great promise and small performance' (ibid:23). Johnson implies that blindness is a punishment for Milton's political activities and derides the poet's claims of divine compensation. Belittlingly, he says 'Invention is almost the only literary labour which blindness cannot obstruct'. He believes it to be a solace in which 'Milton indulged his fancy and the melody of his numbers' (ibid:40). Milton's complaint that
he is 'fallen on evil days and evil tongues and with darkness and with danger compass'd round' also elicits scant sympathy from the 'bigoted Tory' (Havens op.cit:31). Johnson clearly felt that Milton was fortunate to be allowed to continue 'his studies, or his amusements, without persecution, molestation or insult' (ibid:49). He concludes 'Such is the reverence paid to great abilities however misused: they who contemplated in Milton the scholar and the wit, were contented to forget the reviler of his King' (ibid:49).

Johnson's work may have been 'marred by gratuitous sneers, misrepresentation of motives and a willingness to believe the worst things that have been said of its subject' (Havens op.cit:31) but he was able to commend *Paradise Lost* as 'a poem which considered with respect to design may claim the first place, and with respect to performance the second, among the productions of the human mind' (ibid:66). It was a poem 'the characteristic quality' of which is 'sublimity' (op.cit:71). This was not to say that it was lit by divine inspiration since 'these bursts of light and involutions of darkness; these transient and involuntary excursions and retrocessions of invention' are commonplace 'to every man in every mode of exertion, manual or mental'. There was no doubt that for Johnson, claims of divine inspiration were inflated and 'eagerly caught by the lovers of a wonder' (ibid:48).

Despite his disparagement of the poet and his poetry Johnson concludes his essay on Milton with an acknowledgement of the poet's independence of mind and character, and not least, with a recognition of the physical difficulties under which he had laboured. He concedes that 'His works were performed under discountenance, and in blindness, but difficulties vanished at his touch; he was born for whatever is arduous,
and his work is not the greatest of heroic poems, only because it is not the first' (ibid:82). Although Johnson found it difficult, as did other critics in the eighteenth century, to separate the man from his intellect and his art, he discovered that he was unable to ignore the acclamation and increasing status accorded to the poet whose work continued to do 'honour to the English nation'. He acknowledges that if Paradise Regained 'had. been written not by Milton, but by some imitator, it would have claimed and received universal praise'. He is also aware of the peril that lies in wait for any critic who, in 'transcribing passages' might 'lessen the reputation of Milton' and thereby 'diminish in some degree the honour of our country' (ibid:79).

Parker's comment about 'noisy partisanship' appears to be fully justified. It was, indeed, never far distant in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, let alone in the many and varied evaluations of Milton's work which were to follow in the next two centuries. Assessments, informed as they were by personal belief, social, religious and political experience and expediency, showed as much ambivalence and opprobrium as they did admiration. The Augustans may have praised Milton's classical learning but his radicalism, his role as a spokesman of a Puritan revolution against feudalism, his religious views and unconventional art were anathema to them. Even the more neutral comments of the neo-classicist Addison and Bishop Newton, among the many commentators 'whose criticism is inordinately informed by the tastes of their age' (Wittreich op.cit:9), reflected the beliefs and attitudes of an age which longed for order and orthodoxy after the disorder of Civil War, the execution of one king and the restoration of another which was itself to be followed by the Glorious Revolution of 1688.
However, despite accusations of 'enthusiasm' and impious claims of God-given insights, the growth of Milton's 'gigantic influence' was enough to convince Augustan poets that 'poetry was the gift of God' as Milton himself 'becomes the inspired poet' (John Lucas 1982:36.) His radicalism and claims to inspiration were to be espoused, promoted, venerated even, by the Romantic poets for whom he became an exemplar of the imaginative spirit,'the quintessence of everything [they] most admired' (Wittreich op.cit:1), and if this quality was seen as an outcome of blindness it was not cited as such. Indeed, the fact of physical disability was largely ignored and certainly not seen as a point of dissension.

Wittreich insists that during the early years of the Romantic period 'the concepts of Milton—man, thinker, and poet—fused into a single idea to form, not only the Romantics' "idea" of Milton, but also their idea of a poet and a poem', contrary to the commonly held assumption that the Romantics fasten full attention on 'Milton's artistry alone' (Wittreich op.cit:19). Significantly, at another period of revolution and change, he was, for them, 'a daring individualist who took his place outside the circle of conformists' (ibid:11), 'a priest of poetry ...compelling as a symbol of the spiritual life and the man who has attained it in full measure'. Hanford & Taaffe indeed claim that 'among the poets who came in the wake of the French Revolution, Milton was the most dynamic force'. They conclude that 'Taken as a whole, the romantic period, though its view of Milton was coloured by its own emotions, stood close to him in imaginative sympathy and was better equipped than the eighteenth century to value his poetic quality' (op.cit:285).

Importantly, to the Romantic poets Milton was a 'rebel, a republican, an
'iconoclast', the man who 'translates the divine idea into poetry and
sounds the trumpet of prophecy' (Wittreich op.cit:11/12). They
confirmed, enhanced even, Milton's own view of himself as one 'who lived
in the presence of divine mystery and penetrated it...his poetry
contained it' (Wittreich op.cit:13). For them, he had 'restored the art
of prophecy to its original perfection' (Wittreich 1975:101) and they
were at one with him in believing that knowledge comes chiefly from
'celestial light that inward shines', enabling the prophet to tell 'of
things invisible to mortal sight' (Paradise Lost, 111:51-55).

For Coleridge, amongst the Romantic poets, Milton was a poet in
'ideal perfection', whilst Shelley regarded 'the sacred Milton' as 'a
republican' and 'a bold enquirer into morals and religion' (Preface to
Prometheus Unbound quoted in Wittreich 1970:21), one who was 'shaking to
dust' the most oppressive forms of religion. Shelley compared him with
other poet-heroes who have the world against them:

He died,
Who was the Sire of an immortal strain,
Blind, old, and lonely, when his country's pride,
The priest, the slave and the liberticide,
Trampled and mocked with many a loathed rite
Of lust and blood; he went, unterrified,
Into the gulf of death; but his clear Sprite
Yet reigns o'er the earth; the third among the sons of light.
Adonais.

Keat's 'Hyperion' was, in turn, influenced by Milton's 'poetical luxury'
(Hanford op.cit:287), but it is to Blake that the 'apotheosis of Milton
is left' (Wittreich 1970:11). For Blake, 'prophet, poet' himself
(Kathleen Raine 1970:7) the 'immortal Milton' was 'the Awakener', 'the
ture hero...a ruler over the minds of man, a genius and a prophet'
(Wittreich 1970:11).
Admiration was not enough for Blake however. He claimed that he was 'a kind of reincarnation', 'a poetic son' (Havens op.cit:225.) of the earlier poet, and that Milton appeared to him frequently in visions. He maintained that he too was visited by the Muse in his sleep. It was out of this 'knit of identity' (Wittreich 1975:221) that Blake could say

And I became one man with him, arising in my strength,
'Twas too late now to recede. Los had entered my soul,
His terrors now possessed me whole. I arose in fury and strength.

This identification did not, however, prevent Blake from 'correcting' and clarifying what he saw as Milton's 'mistaken vision' which, Wittreich suggests, resulted from the 'inadequacies of vision that constricted and confused the visionary dimensions of his poetry' as well as the 'obstacles to vision created by Milton's eighteenth century commentators' (1975:39/40). Blake wished to interpret anew the revolutionary vision which had been 'hidden by regressive artistic techniques' and 'lost in (the) misunderstanding' of 'layers of mistaken criticism' (ibid:40).

Blake claimed that his 'first great prophecy' (ibid:189), 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell' was written after a visionary visit by Milton during which he asked Blake to 'expose the falsehood of his doctrine, taught in Paradise Lost, that sexual intercourse arose out of the Fall. The Fall could not produce any pleasure' (Crabb Robinson quoted in Raine op.cit:148). Wittreich states that the 'prophecy' concerns 'the formation of a prophetic character and assumes the status of commentary on Paradise Lost. In the poem Blake defines his disagreement with Milton, the Puritan theologian, pointing out the inconsistencies and contradictions inherent in the work and rejecting
the assertion that the cause of 'all our woe is sin.' In famously accusing Milton of being 'a true poet and of the Devil's party without knowing it', Blake asserts that Milton had allowed reason, represented by the Messiah, to curb desire, as represented by Satan. In following the accepted orthodoxies of biblical teaching and institutionalised Christianity, Blake considered that Milton had repudiated and repressed not only his radical theological and political views but also his imagination and inspiration--his true self, a true self he was to come to realise, in Blake's view, in Paradise Regained.

Blake was, however, to become less intent on rebuking Milton as he came to appreciate the visionary element in the latter's art. Whereas 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell' becomes a critique of Milton, the poem 'Milton' celebrates the poet, his life, his values and his vision. The poem becomes more than 'the story of the poet's journey, his pilgrimage' (Wittreich 1975:22), the releasing from 'the bondage of rationalism ...or "selfhood" (Raine op.cit:148) to an expanded consciousness, but an acknowledgment of Milton's struggle for liberty against restricting orthodoxies. It is importantly, an invocation to Milton, as England's saviour' (Wittreich 1975:11) to Milton, the 'Awakener' ('Milton' 21:33), the redeemed prophet who 'finally leads mankind back to the faith' (Wittreich 1975:44), towards apocalypse and the instrument of Albion's redemption. Thus, 'Milton' is concerned with more than the making of poet and a poem, where imagination and inspiration converge, but with the harnessing of Milton's prophetic radicalism and love of liberty to Blake's own cause of freedom and expansion of man's consciousness in general.
Though Blake acknowledges Milton as a visionary poet and prophet he does not speak of him as a blind seer. He was not however unaware of the fact of Milton's blindness as his Head of Milton (based on William Faithorne's portraiture and executed as part of a frieze for William Hayley's library) clearly indicates. Blake’s evaluation of Milton did not depend on lack of sight. More importantly, the symbolic emblems of the iconography portray an idea of Milton, 'as a prophet intent upon opening the gates of perception' (Wittreich 1975:12.), just as his many engravings (over 90 of them) indicate Blake's perception and understanding of the work he is illustrating, raising the conception of the original 'into a new world of meaning' (Raine op. cit:200).

Whereas for Blake Milton was an exemplar of the 'inspired man', for Wordsworth he became the master who had claimed that poetic abilities 'wheresoever they be found, are the inspired gift of God' (Milton in Reason of Church Government [Bk.11]). For Wordsworth who 'worshipped Milton this side of idolatry and not always this side' (Reiger in Wittreich 1975:190) Milton was 'that holiest of Bards' (At Valambrosa 1.26) ranking alongside Homer and other Jewish prophets (The Prelude V.198-222) and one of the four poets of whom he had said he 'must have continually before me as example' (Quoted in Wittreich 1970:135.) Having been imbued, at an early age, at his father's instruction, with the works of 'the best English poets' (quoted in Wittreich 1970:135) and reputedly much akin to Milton in his love of liberty and intense moral earnestness (Hanford 1970:287, Havens 1922:177/8) it is not surprising to find 'echoes' (Hanford ibid:287) or 'borrowings' (Havens ibid:183) from Milton's work scattered throughout Wordsworth's poetry and prose. Although Havens (ibid:178) refers to Wordsworth as 'a kind of Milton in
Wittreich's comment that Havens was himself 'indiscriminating in his explorations' (1970:XIII) should perhaps be borne in mind.

Although Wordsworth's kinship to Milton never reached the kind of symbiosis that Blake claimed to have achieved, his admiration extended firstly, to Milton's radical politics (though Wordsworth's commitment was to be of a shorter duration than that of Blake), and then, importantly, to his acclamation of, and identification with Milton as a teacher, a proponent of the inspiration which comes from God, and is of God, as a Creator with and alongside the poet.

The concern for England's ills which had given rise to Wordsworth's invocation to Milton to return as an exemplar for his country (in the poem 'London' [1802]) soon turned to disillusion. Wordsworth sought solace in Nature, particularly Nature in solitude where he saw the power of God in Nature's laws. Here Wordsworth related the gift of poetry (by now accepted as God-given) with the imaginative inspiration he was to garner from Nature itself and to 'receive enduring touches of deep joy/ From the great Nature that exists in works of mighty Poets'. For him 'Visionary Power' was of a piece with the essence of nature and the 'mystery of words' (The Prelude Bk.VI.617-621).

Although The Prelude is accepted as a retrospective account of 'the growth of the poet's mind' (Wordsworth [Ed.].Gill 1984:XXIII) it nevertheless vividly records the poet's certainty of belief that communion with the natural world, with 'the sweet breath of Heaven' creates a 'corresponding mild creative breeze', 'the gift of whosel consecrates my joy' (Bk.I. 40-43).

Significantly, in 'Tintern Abbey' (and in 'The Blind Highland Boy'), Wordsworth links inner imagination and 'visionary power', the ability to
'see into the life of things', with 'the deep power of joy', that emotion which, like 'enthusiasm' had, by the end of the eighteenth century 'become equated with religious inspiration...a guarantee of truth, of God's presence, or the fact that the poet was a chosen man, a prophet, a seer blest' (Lucas 1982:44). Divine inspiration had been seen as God's gift to Milton—now it had been claimed by his greatest admirer who had stated his belief that 'the imagination also shapes and creates' aided by 'the Heavenly Muse who dictates the poem to the eye of the Poet's mind (quoted in Wittreich 1970:129).

That Wordsworth was highly aware of the fact of Milton's blindness, and accepted the relationship between this and the claims to divine inspiration and roles of prophet and seer, is clear from references in his poetry and prose. He indicated that of all of Milton's sonnets, a favourite was that addressed to 'Cyriac Skinner: On his Blindness' (Wittreich 1970:111). Wordsworth hailed Milton as a blind Bard, a compeer of 'blind Maeonides' and a blind prophet in two of his own late works (quoted in Wittreich 1970:134&144) having already claimed 'Our blind Poet' as a champion of freedom and standing alone for truth, 'darkness before, and danger's voice behind' in The Prelude (Bk.1II.284-286) a clear indication of a lifetime's adherence to his master.

Wordsworth, then, like the other Romantic poets, embraced and propounded Milton's lofty view of the poet and his poetry. For them the 'true poet is a bard, a prophet, a priest, inspired by some power greater than himself, pouring out floods of wisdom in rapturous song' (Fairchild 1939.1:205).

The power of Milton's visionary claims and the interest in his theology were to wane however as the nineteenth century drew on and
though his poetry was still regarded as 'sublime', the concerns of the readers of *Paradise Lost* narrowed and 'shifted to literary and technical matters' (Hanford & Taare 1970:288). Although the strength of belief sustaining the ideology that disease was the outcome of sin remained, its power was to be increasingly diminished as the 'new science' of the eighteenth century developed into the scientific and medical revolution of the nineteenth. Yet, superstition was still to be an important factor in some of the literature of the years that followed. I intend therefore, in the remainder of this thesis, to examine the degree to which myth retains its power to inform and influence our ideas about blindness and the blind.
CHAPTER 4.

Depictions of Blindness in the Nineteenth Century.

At the end of the last chapter I indicated that a number of factors in the nineteenth century contributed to the slow decline in the use of symbolic belief to explain the causation and effects of blindness. I intend, however, to outline the reasons for my choice of texts before dealing briefly with these factors.

Choice of Texts.

Two main factors determined the choice of texts for discussion in this chapter. Firstly, I looked for texts which had been published at different points during the century, anticipating that each text might reflect, at least to some degree, its own peculiar world which would include evidence of changing knowledge and belief. Secondly, I looked for authors who had published more than one novel which contained depictions of blind people, again anticipating that those who wrote might show awareness of developments in medicine and the evolving social situation of a vulnerable group and mirror this in their work.

My choice of texts is, of course, by no means exhaustive; though it was limited to twelve novels because they contained within them much more complex delineations of blindness, both factually and fictionally, than could be encompassed by say, Tennyson in his brief description of
Tiresias or Thomas Hardy in his wonder at the zestful song of the blinded bird (The Blind Bird 1.10). Although I had previously read Jane Eyre in an unheeding and uncritical way the other titles were previously unknown to me and obtained from catalogues. With the exception of the Russian, Vladimir Korolenko, all the authors are British and of the same general culture, though it is worth noting that Charles Dickens draws on his American experience in Cricket on the Hearth. The dates of publication are, of course, significant here— in particular, because of the rapidly changing medical scene and growing awareness of the plight of the blind in general. I shall, therefore, discuss the novels chronologically.

It will be seen, however, that any expectations of reported change are only partially fulfilled, since although later accounts do include some details of diagnosis and treatment, this is of a minimal nature which reflects little of the actuality of the true situation. Again, although evidence would suggest that the works of Bronte, Collins, Kipling, Dickens and Scott show some direct knowledge of blindness, it is clear that myth and stereotype persist as a means to fulfil the needs of a story. It is rarely clear, however, if symbol is employed with informed and deliberate intent to establish a point or to move the story on. Whilst blindness is a central factor in Collin's Poor Miss Finch, it appears to be used in other accounts simply to add to a character's definition,— witness Stagg in Barnaby Rudge or Bertha Plummer in Cricket on the Hearth. Nevertheless, in Bleak House, blindness provides the means by which Esther Summerson achieves insight and perception.

Although only three of the protagonists are described as having been blind from birth, none totally fulfils the traditional role of beggar or
hard, and indeed most of the characters demonstrate a high degree of independence, both financial and physical. Both Stagg and Bertha Plummer are credible representatives of the poor of their time whilst Nydia, the blind slave of Bulwer Lytton's *The Last Days of Pompeii*, like many of the others, exhibits a high degree of what modern commentators describe as 'facial vision'.

Significantly, the two themes which polarised attitudes toward Milton, and resulted in such vigorous partisanship, appear to have largely disappeared in the nineteenth century novels though only to be replaced by a seemingly unquestioning use of stereotyped belief. Thus, whilst there is belief in the imposition of blindness as punishment for sin, as in *Westward Ho! and Jane Eyre*, claims of visionary power all but disappear and are mentioned only in Walter Scott's novel, *The Bride of Lammermoor*. The reasons for these developments are no doubt complex and interrelated, but it can be suggested that they were influenced in no small part by the advent and development of the new science, discoveries in medicine and the slow, but increasing, interest in the capabilities of the blind. It is also important to note that changing knowledge and belief had also led to a modification of attitudes toward Milton and his influential claims to be a visionary poet and prophet. I will, therefore, look briefly at nineteenth century assessments of Milton and his work, and the relevant social milieu, before undertaking discussion of the chosen novels.

1. Re-evaluation of Milton as a poet-prophet.

In the nineteenth century Milton was no longer seen as 'the inspired poet' (John Lucas 1982:36), divinely gifted and an icon for those of
radical and iconoclastic tendencies. His politics were still as antipathetical as they had been to the neo-classicists who had found Milton's Christian thought and moral instruction 'repugnant', his art 'unconventional'. Victorian critics, 'similarly repelled by the man and enraged by his terrifying theology, Puritan austerity and subversive politics' focussed instead on 'his art' (J.A. Wittreich 1970:9).

Matthew Arnold's comments are expressive of the dominant view of Milton in the nineteenth century. Though he compares Milton with 'Virgil and Dante' and extols 'the sure and flawless perfection of his rhythm and diction' (1888:37) and attributes 'the high and rare excellence of the great style' to 'a gift, a divine favour' (ibid:38) he says that 'the Milton of religious controversy, and perhaps of domestic life also, is not seldom disfigured by want of amenity, by acerbity' (ibid:39). Here, Lucas suggests, Milton is 'being explicitly denied the image in which the Romantic poets had cast him' since 'Arnold denies him his ideas, rejects any suggestion that he had been involved in politics. Or rather he sets them aside as unimportant (1990:183).

No longer was Milton to be valued as 'a rebel, a republican, an iconoclast' who 'translates the divine idea into poetry and sounds the trumpet of prophecy' (Wittreich op.cit:11/12); he is now to be valued 'as a poet and not a thinker' (B.Rajan 1970:47). Romantic criticism, marked for its ability 'to hold Milton--man, thinker and poet--in balance' (Wittreich op.cit:9) was a thing of the past. Now Milton was seen as 'a man whose imagination redeemed the poverty of his intellect and whose poetry could still remain magnificent and moving despite the barriers of an obsolete mythology. What was valuable to his readers was the style itself and not the doctrines it organised' (Rajan op.cit:7).
Beliefs about, and attitudes toward blind people in general were, however, to change less dramatically.

II. Social situation of the Blind.

Although there was little immediate effect and progress was painfully slow, the nineteenth century was to see a continuation of the re-evaluation of the capabilities of blind people which had begun with the work of Valentin Haüy in Paris in the latter part of the eighteenth century. This is not to say that there had never been the occasional 'shooting star on the horizon of deep darkness, ignorance and neglect' (M. Anagnos 1969:13) who, through great personal talent and determination, or with the advantage of money and family, those 'islands in an ocean of unconcern' (L. Bickel 1983:5), had proved their capabilities and led independent lives. Homer's Demodocus, the fourth century Ossian, and the seventeenth century Torlagh O'Carolan, were all noted bards whilst Didymus of Alexandria (b.308 B.C.) and Nicholas Saunders (b.1682), the Cambridge mathematician, both achieved great learning. Though their success was noted it was not copied, despite the fact that Didymus carved a wooden alphabet for himself and Saunders devised a ciphering board as an aid to his own education. The example of these 'stars' was seen as unique, to be applauded but not emulated by those who were similarly affected.

There had, however, been occasional interest shown in the abilities of the blind before Haüy showed that it was possible to educate blind people. The English philosopher John Locke, in his Essay on Human Understanding (1690), had speculated that someone who had regained his sight would be unable to recognize, through sight, what he had learned.
to know through touch. This theory had gained scientific support when a thirteen year old boy, his sight restored by the surgeon, William Cheseldon (1685-1712), reacted exactly in this way. It was a phenomenon which would be vividly illustrated over a hundred years later by Wilkie Collins in Poor Miss Finch, and later still by Brian O'Doherty in The Strange Case of Mademoiselle P (1992),--a novel based on the life of the blind pianist Maria Theresa von Paradis, a contemporary of Mozart. It was she to whom Haüy had turned in his search for educational aids for blind children.

The interest of the philosopher and scientist, Denis Diderot (1713-1784), was to prove more influential, however, than that of Locke; however, like Locke, Diderot and his fellow encyclopedists did not venture beyond the bounds of abstract psychological speculation. Diderot, 'captivated' though he was 'by medical aspects of sight' (G.N.Laidlaw 1963:98), by 'a tragic physical fact, an object of scientific conjecture' (Ibid:97), proposed no measures of practical utility or relief despite being aware of Nicholas Saundere's geometry machine and the pre-Braille alphabet used by the blind, but intellectually accomplished, Melanie de Salignac. Diderot's 'Letter on the Blind' [Lettre sur les Aveugles a l'usage de ceux qui volent], published in 1749 as his 'manifesto as a man of science and an advocate of enlightenment' (Ibid:99) was, however, to prove effective. Though it was variously received at the time, it was later considered to show 'spiritual insight that prepared the way for the evolution of modern science' (Assezat 1963:99).

Though some of his tenets were to be challenged by later commentators, Diderot 'waxed lyrical' (Laidlaw op.cit:100) over his
belief that the senses of the blind are not necessary sharpened by loss of sight, but rather that loss of sight compels the increased use of the remaining senses. He had come to this conclusion after Lenotre, the Blind Man of Puiseaux, had told him that 'If it were not for curiosity I would just have soon have long arms: it seems to me hands would tell me more of what goes on in the moon than eyes or your telescopes. Besides, eyes cease to see sooner than hands to touch' (Lowenfeld op.cit:59/60).

Though Diderot's observation was an accurate one, it is significant that the belief persists, and is perpetuated in some of the novels to be discussed, that blind people are gifted with an extra sensitivity.

More importantly, Diderot suggested that education ought to be built on what a blind person has, rather than what he has lost, and that, above all else, he should keep active contact with the objective world. The 'Lettre' focussed attention not only on the blind who had achieved fame but also on the beggars at Church doors, the wanderers and 'the misery of those who lived in darkness' (G.Farrell 1969:16).

Despite the validity of his comments about the educability of the blind, his influence was not to be felt in the realms of education until the founding of the first school for the blind by Valentin Haüy, in Paris, in 1784. It was to be the forerunner of many other such establishments in Europe and Great Britain over the next century. It is tempting to think that Haüy, the 'Apostle of the Blind' (Bickel op.cit:7) was aware of the older man's writings and beliefs when he came across the burlesque and mockery of the ten blind 'musicians' at the Cafe St. Ovide in September 1771. Wearing grotesque robes, dunces caps and huge pasteboard spectacles devoid of lenses, their music sheets turned away from them, they were forced to make a living by scraping
crude bows across rough stringed instruments for the amusement of the crowd. Though Hauy was shocked at this maltreatment of the blind, another thirteen years were to pass before he established his school for the blind, L'Institution Nationale des Jeune Aveugles. Determined to 'substitute the truth for this mockery' (M. de la Sizeranne 1969:19) he had begun by teaching a young blind beggar who had impressed him with his 'intelligence of touch' (Bickel op.cit:2) and, in order to further his aims, had sought the advice of Maria Theresa von Paradis who had herself learned to read and write by means of a kind of embossed writing. Though Diderot had appreciated that blind people need 'their souls in their fingers' (Laidlaw op.cit:101), Braille's six-dot alphabet system was not to be published until 1829 and then strongly resisted by those who maintained that an alphabet for the blind should be 'pleasing to the eye' (Farrell op.cit:100) and, therefore, easily read by the sighted.

Although Hauy's school was to experience various vicissitudes, not the least of which was the view of the sighted that the blind should accommodate to their world, his example was followed Europe-wide within a short period. Thirty-seven institutions were established in the United Kingdom between 1791 and 1897 (F.H.Garrison 1929:770/1). Though their general aim was to 'alleviate the lot of the blind beginning with children', the immediate goal of the schools was, not unexpectedly, 'to teach blind children in order to enable them to work' (Farrell op.cit:32). Thus, the object of the Liverpool School for Indigent Blind (founded in 1749) was 'to teach poor visually handicapped children to work at trades, to sing in Churches, [and] to play the organ' whilst that of the Edinburgh Blind Asylum (founded in 1793) was, similarly, 'to
render the blind happy and useful to society'. Increasingly, however, institutions which had initially offered only education began to include the teaching of trades and to offer employment in their workshops. Typically, the Edinburgh Blind Asylum became the Asylum for the Industrious Blind. Though the institutions offered proof that many blind people were capable of more than beggary, it is clear that when they were 'industrious' and 'useful to society' they were also no longer a burden on the Parish. Nevertheless, many were now segregated and marginalised in a different way. They lived and worked within the institution, the nature of their work highly circumscribed and determined by the views of the sighted.

Little was to change, however, until the second half of the century when Dr. Rhodes Armitage brought his commitment and influence to bear on the welfare of the blind in general and education for the blind in particular. A physician who had lost his sight at the age of thirty-six, and 'a finger reader' himself (Farrell op.cit:104), Armitage was a staunch supporter of the Braille system and a committee member of the British Council for the Blind (later the Royal National Institute for the Blind) which advocated its adoption, in England, in 1868. He was also to be instrumental in founding The Royal Normal College and Academy of Music in 1872 and Worcester College, 'a school for the blind sons of gentlemen' (Farrell op.cit:105) in 1889.

Blindness then, was acknowledged, during the late eighteenth and throughout the nineteenth century as a potent economic factor in people's lives as well as a stumbling block to education and learning. Efforts to remedy these defects were largely dependent on voluntary and individual charitable enterprise and foresight.
At the same time it is worth noting that statistics showed that the young blind represented only a small proportion of the blind population in general at the end of the nineteenth century. However blindness was often accompanied by other infirmities. Thus, in the 1880's 'of about 30,000 blind persons in the United Kingdom only 10,000 were able bodied, and only 800 of these enabled to work to support themselves' (F.B. Smith 1990:332). It is not surprising in these circumstances that the Royal Commission on the Poor law (1909) found that 33% of blind people were paupers (ibid:332) particularly when it is remembered that there was no statutory provision for the education of blind children until 1893 (E. Toplis 1975:10), even though compulsory schooling for all children had been introduced in 1870.

iii. Developments in Ophthalmology.

In contrast to the slow progress of educational provision, the comparatively narrow field of ophthalmology witnessed an 'immense advance' (D. Guthrie 1956:374) during the nineteenth century. Similar increases in knowledge relating to the causes of infectious disease, asepsis and anaesthesia were such that the incidence of reported blindness declined at every census after 1851 (Smith op.cit:332). It is not possible to say whether these findings reflect a true record of the occurrence of blindness since the lack of an accurate definition of blindness, combined with the cost and limited availability of medical treatment, would make a realistic assessment difficult.

Amongst the most notable contributors to this remarkable 'advance' were the German, Von Graefe, 'the master of ophthalmic surgery' (A. Castiglioni 1947:731) and 'creator of the modern surgery of the eye'
Garrison op.cit:608) and the Dutchman, Donders, who was said to be 'the
greatest physician of the nineteenth century in the physiology and
pathology of the eye' (Castiglioni op.cit:731). They had been preceded,
in this country, by those such as Travers who had published, in 1820,
one of the earliest works in English to deal systematically with the
subject of eye diseases, and Wear who is credited with being the first
to have described gonorrheal ophthalmia in 1795, although Garrison
states that the connection between syphilis and blindness was known as
early as 1536 (op.cit:207). It is true that the work of these men
resulted in greater surgical success: two-thirds of the cases at the
Liverpool Ophthalmic Hospital regained useful vision despite operations
without anaesthesia. There was, moreover, greater accuracy in the
definition of visual acuity (Snellen's work of 1862 was instigated by
Von Graefe) and a more effective control of the making and supply of
spectacles when this was removed from the hands of quacks (Smith
op.cit:32). It was, however, the recognition and control of some
blindness-causing infectious diseases which contributed much to the
significant decrease in the incidence of sight loss. Smallpox, once a
large causative factor, was increasingly eliminated following Jenner's
experiment with vaccine in 1796 (Guthrie op.cit:246) whilst trachoma,
'military ophthalmia' (Farrell op.cit:221), and the ophthalmias caused
by staphylococcus and gonococcus were eliminated or reduced by better
hygiene, increased knowledge of asepsis, and more effective drug
treatment. Nevertheless, it could still be said, in England in 1879,
that 25% of all blind children had lost their sight because of
ophthalmia neonaturam, either because of the gonococcus, present as
venereal disease in the parents, or staphylococcus due to lack of
Thus, both scientifically and socially, knowledge about, and perceptions of blindness and the blind changed considerably throughout the nineteenth century. Milton was no longer seen as the poet of inspiration, there was a slow realisation that blind people are not necessarily ineducable, helpless and dependent and there was a growing recognition that, as far as medical science could determine, blindness had causes other than sin.

This then is the context in which to consider some writers of 'the great age of the novel, when it became the supremely confident form for consideration of an increasingly complex world' (J. Peck & M. Coyle 1984:113). I will hope to show, however, that 'the supremely confident form' does not always mirror accurately the 'complex world' but that even in the age of Darwin, fictional accounts of blindness continue to perpetuate assumption and stereotype.
I, Walter Scott 1771-1832.

**Old Mortality** (first published in 1816).

**The Bride of Lammermoor** (first published in 1819).

Since Elisabeth McClure's blindness plays no great part in *Old Mortality*, I shall discuss Scott's later novel, *The Bride of Lammermoor* first because 'the fate-haunted gravity of Old Alice' (D. Cameron 1969:185) is a significant factor in the unfolding of the story, as well as indicative of Scott's interest in folklore and superstition and his effective use, in the historical novels, of 'powerful and supernatural effects' (ibid:188). Yet, since *The Bride of Lammermoor* is concerned with events which took place at the end of the seventeenth century, it is unclear whether Scott is employing beliefs about blindness which were current in his own time or whether he is using historical myth to enhance his tale.

Scott's 'literary art was based on a phenomenal memory' into which he had 'absorbed eagerly every kind of lore and reminiscence' (D. Daiches 1971:19), every 'tale and legend of a heroic past' whilst he was recovering, over a long period in his early teens, from illness which necessitated his absence from school (T. Crawford 1969:1/2). He was not unacquainted either with the effects of blindness since he describes how, as a pupil at Edinburgh High School and already an avid reader, chance had thrown in his way 'a poetical preceptor', 'the excellent and benevolent Dr. Blacklock' who 'was well known at that time as a literary character'. Scott says he became 'a frequent and favoured guest' at
Blacklock's home as 'the kind old man opened to me the stores of his library'. Scott indicates that it was through Blacklock's 'recommendation' that he became 'intimate with Ossian and Spenser' though Scott admits that he was 'disgusted' by 'the tawdry repetition of the Ossian phraseology'. Spenser, however, he could have 'read for ever' (W.W.Hudson 1961:36). It may be surmised though that the works of Ossian did not go unremarked.

Scott then, even as a child, would have been aware of the considerable abilities of one influential blind man and this is evident in his depiction of both Old Alice and Elisabeth McClure as capable, independent blind women. Blacklock, though blind from babyhood, had translated Hauy's 'Essay on the Education of the Blind' and written an article on 'The Blind' for the Encyclopedia Brittanica in 1783 at a time when it was published in Edinburgh. Before his death, Blacklock was involved with plans to establish a school for blind children in Edinburgh—it was founded in 1793 as The Edinburgh Blind Asylum.

It is then from a background of wide reading which produced 'an imaginative synthesis of the aristocratic and the folk, the epic and the romantic' (Crawford op.cit:2) and friendship with an educated and able blind man that Scott portrays 'old Alice' in The Bride of Lammermoor (published in 1819 but here in an edition of 1878) as both 'the blind Sybil' and as a blind person who is able to maintain herself. Scott clearly ascribes the role of seer to Alice. Through her he demonstrates his striking use of omen and prophecy to show that a stubbornly held stance, determined by an earlier decision, may lead to disaster. Here Alice warns the Lord Keeper, usurper of the House of Ravenswood, 'in an impressive and solemn tone' to 'take care what you
do; you are on the brink of a precipice' (Scott 1871:48). Her warning is not without reason because of his opportunist behavior toward the House but the manner in which it is delivered adds to the sense of foreboding and menace in the novel. Similarly she identifies a fallen tree as a symbol of a fallen House and as an omen which she had hoped not to see in her lifetime. To add to the suggestion that Alice has extra-ordinary powers, Lucy Ashton describes her as being a 'poor blind soul, but when she speaks to you, you would think she has some way of looking into your very heart'. Lucy continues 'I am sure I cover my face, or turn it away, for it seems as if she saw one change colour, though she has been blind these twenty years' (ibid:43).

Alice herself hints at prophetic abilities. After warning Ravenswood about the dangers inherent in his courtship of Lucy Ashton, she says 'my thought are my own; and if my mortal sight is closed to objects present with me it may be that I can look with more steadiness into future events' (ibid:185). Ravenswood seems to confirm Alice's words later when he says 'and I am in the situation which she foretold...or rather I am more deeply dishonoured, not the dependent and the ally of the destroyer of my father's house as the old sybil presaged' (ibid:226). Alice appears later to Ravenswood as an apparition 'to renew her warning' (ibid:228). This comes in vain but occurs in the story as if to confirm the power of supernatural gifts as well as fulfilling a legend.

Though Alice, to enhance the tale, is identified as possessing sybilline talents, she is nevertheless shown to be a competent old woman who is skilled at using her remaining senses. She makes no attempt to attribute her heightened senses to special gifts but explains that her hearing has been 'sharpened by my blindness' so that she can 'now draw
conclusions from the slightest sounds which formerly reached my ears as unheeded as they now approach you'. She explains that 'necessity is a stern but excellent school mistress, and she that has lost her sight must collect her information from other senses' (ibid:82). Alice's description of herself is confirmed by Lucy who notes the 'acuteness of perception' and 'dignity of manner' (ibid:45) of this 'blind and paralytic old woman' (ibid:13) whose spirit is unbroken by poverty and affliction and who, without husband and sons, maintains herself by bee-keeping.

Scott's depiction of old Alice is then something of a mixture of the real and the supernatural. Though he gives her intuitive understanding he also employs commonly held myths within a traditional story to enhance 'the psycho-supernatural atmosphere of the whole book' (Cameron op.cit:204). However, after her death, and as if to confirm her humanity and deny the supernatural, she is described as 'the abandoned and forsaken corpse of a common pauper' (ibid:229).

Similarly, although Elisabeth McClure in Old Mortality is described as competent, brave and able to find her way about the countryside unaided, the hint of mystery surrounding the 'old woman wrapped in a red cloak who was sitting by the crossway' to warn the defeated Covenanters of a trap is not dispelled until the end of the novel when she is identified as 'a poor widow and blind' who 'doucely and decently has borne her burden, blaming nane, and condemning nane' (1816:393). As keeper of a small, poor wayside inn, and 'notwithstanding her blindness', she is described as 'assiduous in her attendance' and using 'a sort of instinct to find her way to what she wanted' (ibid:394). As with old Alice her ability to use senses other than sight is explained
in down to earth terms. We are told that Elisabeth McClure assumes 'an attitude of listening, that showed how effectively her powers of collecting information had been transferred from the eye to the ear, for instead of casting a glance of circumspection around, she stooped her face, and turned her head slowly around, in such a manner as to ensure that there was not the slightest sound stirring in the neighbourhood and then [she] continued 'I'll tell ye...' (ibid:397). A description as clear and informative as this will not be forthcoming until the autobiographers of the late twentieth century explain how they learn how to appreciate their environments by means other than eyesight.

The cause of Alice's blindness was not identified. Elisabeth McClure indicates however that, in her view, her loss of sight came from the emotional impact, and subsequent grief of seeing one of her sons shot by the oppressors of the Covenanters. She explains that 'my auld een dazzled when the shots were looten off, and, to my thought, they waxed weaker and weaker ever since that weary day and sorrow and heart break and tears that would not be dried, might help in this disorder (ibid:395).

Although Elisabeth McClure's blindness plays no significant part in his novel (a novel incidently which illustrates the extent to which enthusiasm, that religious zeal so deplored by Newton, fired the Covenanters in their fight for religious freedom and toleration) Scott gain shows how ordinary blind folk, to avoid beggary and pauperism, sustained their independence as best they could.

These displays of staunch independence may, of course, have been as much informed by Scott's own 'habit of sober calculation and diligent labour' (Crawford op.cit:1) as they were from his knowledge of
Blacklock's ways. Though he had turned 'against his father's Calvinism', he was to 'retain to the end the habits of diligence fostered by that creed and the value of rational control and moral restraint which it shared with both Augustan ethics and utilitarianism' (ibid:4). His work was always to show a 'blending of historian, antiquarian and patriot and business man, lawyer, sportsman, amateur soldier and would-be laird' (A.H.N. Jefferson 1969: Intro.XI).

In comparison with Scott's largely realistic portrayals of blindness Bulwer-Lytton's description of the blind slave girl, Nydia, in The Last Days of Pompeii owes much to myth and stereotype despite the fact that she is credited with competently guiding the soldier, Glaucus, to safety through the ruins of Pompeii after the eruption of Vesuvius.

Edward George Bulwer Lytton, Earl Lytton, 1803-1873.
The Last Days of Pompeii First published in 1834).

Though The Last Days of Pompeii is said to be an example of Bulwer Lytton's 'verve and resource as a novel writer' (Editor's note 1834:7), his portrayal of the blind slave girl, Nydia, seems to rely more on untested myth and habitual belief than it does on research or factual evidence. His presentation continues to promote the paradoxical views that though the blind are specially gifted they are nevertheless not of the normal kind and are therefore less worthy.

Thus, since it was commonly thought that 'no-one would want to marry a blind girl' (Twersky 1955:303) it is seen as unthinkable that Nydia should harbour any such ideas. Lytton's protagonist, Arbace, pondering over Nydia's love for Glaucus, the Roman soldier, speaks wonderingly of 'the strange and absorbing passion which, in blindness and in slavery, this singular girl has dared to cherish' (1834:303). Despite her
protestations to the contrary, Nydia is seen as a child and not as a mature woman, with all a mature woman's desires and hopes. Similarly, and as if to emphasise the belief that blindness has no common cause, Nydia is described as 'darkly fated' (ibid:178) with 'a look of resigned sorrow, of tranquil endurance' and with something 'timid and cautious in her step' (ibid:48). Her blindness is likened to insanity, as 'vague and chilling (ibid:162). True to stereotype, she is also seen as pure and unworlly, 'seemingly unscathed' by the 'heated scenes of profligacy which she had passed' (ibid:179), and 'saved by her misfortune' 'from the low and rude evidence of vice around her' (ibid:51). Nydia has a bitterly different explanation. She says 'the despicable are ever safe' (ibid:160).

Though Nydia appears to accept that she is seen as pitiable by the author and many of his characters (she refers to herself as 'the poor blind girl' (ibid:48)) she is, in fact, dexterous and well able to find her way about. This is well proven when the story culminates in the eruption of Vesuvius and she is able to lead Glaucus to safety through a Pompeii engulfed in dust and ash. We are told that she 'miraculously' 'threaded' her way through every crowd 'avoiding every danger' and finding 'her benighted way through the most intricate windings of the city' (ibid:178). Burdened with every possible preconception, and in final proof of her unworthiness, she drowns herself out of unrequited love.

Significantly, in a novel which is so imbued with myth and superstition, 'the art of witchcraft' in which Nydia was believed 'to be well versed' (S.B.Liljegen 1957:37) is not ascribed to her blindness. It was thought rather to be due to her Thessalian descent.
Little myth attaches however to the three novels of Charles Dickens which I shall consider next.

iii. Charles Dickens 1812-1870.

*Barnaby Rudge* (first published in 1841; here in a 1981 edition)

*Cricket on the Hearth* (first published in 1843; here in a 1897 edition)


Though these novels were all published within a relatively short period in mid-century they contain very different views of blindness. Surprisingly, perhaps, in view of Dickens' own avowal of 'unsentimentality about illness' (P. Ackroyd 1990:380) and the statement that 'his novels reflect the leading scientific pre-occupation of his time' (ibid:663/4) they are not devoid of stereotype and conventional assumption, though this is not, of course, to suggest that a writer's work must necessarily reflect his own views. It is however not surprising to find that all the novels are informed by the social conditions of the period, the overcrowding, pollution, poor sanitation, crime and poverty, since Dickens was concerned 'about the condition of England question' (House M. & Storey G. 1965:11V.xii). Involved as he was with the reformers, Dr. Southwood Smith and Edwin Chadwick, he was highly knowledgeable about their public health campaigns. Nevertheless, the novels do not reveal any awareness of the burgeoning medical and social developments relating to blindness, despite Dickens' visit to the Perkins Institute for the Blind in Boston in 1842 and his interest in Laura Bridgeman, the deaf-blind mute who was said to have inspired his portrayal of Bertha Plummer, the young seamstress of *Cricket on the*
Since I have mentioned this novel I will consider it next even though it was published two years after *Barnaby Rudge*.

Dickens met Laura Bridgeman when he visited America for the first time between January and June 1842. His subsequent visit in 1867 was given to public readings of some of his work.

His concern for much of his time in the United States (which he records in *American Notes* [first published in 1842; here in a 1957 edition]) was with 'the mournful institutions of American life; the asylums, the workhouses, the prisons, the orphanages, the blind institutes' (Peter Ackroyd 1991:365). Dickens landed in Boston where he was impressed both by the 'intellectual refinement and superiority' of the town, which he attributed to the 'quiet influence' of the nearby 'University of Cambridge' (Dickens in *American Notes* 1957:27) and by 'the public institutions and charities of the capital of Massachusetts [which] are as nearly perfect, as the most considerate wisdom, benevolence, and humanity, can make them' (ibid:28). Aware, no doubt, of the current debate about the nature and role of public institutions, he approved here of the omnipresent involvement of the State. He believed that a 'Public Charity is immeasurably better than a Private Foundation, no matter how munificently the latter may be endowed' (op.cit:28).

Dickens' comments about 'The Perkins Institution and Massachusetts Asylum for the Blind at Boston', show, however, just how much he combined 'philanthropy' both with 'an odd mixture of the most sensitive sympathy and the sternest authoritarianism' (Ackroyd op.cit:440/441). He noted that whilst the 'indigent blind' of Massachusetts were admitted 'gratuitously', those from adjoining states could be admitted only by
'warrant' from a neighbouring state or through the 'security of their friends'. At the end of training only 'working bees', who were able to maintain themselves could expect to 'remain and receive...earnings'. Those who were incapable of supporting themselves were deemed to be 'better provided for in establishments fitted for the infirm' (op.cit:29). This matter-of-fact reporting is, however, strikingly at odds with Dickens' comments about the blind children at the Perkins Institution which show the degree to which he subscribes to a number of commonly held beliefs about blindness. He was obviously impressed and moved by his visit to The Perkins Institution on 'one very fine winter morning' (ibid:30). He noted its fine site 'upon a height commanding the harbour' but as he appreciated the radiance of the bright day with its 'fulness of light', he 'felt a kind of sorrow' at the realisation that 'a blind boy with his sightless face' was unable to see the spectacle before him. Dickens experienced 'a strange wish that for his sake it were darker' (ibid:30). He was to be similarly moved at the sight of a blind child who wept as she listened to music and singing in the school hall.

He goes on to deplore the 'darkness' in the children's lives though he is full of praise for the 'cheerful industry and good order' (ibid:31) in every part of the building. He applauds the efforts to maintain the individuality of each child but seems somewhat surprised that the children, like their sighted peers, 'answered the questions put to them with readiness and intelligence and in a spirit of cheerful contest for precedence'. He seems amazed that they were 'gleesome and noisy' at play (op.cit:30). He finds, however, as he had 'expected', that the friendships which existed among the children were 'more
spiritual and affectionate' than those which exist among children 'suffering under no deprivation'—this he believes to be part 'of the great scheme of Heaven's merciful consideration for the afflicted' (ibid:31).

There is no doubt that Dickens 'most sensitive sympathy' (Ackroyd op.cit:440) affected his attitude toward Laura Bridgeman, the 'girl, blind, deaf and dumb; destitute of smell and nearly so of taste' who was a pupil at the school. He describes her as 'a fair young creature with every human faculty of hope and power of goodness and affection, inclosed within her delicate frame, and but one outward sense—the sense of touch' (op.cit:31/2). Though he likens her condition to being immured in a marble cell, 'impervious to any ray of light or particle of sound', he finds her face to be 'radiant with intelligence and pleasure' (op.cit:32).

There are suggestions here of a Pygmalion-like creation as Dickens describes how Dr. Howe (Founder and Director of The Perkins Institution) 'made [Laura] what she is' (op.cit:32). However, although Dr. Howe's account eulogises Laura's achievements there is no disguising the severity of her disabilities and the extent of the painstaking efforts made to overcome them. Puny and feeble at birth, subject to fits, and 'stinted' (ibid:33) mentally, she had sickened again as a small child. At two years old she lost sight, hearing and her senses of smell and taste. It was a year before she could walk unaided. Howe comments, however, that 'the immortal spirit which had been implanted within her could not die, nor be maimed nor mutilated' (ibid:33). Laura was admitted to The Perkins Institution in October 1837 at the age of seven years.
Though Dickens describes Laura's achievements in glowing terms and accepts Dr. Howe's proud, but no doubt inflated, claims of 'rapid mental growth and mental improvement' (op.cit:41), it seems a fair assumption that neither he nor Howe would have appreciated the acerbic, and somewhat cruel comments, made about a century later by Dr. Thomas Cutsforth, a blind psychologist who was highly critical of the then American educational system for blind children. He stated that Laura had been 'educated only to the upper levels of feeble-mindedness' but was 'famous because she was educated' (Cutsforth 1933:203). It should be remembered, however, that Laura's education, no matter how limited, was achieved in the early days of scholastic opportunity for blind children, when skilled help and provision was still extremely limited. Moreover, this was at a time when women in general were not expected to achieve any great learning since 'being clearly destined by God and nature for a domestic role the primary aim of [a woman's] education should not be academic...but should focus on training her to become a wise and efficient housekeeper and manager of servants' (Michael Slater 1983:323/4).

It is, nevertheless, a measure of the impression made on Dickens by this visit that he is as moved, when he leaves the school, by the sight of a seeing child, 'running among the sightless crowd' to greet her father, as he was by 'the blind boy in the porch' two hours earlier. He reflects painfully on what he now sees as an even greater contrast between the outer scene and the 'darkness of so many youthful lives within' (op.cit:45). It is also a measure of his sympathetic response to the grave effects of Laura's dual disability that he made (in 1843) a speech 'at the Charitable Society for the Deaf and Dumb' in London.
Shatto suggests, however, that his decision to make Caddy Jellyby's child deaf and dumb (in *Bleak House* 1852) 'may have been influenced by recent and forthcoming contributions to *Household Words* by Harriet Martineau, who had become deaf in childhood', rather than by his experience in Boston (ibid:296).

Laura Bridgeman, a product of her times and of its mores, was never to attain the heights reached by her successor in Boston, Helen Keller, though it is worth noting that Cutsforth was equally critical of her and her writings. He considered that she wrote as if she were sighted and that this ignored the different, but equally valid, experience of the world as 'seen' through blind eyes.

It is then not surprising to find stereotyped beliefs about blindness in Dickens' depiction of Bertha Plummer in *Cricket on the Hearth*, though the young seamstress bears no resemblance to Bridgeman beyond the fact that they both lack sight and are, in their own ways, victims of blindness. Thus, in a plot which 'lacks probability' (A. Lang 1897:ix) and is full of pathos and sentimentality, Bertha is portrayed in as stereotypical a manner as was Nydia before her. Twersky describes her as 'pure, sweet and sickening', and as one who 'carries her cross of blindness in a manner to delight heaven and all feeling men' (op.cit:30). She is, in fact, more a victim of her father's deception and over-protection than she is of lack of sight. Naive, dupable and trusting, she is easily persuaded by her father, who is concerned to make 'happy' (Dickens 1987:239) his 'poor blind daughter' (ibid:238), that all is well in a world where they live in a hovel penetrated by wind and rain. Misled by her father, she falls in love with Tackleton, her father's unscrupulous employer who 'really did believe she was an Idiot' with 'no
gleam of reason' (ibid:244). It is made as clear to Bertha Plummer as it was to Nydia that marriage is not for her.

Bertha may have been an able woman but the stereotype which persists is one of long-suffering patience and resignation, together with a lack
of 'nous' which is seen as a natural consequence of blindness. This kind of representation seems to be one of a kind with the 'deeply pathetic' painting by John Everett Millais in 1856 of The Blind Girl who 'with her poor instrument of beggary' on her knee rests, unaware of the rainbow at her back. Since the rainbow was regarded as a 'sign of Divine promise specially significant to the blind' the representation was acknowledged as a 'religious picture and a glorious one' (John G. Millais 1899:240).

Significantly however, Kate Flint points out that the meaning which modern commentators read into the painting may not be that which was 'necessarily consciously intended by Millais' (1996:3). She states (and this is confirmed by John G. Millais' critique of the painting) that critical responses to this and other paintings shown in the 1856 Royal Academy exhibition suggest a greater concern 'with the implications of colour deployment...and with accuracy in drawing...than with the type of decoding' (ibid:3) which she is employing here. She suggests that critics of the time, 'looking very selectively at the canvas surface' were 'blinded' to a 'crucial (and in the case of a painting, a troubling) meaning of the Blind Girl: that the most powerful form of vision may be inward, rather than depending on the visible, material world' (ibid:12).

Though Flint states that 'this depiction of a travelling blind girl with a younger figure may be interpreted in a variety of ways' (ibid:3) she warns that 'we would be unwise to assume that our understanding of the visual components of the culture of the period' means that 'a painting was interpreted with all, or even a substantial number of these potential points of reference in mind' (ibid:12).
Flint suggests that these 'references' can be taken as either 'social commentary', e.g. "a subject of pathos and very touching in its story" (Effie Millais [quoted by Flint op.cit:3]), and an example of the vulnerability of the poor to infection and poor living conditions, or as an example of 'typological symbolism' (ibid:5). She points out that 'the double rainbow may be read as a symbol of God's covenant of mercy' (ibid:5), or as a symbol of the light which is denied to the blind girl. She notes that light itself, like the rainbow, was commonly thought of as 'inseparable from God' as was made clear in Holman Hunt's picture, 'The Light of the World', exhibited in 1854 (ibid:6).

Again, while Ruskin praises the detailed countryside background to the blind girl and her companion, Flint sees added symbolism in the 'forget-me-notes', 'the donkey, figuring Christ's passion and the white horse, from the Book of Revelation', the grazing flocks on green pastures and 'the stream of living waters' (ibid:6). She suggests that 'the desire to find compensatory factors, symbolic or otherwise, in blindness leads one to a further, and still more suggestive set of possibilities' since "The Blind Girl" can be understood as alluding to the promise held out by God of inner, rather than external illumination'. She says that this would be 'consonant with the repeated Victorian stress of the paradoxical blessings of blindness' (ibid:7).

Flint believes that 'read in this manner', 'The Blind Girl' becomes more than a social commentary 'or even a spiritual commentary'. She says 'it may be seen as a contribution to a developing discourse which set the visibility and epistemological certainties of the material, industrial world, blindly self-regarding in its own pride, in its achievements, against the higher worth of divine illumination'.
She concludes that we would be wrong to confine our interest 'to that which is directly made visible in their culture' (ibid:13).

However, whilst stereotypes of passivity and hope are used to define Bertha Plummer, Dickens employs enough ingrained beliefs to delineate the character of Stagg in Barnaby Rudge to cause Twersky to say that this depiction is a 'clear expression of the view that blindness leads naturally to immorality'. Twersky sees Stagg as 'the personification of evil', 'a ruthless blackmailer, greedy and cynical' (op.cit:29).

Since K.Tillotson notes however that Barnaby Rudge is 'less a study of individual character than as an expression of Dicken's compassion for the helpless exploited' (1981:Intro.XII), and since Stagg is presented as a highly articulate, observant man, it can be suggested that Dickens is deliberately using the worst of stereotype as a strategem, to point up the contradictions between reality and ingrained belief.

Stagg is both highly aware of his ability to cope, and of the ways in which he and his kind are perceived in a society which makes little provision for them. He challenges the assumption that he, 'being in darkness', ought to 'be better than men who have their sight'. He is angered at the belief that it is 'far worse' for someone without 'the most important sense' to rob, lie or steal, particularly if that someone 'can barely live on the few halfpence that are thrown to him in the streets','dependent' as he must be 'on the mercies of the world' (Dickens 1981:351). Similarly, he describes as 'cant' the belief that 'Heaven' had caused his blindness.

Though Dickens puts these down-to-earth, and doubtless accurate comments into Stagg's mouth, he attributes to him a number of traits which are characteristic of the contradictory nature of much of habitual
belief. Stagg is seen as evil because 'the craft and wickedness of his
department were so much aggravated by his condition' whilst being
credited at the same time with 'an almost divine gift' which 'we are
acustomed to see in those who have lost a human sense' (ibid:345). He
is said to be as observant 'as the keenest sighted man' and described as
independent and able, with 'the quick ears of the blind man' for whom
voices are 'like eyes'. Stagg knows, however, that his senses are
sharpened by 'use and necessity' (ibid:343). He is angered by the
judgements of the sighted and points out to Mrs. Rudge, through the more
sophisticated voice of the narrator, that their 'blindness' about the
condition of sightlessness is as disabling to the blind as is their
physical condition. With some reason, Stagg describes himself as 'a most
illustrious example of blindness' (ibid:343).

Esther Summerson's blindness in Bleak House differs from that of
Bertha Plummer and Stagg in that it is of a transient nature.

_Nevertheless, although it is of short duration only, it 'signifies an
important crisis in the sufferer's life' (Ian Ousby in Dickens 1977:892)
and serves to mark an important staging post in her journey toward
self-discovery (both literal and psychological)' (Graham Storey
1988:21). This is a journey and progression in which the reader becomes
directly involved since Esther's story (Dickens had been influenced by
his reading of Jane Eyre [Ackroyd op.cit:584, Susan Shatto [1984:45]) is
told in the first-person, in retrospect, and 'in the simplest kind of
sequence' (W.J.Harvey in Dickens 1977:96). This is in marked contrast
with the 'impersonal and discontinuous' (Storey op.cit:21) account of
the omniscient narrator which describes the moral and physical disorder
of mid-nineteenth century London, the setting of this complex novel.
It is significant here that insight and understanding come to Esther Summerson not only through blindness, but also through the suffering which she undergoes because of the sight-destroying small-pox which she contracts during the nursing of her maid, Charley. Already insecure in her identity and being—it had been impressed upon her in childhood that 'it would have been far better...that you had never been born' (Dickens 1977:19)—and confused by her 'semi-recognition of Lady Dedlock's resemblance to herself' (Ousby op.cit:982), Esther experiences 'fevered hallucinations' in her illness. Two visual images dominate these hallucinations during the seemingly 'one long night' of their duration. Firstly, Esther tells how she 'laboured up colossal staircases, ever striving to reach the top and ever turned...by some obstruction, and labouring again' (op.cit:431). Secondly, in a more perturbing image, she sees 'strung together somewhere in great black space,...a flaming necklace, or ring, or starry circle of some kind, of which I was one of the beads'. Her only prayer at this time 'was to be taken off from the rest...when it was such an inexplicable agony and misery to be part of the dreadful thing' (op.cit:432). There are potent images here of death and rebirth following a kind of Dantesque or Miltonic journey into a dark and threatening other world where she leaves behind the confusion of her past life. Esther's striving and 'laboured' progress up the 'seemingly endless staircase', with its reminders of Dante's toil 'upward' from Hell (Canto XXXIV:135) and Milton's escape from the 'Stygian pool' (Paradise Lost 3:141), is symbolic of her struggle 'toward the truth about her identity' (Ousby op.cit:982).

Esther's unconscious attempt to arrive at a coherent sense of identity is made the more difficult by her inability, in her dreams, to
separate herself from the 'dreadful thing', the 'flaming necklace' or 'circle' which is both the symbol for Lady Dedlock herself and for the 'vital interrelation' (Ousby op.cit:983) between them. Ousby notes that 'from her first appearance Lady Dedlock had been associated with images of stars and jewellery'. He reminds us that the narrator describes the world of fashion to which she belongs as 'a world wrapped up in too much jeweller's cotton and fine wool [which] cannot hear the rushing of the larger worlds and cannot see them as they circle round the sun'. It might be surmised that Esther Summerson, with her 'dedication to her housekeeping' (Storey op.cit:22), and her concern for the well-being of her family and the ordinary folk of her world, would resist any affiliation with Lady Dedlock's world of 'class pride and fashionable boredom' (Slater op.cit:261) which is 'sometimes unhealthy for want of air' (Dickens op.cit:11).

It matters little that Esther's dreams might be 'closely modelled on passages in De Quincey's Confessions of an Opium Eater (1821,1822)' (Shatto op.cit:7), or that they may come from Dickens' own remembered dreams in childhood where there were recurring images 'of objects or people's lives being tightly bound together, somehow incurring loss of identity' (Ackroyd op.cit:54). It matters little because 'the idea of blindness and of visually symbolic dreams is essential to Esther's realisation of her true identity' which is only to be achieved when 'she is brought to see the body of her mother [Lady Dedlock] at the graveyard where her father, Nemo, is buried' (Ousby op.cit:983). Thus, although the 'small-pox scars are the visible signs of how much Esther has changed', the experience of blindness provides 'quite literally a dark night of the soul' ('a period of anguish or despair, a period of
spiritual aridity suffered by a mystic' (Oxford Dictionary of Phrase, Saying and Quotation, 1997:125) from which she emerges 'tested and matured, ready for the recognition of Lady Dedlock' (Ousby op.cit:982).

Though it might be hard to justify the term 'mystic' in the case of the practical Esther Summerson, it is significant, in view of some of the myths which attach to blindness, that she is said to achieve not only greater clarity of perception through sightloss and suffering but also eventual 'salvation' (Storey op.cit:21) through her subsequent marriage to Alan Woodcourt. It is also significant in this novel that, 'out of a host of characters', only Esther Summerson is said to arrive at a 'progressively clear vision of the world around her' (Ousby op.cit:981). In a novel marked by the 'interconnectedness' of the 'apparently unconnected' (Storey op.cit:20), where people 'are tightly bound together...so that the novel itself grows dark with the mass of lives fluttering together within it' (Ackroyd op.cit:71), she becomes a 'testament to the power of the individual to achieve a clear sighted vision which is at once literal and metaphorical' (Ousby op.cit:981).

Thus, in a novel pervaded by differences of perception and vision, Esther's insight and self-discovery are posited against the lawyer Tulkinghorn's 'blindness to all human feeling' which is 'totally reductive' (Storey op.cit:29) and 'the Court's labyrinthine activities [which] lack any guiding light [and] obscure rather than illuminate' (Ousby op.cit:976). Similarly, the metaphorical blindness implicit in the 'telescopic philanthropy' (Dickens op.cit:34) of Mrs Jellby and "The phrase "dark night of the soul" traces its origins to a work by the Spanish poet and Roman Catholic mystic Saint John of the Cross (1543-1591). 'It is that stage on the mystic path when "spiritual persons suffer great trial...not so much because of the aridities which they suffer, as of the fear which they have of being lost on the road...that God has abandoned them"'. (Internet: Van Morrison Glossary)."
Mrs. Pardiggle, show the 'two charitable ladies' (Storey op.cit:61) to be careless and insensitive to the needs of others. Mrs. Jellyby's 'curious habit of seeming to look a long way off' (Dickens op.cit:37) as she devotes herself 'to the subject of Africa' (op.cit:35) shows her to be unseeing of those immediately about her. The needs of her home, husband and family remain neglected and uncared for.

Mrs. Pardiggle, in contrast, has none of Mrs. Jellyby's 'lunatic idealism' (Storey op.cit:61). Her 'benevolence' is 'interference masquerading as charity'. It ignores 'human respect and human privacy' (op.cit:62). This, 'the blindness that afflicts so many of the novel's characters' is 'a blindness that isolates and deadens them' (op.cit:34). It remains unchanging.

Mr. Rochester in *Jane Eyre* also gains insight after the infliction of blindness suffering and mutilation, but his story is more akin to that of Samson than to any of those already discussed in this chapter. As I have already indicated *Jane Eyre* is taken out of chronological order since it seemed more appropriate to take the novels of Dickens together.


*Jane Eyre* (1847), (here in a 1981 edition), has been described as 'largely a religious novel concerned with the meaning of religion to man and its relevance to his behaviour' (R.B. Martin 1966:81) and as 'saturated in Miltonic echoes' (V. Myers 1987:147) because of its references to Samson and its reminders of *Paradise Lost*. However, a number of writers suggest that its writing owes much to
the circumstances of Charlotte Bronte's own life since 'the shape of the
heroine was dictated by Charlotte's own needs' (Myers ibid:164). Quoting
Helen Moglen, Myers suggests that Bronte was influenced by the traumas
of her schooldays at Cowan Bridge, the dreary years spent as a
governess, her thwarted passion for M. Heger, her employer when she was a
governess in Brussels, her ambivalent relationship with her father and
brother, Bramwell, her sense of isolation and alienation, the intensity
of her imaginative functioning and yearning sexuality, and a religious
aspiration that transcended traditional belief (ibid:164). Thus 'the
mutilation of Edward Rochester, distressing for readers, was a
profoundly necessary resolution for Charlotte, as an assault on
patriarchy and a complaint about the forced passivity, sexual and
economic of women' (ibid:169).

Whether or not Mr. Rochester is the alter ego of her 'generally so
powerful and alarming father' as suggested by R.Fraser (1988:262) and
Myers (op.cit:263) or whether the story is informed by Charlotte's own
'overwhelming feeling for M. Heger' and 'the coincidence of Bramwell's
own guilty passion' (Fraser op.cit:263) it nevertheless presents a
powerful picture of the reality of the loss of sight in a proud and
passionate man who, until the advent of blindness, had 'not yet been
schooled by his own life' (Martin op.cit:78). His initial 'unreality of
vision' (Martin op.cit:77) is transformed by insight, purgation and
repentance as the novel progresses.

Though Myers warns about identifying 'author with heroine'
(op.cit:164) it is interesting to note that Bronte began writing Jane
Eyre at the time of her father's operation for cataracts, in Manchester,
in 1846 (Fraser op.cit:262). Both Fraser and Elizabeth Gaskell
(1857.11:1) write tellingly of the anxiety felt by Charlotte as she witnessed her father's deteriorating sight. When he consulted a Manchester eye-surgeon he was accompanied by both Charlotte and her sister, Anne, but it was Charlotte who, at her father's request, was present at the operation. This was 'not the simple operation of couching but the more complicated one of extracting the cataract' which 'lasted for a quarter of an hour' (Fraser op.cit:262). It was, presumably, carried out without anaesthetic.

It is possible to hear echoes of Gaskell's description of the Reverend Patrick Bronte in his blindness in those of Charlotte's description of Edward Rochester after the fire in which he lost an eye (the other eye became infected and was also lost) and a hand. Gaskell describes how Mr. Bronte could 'groped his way about and recognise the features of those he knew well'. She says that even 'under his great sorrow he was always patient...he enforced a quiet endurance of woe upon himself'. She adds that he was 'driven inwards' and was 'depressed' (op.cit:2).

In the novel itself, Jane Eyre, on her return to Ferndean, describes Rochester as 'trying to see with those sightless eyes' (1981:701), trying 'to walk about: vainly...all was too uncertain. She tells how he 'groped his way back to the house, and re-entering it, closed the door' (ibid:707). Noting his helplessness when blind, she explains that 'he seemed to wish by touch to gain an idea of what lay around him: he met but vacancy still: for the trees were some yards off where he stood' (ibid:707). She was struck by the 'powerlessness of the strong man' whose face had 'lines of habitual sadness' (ibid:709). It reminded her 'of a lamp quenched' which was dependant on others for re-kindling.
Although it seems clear that Bronte's description of Rochester owes much to the actual experience of her father's deteriorated sight, she nevertheless makes use here, consciously or not, of stereotype and myth. Not only does she describe Rochester as helpless, dependent, patient and resigned, almost without life as a 'quenched lamp', but she also implies emasculation in the use of the word 'powerlessness'. Similarly the suffering consequent on loss of sight and hand in the fire caused by his deranged wife, Bertha, is symbolic of purgation and purification. Reminding us of Scott's use of omen in The Bride of Lammermoor, Bronte also invokes belief in portent and divine intervention when Rochester likens himself to the 'old lightning struck tree in Thornfield orchard' (ibid:727).

Rochester himself appears to subscribe to the common belief that to be impaired is to be inferior, dependent and the cause of revulsion. He who had previously 'hated to be helped' (ibid:729), now describes himself as 'a poor blind man whom you will have to lead about by the hand' (ibid:728). The fact that Jane is now indispensible to him, and their roles reversed, is willingly accepted by them both. Again, anticipating that she will be 'revolted' by 'the sightless block', he asks her to 'overlook' his 'deficiencies'. Believing that she will 'now entertain none but fatherly feelings for him' (ibid:713) he fears that marriage is now out of the question.

There are echoes of Milton in the description of Rochester as that 'sightless Samson', the 'caged eagle, whose gold ringed eyes cruelty has extinguished' (ibid:706). Like Milton and Milton's Samson, Rochester also experiences a period of grief and despair following loss of sight. He speaks of the 'dark, dreary life I have dragged on for months past.
Doing nothing, expecting nothing, merging night and day...a ceaseless sorrow' (ibid:716). Like that of Samson before him, Rochester's marriage was also a 'degradation' (Myers op.cit:82) and, true to mythical precedent, Rochester is also blinded as a punishment...for sexual sin, the sin of an attempted bigamous marriage. But myth is also fulfilled in that Rochester is cleansed and redeemed through sacrifice and the 'furnace of affliction' (Myers op.cit:82). Rochester may be 'stone blind' (Bronte op.cit:702), as a 'just judgement on him for keeping his first marriage secret' and for his 'Sultan like propensities and for sexual sin' (Myers op.cit:161) but due regard is also paid to his 'courage, kindness' (ibid:701) when he remained in the burning house. 'The Holocaust of Thornfield becomes a ritualistic purging of his sin' (Martin op.cit:95) as 'Rochester grows to true manliness' through physical suffering and achieves spiritual healing 'though divested of the romantic trappings of virility' (ibid:96).

Rochester, like Samson, admits his fault, 'I did wrong' (Bronte op.cit:730) and acknowledges 'the hand of God in my doom' (ibid:731). He had been 'forced to go through the valley of the shadow of death' but now 'humbled' 'for ever by His chastisements' accepts blindness as Divine Justice' (ibid:730). Grief had now 'replaced frenzy...sorrow and sullenness' and he could say that 'life is sweet still, even without eyes' (ibid:7310.

Martin suggests that there is also an echo of Paradise Lost when, at the end of the novel, Rochester and Jane Eyre 'enter a new life, putting behind them the illicit Eden of the garden at Thornfield'. With a final harking back to Samson Agonistes he indicates that Jane Eyre also ends with 'all forbidden passion spent' (ibid:96).
The 'forbidden passion' in Charles Kingsley's *Westward Ho!* however is not that of a sexual nature but rather one of violent anti-Catholicism and 'unwonted vengeance' against a Spanish ship together with 'utter disregard' for his men (A.J. Hartley 1977:118). Amyas Leigh's 'blasphemy' of 'putting private gains before Queen and Country' are punished by blindness, though 'for a happy ending', 'Kingsley, fortunately made his hero repent of his wilfulness and pride' (ibid:119).

v. Charles Kingsley. 1819-1875.

*Westward Ho!* (first published in 1855; here in a 1902 edition.)

Unlike *Jane Eyre* Kingsley's book was not informed by possible childhood traumas, a domineering father and actual, if indirect, experience of blindness, but from a background of Christian Socialism fostered by his discipleship to F.D. Maurice which 'precipitated' Kingsley 'into novel writing'. Hartley states that, in general, Kingsley's novels are 'relatively strong in plot largely because they are built on religious conversion' (ibid:19) similar to that of many Biblical figures.

In *Westward Ho!* Amyas Leigh's conversion comes after he is blinded by lightning 'all red hot, transfigured into fire and behind, the black, black night' (1902:530). Although Leigh initially regards his loss of sight as 'unmerciful' (ibid:530) and begs 'Heaven to remove that woe' (ibid:531), he later likens himself to Samson, acknowledging that blindness had come as a 'just judgement on him for his wilfulness and ferocity' (ibid:532). He only accepts his blindness after recognising that he had been 'wilful and proud, and a blasphemer, swollen with cruelty and pride, and God has brought me low for it, and cut me off from my evil delight' (ibid:535). He is now 'resigned to God's will'
not because he repented fighting Spaniards, but because he repented 'hating even the worst of them' (ibid:535).

Westward Ho!, inspired as it was by an upsurge of patriotism at the time of the Crimean War, eulogises the 'Elizabethan age to the disparagement of the Victorian and the Crimean disaster' (Hartley op.cit:112) and lauds the successes of its buccaneers.

As an Elizabethan adventurer fighting the Spanish conquerers of the Americas, Amyas Leigh is initially presented as a 'gentleman adventurer' (1902:177) who is at once 'both a modest and sober-minded Englishment' (ibid:190), 'the most sensible of John Bulls' (ibid:458) who yet expects to 'live by my sword' (ibid:283) and 'do all harm possible to the Queen's enemies and the enemies of God' (ibid:284). Though he is applauded for his ferocious fighting achievements and the pillaging of Spanish treasure, he is nevertheless punished for his vengeful pursuit of the Spaniard whom he blames for his brother's torture and death. As de Soto's ship founders, and in a clear intimation that the punishment comes direct from the hand of God, Leigh is struck by lightning.

Apart from the dramatic unreality of this event and the equally fanciful reconciliation between Leigh and the drowned de Soto, Kingsley shows himself keenly aware of the reactions which follow sudden impairment, and the adjustment to, and acceptance of disability. Leigh is described as being 'utterly unnerved by the horror of his misfortune, writhing in great horror' and calling on his friend, Cary, 'to kill him and put him out of his misery' (ibid:531). As already said, he regards his loss of sight as 'unmerciful'. Later, resenting and fearing the effects of his dependency he describes himself as 'a useless carcase'.
(ibid:539), 'a great blind ox ... who must be fed and tended like a baby for the rest of his life' (ibid:540).

However, though Leigh repents his 'blasphemy' and resigns himself to blindness, his words, which echo those of Samson, indicate the finality of his condition. This once active fighting man is now 'shut up alone with all his strength, valour and fame, in the dark prison house of his mysterious doom' (p.539). The moral is clear—though Leigh is portrayed as living quietly and contentedly he has, nevertheless, been severely punished for sinful behaviour.

Hartley says that Kingsley is reminding 'his own generation that the spirit is at work everywhere', and that 'love to God and neighbour is fundamental and contains all creeds'. He is pointing out that, in resuming his regenerate life, Amyas Leigh is confirming that 'though blind he sees that God alone is Judge, that only in resignation to Him and in concord with his enemy can he honour his oath' (ibid:120).

It it is interesting to note however that whilst Kingsley attributes Leigh's blindness to God, he nevertheless makes him the object of the medical skills which were available to the Elizabethans. He notes that 'the surgeon talked learnedly about melancholic humours' and 'over pungency of the animal spirits' until he 'fell back on the universal panacea of blood-letting' (ibid:532).

Though these Elizabethan remedies proved unavailing to Amyas Leigh, the Victorian ones offered to Lucilla Finch, in Wilkie Collin's novel Poor Miss Finch, resulted, if only temporarily and unsatisfyingly, in the return of her sight.
Wilkie Collins. 1826-1889.

Poor Miss Finch (first published in 1872: here in a 1897 edition).

Though Kingsley's adventure story had been informed by his own Christian Socialist thinking, it had been set in an imagined sixteenth century world. In contrast, Wilkie Collins declared, when he wrote Poor Miss Finch, that he 'tried to present human nature in its inherent inconsistencies and self contradictions...in its intricate mixture of good and evil, of great and small, as I see it in the world about me'. He wished to affirm that 'conditions of human happiness are independent of bodily affliction' (1897:I.V.). S. Lonoff confirms that Collins had 'been careful to verify data' and to 'consult lawyers on legal points and doctors on medical phenomena' (1982:29). As a consequence, his portrayal of the German oculist, Herr Grosse, was realistic enough to force the author to write, in a note to the present edition, that he had 'received several written applications requesting me to communicate his present address to patients desirous of consulting him' (1897:1V.).

It is not clear just how much Collins knew about the then developing interest in the poor conditions of most blind people, nor to what degree he was actually versed in current knowledge about causation and treatment, but it seems reasonable to assume that because he was without sight himself 'for weeks at a time with gout in his eyes' (N.P.Davis 1956:271) he could add enough realism to his narrative to cause a critic to say 'we have little doubt that Mr. Collins has made his blind girl more faithful in nature and thought, act and speech than Lord Lytton's Hydia' (N. Page 1974:96).
However, though Collins still relied on his physician, Francis Carr Beard, as 'his authority on physical and mental disorder' (Lonoff op.cit:24), it did not deter him from planning a novel 'with stupendous originality' (Davis op.cit: 226). The theme of 'love between a blind girl who could not stand to think of the colour blue and a man who stained himself blue by drinking silver nitrate as a cure for epilepsy' (Davis op.cit:226) had occurred to him after noting that the skin of his friend, Dickens, had 'turned him blue in spots' (Davis op.cit:25) following treatment with this chemical.

Although some critics were to think Collins ingenuous, though mistaken, in his portrayal of the 'optical psychology of blindness and the optical phenomena accompanying the first restoration of the blind to sight' (Page op.cit:21/22) he nevertheless paints a persuasive picture of Lucilla Finch's attempt to come to terms with the sighted world, once her cataracts had been removed by Herr Grosse.

The presentation which follows 'closely the precepts of Diderot on the blind' (Twersky op.cit:35) is, coincidentally, very similar to that of Brian O'Doherty's portrayal of the same Maria Theresa von Paradis (in The Strange Case of Mademoiselle P.[1992]) whom Hauy had consulted about reading systems for the blind. Maria Theresa von Paradis' sight had returned following treatment by Anton Mesmer, only to be lost again, it is implied, for 'psychological' reasons. Lucilla French lost her sight again out of 'impatience with medical procedures' (Lonoff op.cit:163) but neither she nor her predecessor was to regret the loss of the ability to see. Indeed, contrary to all common belief, Lucilla says, after the operation has failed, that 'the days I had my sight have been the unhappiest days of my life' (Collins 1897:417). Since, for her,
sight is fallible, she does not understand those who 'attach such an absurd importance to your eyes'. With reminders of the comments of Lenotre she says 'I set my touch...against your eyes as much the more trustworthy, and much the most intelligent sense of the two' (ibid:224). Surprising as her assertion may seem, it is nevertheless borne out by a number of the autobiographers whose accounts follow.

The story of Lucilla's love for the 'morbidly sensitive Oscar du Burg' who turns blue after treatment for epilepsy, and the impersonation of Oscar by his brother Nugent, appears to be improbable and fanciful. In contrast, the depiction of a competent and contented Lucilla is convincing enough for Twersky to suggest that she is 'one of the most human persons among the sightless characters in literature' (op.cit:35). Described in true Diderot fashion as having 'eyes in the tips of her fingers' (Collins op.cit:145) she also has the 'delicate ear' (ibid:14) of an able musician. She is said to be able 'to roam the countryside alone' (ibid:18) in an independent fashion. There is no suggestion here that Lucilla should not marry because of blindness and indeed she is seen as desirable by both brothers. It is not Lucilla Finch who sees herself as pitiable, but the 'simple people of South Downs' who, compassionately, call her 'Poor Miss Finch'.

Collins uses his narrator, Madam Pratolungo, to indicate the gulf between Lucilla Finch's acceptance of, and happiness in blindness, and the untutored view and opinion of someone who is unacquainted with what she sees as handicap and disability. Madam Pratolungo's commentary is full of unsubstantiated beliefs about the sightless. She admits, with some relief, that the eyes of 'the poor child' are 'nothing to recoil from' though 'the poor dim sightless eyes had a faded, changeless
inexpressive look...that was all' (ibid:31). Inevitably, perhaps, she concludes 'in them was death', 'that one sad drawback' (ibid:14). She ascribes to Lucilla, against all the evidence, 'the incurable suspicion of the blind' (ibid:64) and insists that 'the minds of the blind are, by cruel necessity, forced inward on themselves'. She believes that 'they live apart from us...in their own dark sphere of which we know nothing' (ibid:35).

Collins had achieved his goal of interpreting 'faithfully what others have represented for artistic purposes'. He had shown 'a blind person acting and speaking as she really would act and speak' (ibid:14).

Lucilla Finch is portrayed as an able young woman who happens to be without sight. She is independent physically and mentally and is able to lead as full a life as possible because of financial independence. The 'original manner' of his story, however, serves only to detract from its purpose since an unlikely romance with a man who turns blue does little to persuade the reader to consider truths about blindness.

Thus, it is interesting to note that, in an earlier novel, The Dead Secret which depicted events occurring in 1829, Collins had contributed his own fair share of myth and assumption. In the novel he tells how the young Leonard Frankland, after getting 'a bad pain at the back of his head' and 'all sorts of moving spots before the eyes' had been 'blistered...behind the ears and between the shoulders and drenched...with mercury...moped up in a dark room by doctors from London' (1898:35). His 'hopeless' condition was attributed by 'oculists in London and Paris' to an 'apoplectic effusion in the brain' or to 'the long weakness from which he had twice suffered after illness' (ibid:35).
Significantly, it was felt that Rosamund Twerton, who had been 'engaged long before this cruel affliction befell young Frankland' had 'made a sacrifice' in marrying him 'even though old Frankland had offered to release her 'from the engagement' (ibid:37). Rosamund Twerton had no intention, however, of abandoning her fiance. Taking every responsibility upon herself she is anxious that 'his slightest caprice should be humoured' (ibid:33). She promises that 'you shall never know a sad moment, Lenny, if I can help it as long as you live' (ibid:37). Fortunately this 'not very convincing view of blindness' (Davis op.cit:195) was followed, fifteen years later, by the more informed Poor Finch.

In view of Collins' attempt to provide a more accurate depiction of blindness, it might be anticipated that two later works of the nineteenth century, Kipling's The Light That Failed (1891) and Korolenko's The Blind Musician (published in Russia in 1885, translated into English in 1890) would follow a similar pattern. That this is not so is a measure of the tenacious hold which habitual ideas have on the human imagination.

I intend to consider Korolenko's work separately because it is not comparable with those which have already been discussed in this chapter. Although these works came from different periods in the century and were, as I hope I have shown, shaped to some degree by individual experience, they were, nevertheless, broadly informed by the same culture. Korolenko, on the other hand, was born in the Ukraine in 1853. Exiled to Siberia for revolutionary activities in 1879, he 'encountered tramps, thieves, pilgrims and social outcasts' who were 'to figure prominently in his stories' (Enc. Britt.1991.VI:965).
Though it cannot be said that the blind Petrik is portrayed as an outcast he is nevertheless depicted as 'different' and uniquely gifted. The description of the 'inward life of this extraordinary boy' is however convincing enough for Korolenko's translator to call it a 'triumph of art'. He notes particularly the 'words of intuition' which the writer uses to describe his protagonist (S.Stepniak 1890, Intro: VI). I have chosen to include the work here because it contains a wealth of myth and stereotype and provides proof of the widespread nature of uninformed belief.

I will, however, consider first the last of the nineteenth century novels to come from the British Isles, _The Light That Failed._


_The Light that Failed_ (first published in 1891: here in a 1951 edition). A number of critics and biographers (Edmund Gosse [1971:116], Lord Birkenhead [1978:307], J.M.Barrie [1971:84]) suggest that Kipling would have been wise to stick to his short story writing rather than to attempt this first novel though. However, for all its awkwardness, _The Light that Failed_ has much of interest. In particular, the autobiographical element noted by both Birkenhead and Charles Carrington repays attention.

Carrington believes that the early chapters, which 'are out of key with the rest of the book' (1955:16) owe much to the 'wretchedness' (ibid:17) of the five years which Kipling spent, with his sister, boarded out with the Holloway family at Southsea, after having been 'deserted' (Birkenhead op.cit:13) by their parents who remained in India. He also believes that Maisie, 'an unrealised phantom figure'
in the novel, is based on Kipling's enslaved memory for Florence Garrard, for whom he had been 'an easy prey' (ibid:42) when he fell in love with her in 1880. Though he had 'been faithful to her image for five-six years' and had supposed himself to be engaged to her, she 'put an end' to his hopes in 1884, eighteen months after his return to India. She had, like Maisie, determined to 'make a career of her own with her drawings' (ibid:42).

There are a number of other reminders of Kipling's own life in the novel. Firstly, the depiction of Kipling's protagonist, Dick Heldar, as an artist and a soldier, owes as much to his family background and relationships as it does to his 'passion for the military' (Birkenhead op.cit:224) and 'pre-occupation with war' (op.cit:225). Rudyard's father, Lockwood Kipling, 'a man of wide reading and close observation' was 'a sculptor and an artist' (Carrington op.cit:34) who had been employed as a sculptor during the building of the Victoria and Albert Museum before his appointment, in 1865, as Professor of Architecture and Sculpture in Bombay where his son was born. During the younger Kipling's childhood in England, he spent holiday periods with his aunts, Georgia and Agnes who were married, respectively, to the artist Edward Burne-Jones and Edward Poynter. Burne-Jones was said to have been 'adored' by Rudyard and Trix (Carrington op.cit:5). Similarly, visits to British military camps in India had given the 'soldier manque, Kipling' (Birkenhead op.cit:234) an enduring 'veneration' (op.cit:254) for soldiers and 'subaltern hero-worship' (op.cit:175) which was to appear time and again in his poetry and prose.

Secondly, though Carrington states that the 'author's shortness of sight can hardly be considered relevant to the realistic description of
Dick Heldar's blindness' (op. cit:169) it is nevertheless true that Kipling was not unfamiliar with the problems of impaired vision. He had been taken as a child to see an 'eye specialist' (A. Wilson 1977:32) after his not insignificant problems had been noticed, so that it is from a certain amount of knowledge that he describes how the oculist, using a 'gas microscope', decides that the cause of Heldar's failing sight is 'decay of the optic nerve' and 'therefore hopeless' (1951:199).

Heldar had initially received a sword cut to the head whilst fighting in the Sudan, and it is to the Sudan that he returns in the hope of finding death after his rejection by Maisie because of his 'worn-out eyes' (ibid:222).

The vivid description of fear and panic, denial and increasing despair which accompanies the insidious onset of blindness (whether or not it came from Kipling's own experience of weak sight) is realistic enough to at least partially justify Lionel Johnson's comment that the author was 'an observer and not a thinker' (1971:90). Blindness was particularly hard for Heldar who had, using his sight, achieved acclaim as a soldier-artist in the deserts of the Middle East. Kipling tellingly describes the uncertainty, dependency and apathy of the newly blind who find themselves in the 'long employless days of dead darkness' (1951:194). It is a description which is highly reminiscent of Samson in his days of captivity.

Dick Heldar, like Rochester and Leigh, experiences pity and 'tender grief' (ibid:203) for himself. He declares himself to be 'a poor beggar' (ibid:251). After passing his blindness off as 'a touch of ophthalmia' (ibid:278) (which the soldier alongside him accepts since he too had 'had a turn of it...its as bad as being blind' (ibid:278)) Heldar gropes
'his way back to the battle field where, aspiring like an aphrodisiac
the smell of gun-powder and slaughter, he achieves a self-sought death
at the hands of his friend, the enemy' (B. Miller 1972:6) whilst amongst
his erstwhile fellow soldiers and journalists. Whether it is Maisie's
'antagonism, her usurpation, at every juncture, of the dominant role
which have reduced an over-confident, over successful young man to
darkness and to impotence' (Miller op. cit: 6) or whether 'given Kipling's
bad eyesight, the blindness is an understandable symbol for fear of loss
of creative powers' (Wilson op. cit: 157) the result is effectively
suicide, however melodramatically achieved. Kipling notes that Heldar's
'luck had held out until the last, even to the crowning mercy of a
kindly bullet through the head' (1951:292). Death here, as so often (e.g
Vera Brittain who states 'it is better to be anything than blind: I am
not sure it is not even better to be dead' [1981:339]) is seen to be
preferable to blindness, to the 'living death', 'shut up in the dark'
(Kipling op. cit: 173) of failed sight. This is the enduring fear that
only the autobiographers are able to refute with any degree of
conviction.

However, despite this depiction of despair and the final violent
rejection of blindness, Kipling shows that he has enough knowledge about
the capabilities of the blind to indicate that Heldar is able to 'grop' his way back to his friends on the battlefield. In comparison,
Korolenko's work here appears to depend more on 'words of intuition'
than on actual knowledge of blindness. This said, however, it is clear
that Korolenko is not unaware of the importance to a blind person of the
uses of the senses of touch and hearing though he does stretch credulity
when he attributes extra-ordinary gifts to the blind child, Petrik.
As I indicated earlier, I have chosen to include this novel, which admittedly sits uneasily alongside those already discussed, because it demonstrates particularly the almost indestructable and world-wide quality of so much of mythical belief.

Despite recourse to the Reference Library of the R.N.I.B. I have been unable to obtain any information about provision for the blind in Russia, although Bernard Lowenfeld notes that a school for blind children was established in St. Petersburgh in 1809 (1975:80) as a result of Hay's example in Paris. Thus the novel is discussed without regard for a social context and included only for the views which it expounds on blindness.

The novel opens on a scene of 'foreboding' and sense of 'terrible calamity' as Petrik is born 'in the house of his father, a rich Ruthenian noble' (1890:2). It is in keeping with the cliched prose of the novel that we are told that the child's 'first plaintive cry' suggests to his mother that 'he had come into the world bearing a cross' 'which would overshadow his life from the cradle to the grave' (ibid:2).

Significantly, it is only the mother who notices 'an indefinable something—which differentiated him from other young children' (ibid:2). The 'indefinable something' however is diagnosed as incurable blindness, proof of which lies in 'the portentous strangeness of her boy's face' which was 'always so immutably and unchildishly grave' (ibid:4).

With a mixture of fact and fantasy Korolenko describes the search for explanation and cause. Since neither 'the skills of the faculty' nor
'all the prayers of the Chuch' could restore sight 'to those vacant yet beautiful eyes' (ibid:10) the child's mother, not uncommonly it might be said, 'half-believed' that those 'who were responsible for her child's being were in some mysterious way answerable for his affliction' (ibid:12). Guilt-ridden, she allows the child to become an 'unconscious despot', his every whim respected and obeyed.

Significantly, it is the child's uncle, Max, the 'maimed' ex-soldier, who identifies with this child whom he believes to be as 'equally unfitted for the battle of life' (ibid:10) as he is. Since Petrik's father, immersed as he is in estate business, ignores his son, Max encourages the child to explore his surroundings in the conviction that to have 'no eyes' does not mean 'no legs' (ibid:14) though he is not above thinking that 'it would have been better if he had never been born' (ibid:13).

Korolenko is clearly aware here of the great sensitivity of hearing and touch achieved by many blind people. He describes Petrik as 'observing through his hands' (ibid:16) as he employed 'rapid and agile fingers' (ibid:15). Similarly, he notes that 'his acutest sense, the sense of hearing' (ibid:17) provided Petrik with the means to 'build up his conceptions of the life which he could never see' (ibid:18). The realism of this account is however marred by overstatement and pathos. Not only does Korolenko suggest that 'the sublety' (ibid:16) of Petrik's touch is almost enough to distinguish one colour from another (and state that he liked best brightly coloured clothes) but he describes the child (then about two years old) as 'falling pale and unconscious' (ibid:26), overcome by the 'irruption of hurrying sounds of Spring' (ibid:19). He says, for the blind boy, 'the scene [which] resembled a vast temple
prepared for a glorious feast' was 'merely an immense darkness which moved around him, touching his soul from every side, thrilling him with new and unknown sensations and stirring his heart with unspeakable thoughts' (ibid:23).

It is noticeable that Korolenko falls prey here to the common assumption that though 'nature had deprived Petrik of sight' 'she had bestowed upon him many noble qualities' since he says that 'all his other senses were wonderfully acute' (ibid:27). He indicates that, had Petrik not been blind, he would have been recognised simply as someone who was 'exceptionally serious and thoughtful, who seemed to be always looking a long way off with strange, motionless eyes' (ibid:33).

Though Petrik is not gifted, Tiresias-like, with prophecy, he is adept enough for his uncle to believe that 'by assiduous effort he might train the blind boy to be a champion of the right and true and make him a great and good man' (ibid:28). He ensures that 'the poor little chap' (ibid:60) is given a wide ranging education (at home) in the belief that Petrik's 'exceptional gifts' (ibid:60) for music are, at best, only for entertaining friends. His training is intended to correct the 'proneness to introspection and dreaminess which was the natural outcome of his blindness and his passion for music'. His 'infirmity' at this point is no 'hindrance' to him. The only signs of blindness are 'a shade of sadness' in his face and a modification in 'the natural vivacity of his temper' (ibid:62). Petrik is said to have 'no painful consciousness' (ibid:64) about his condition and lives a full life except for lacking companions of his own age.

However, the peasant boys who come at Max's invitation are 'abashed at their unwonted surroundings' and leave Petrik 'out in the cold'
They tend to mock the boy who cannot see them. They are more successfully replaced by the compassionate and self-sacrificing, Velia, who is more 'a diminutive woman than a young girl' (ibid:70) and, like Petrik, old beyond her years. Petrik is said to be about ten years old when, because of Velia's ignorance about blindness, he is shocked into realising that it can 'inspire not merely pity, but repulsion and fear' (ibid:75). With 'his heart well nigh bursting with anger and humiliation' he feels, for the first time in his life 'the reproach of his infirmity' (ibid:74/5). Petrik informs Velia that, though blind, he is 'not strange' (ibid:77) and explains to the pitying girl that he can read 'with my fingers' (ibid:80). The ensuing friendship is described as 'simply a God-send to the lad' who 'no longer lost himself in reveries and sought lonesome places' (ibid:89).

Since 'self-abnegation' is 'bread of life' (ibid:91) to Velia, it comes as no surprise to find that she and Petrik eventually marry although not before he experiences 'a vague but persistent melancholy' (ibid:98) brought about by a longing for sight, a longing which some of the autobiographers of the next century declare, with some vigour, to be entirely false and an assumption of the sighted. They take issue with Korolenko's statement that 'Petrik's cravings for light were natural and inevitable' and with the suggestion that, to some extent at least, 'our spiritual life depends on our optical impression' (ibid:97). They would not agree with the author's belief that because 'the windows of the soul' were closed to Petrik 'all of wit and humour and fun' were 'beyond his ken' (ibid:98).

In view of Korolenko's stance it is perhaps inevitable that he describes his 'hot-house plant' (ibid:103) protagonist as finding solace
in the sadness and pathos which abound in the character, the songs and
the folk-lore of Ruthenia. He seems to be unable to come to terms with
Petrik's 'illimitable darkness' (ibid:103) which he likens to 'death'
(ibid:161). Despite possessing 'intuitive knowledge' (ibid:101) of
things which only a sighted person could know, Korolenko intimates that
Petrik is in 'a condition of keen expectancy' for his sight to return,
whilst being 'haunted by a foreboding that this darkness might...stretch
out...and touch...something of his soul which was waiting to be wakened
out of its long sleep' (ibid:103). Clearly, Korolenko believes that only
sighted lives lead to fulfillment.

Petrik is only able to achieve 'a place in the world' (ibid:143), as
a blind pianist who serves 'a noble purpose' (ibid:175) by using 'the
divine power which God had given him to plead the cause of the poor'
(ibid:186), after he has been shocked out of apathy and discontent by
the plight of blind beggars who, dependent on alms, are driven from
place to place by the more able. Long inhibited by his mother's
overprotection and fear, and Velia's doubts, he has fretted against the
'quiet and monotony' which 'oppressed him' (ibid:116), particularly
after his uncle 'deliberately and remorselessly made a break in the
wall' (ibid:116) which keeps him from the outside world by introducing a
number of young men of Petrik's own age and class into their home.
'Their bounding hopes, their novel ideas' (ibid:113) provide a bitter
contrast to the unruffled 'calm of his monotonous life' (ibid:104). It
is only the 'terrible lesson' (ibid:174) of the blind beggars which is
to cause Petrik, in his uncle's words 'to see the light' and provide him
with 'his work and his mission' (ibid:186).
There is evidence enough then, to show that even at the end of the nineteenth century, fictional accounts of blindness continue to promote mythical and stereotyped ideas about blindness and the blind, even when there is actual knowledge and experience of impaired or lost sight. Whilst this knowledge led, in some instances, to more informed and realistic portrayals of the abilities of blind people, and a reduction in suggestions of divine reward or punishment, it is also clear that personal creeds and experience have a bearing on most if not all accounts. The effects of increased technology, advances in medical knowledge, and not least the increasingly heard voices of the blind themselves, will be described in the next two chapters.
CHAPTER 5.

**Depictions of Blindness in Twentieth Century Literature.**

I hope I have shown that at the end of the nineteenth century the situation of most blind people, in this country at least, was precarious and subject to the many prejudices of the sighted, notwithstanding the considerable improvements in educational and employment provision and advances in medical understanding.

I hope that I have also shown that most of the novels discussed demonstrate little understanding of the growing impetus for change in the world of the blind, but continue to promote myth and stereotype either out of limited understanding and of the desire to enhance a story, or from personal creed.

My intention in this chapter remains the same i.e. to test the truth, in the literature of the current century, of Porter's statement that 'literary truths illuminate the understanding of the living process...the meaning of of health and illness' (1993:1) and at the same time take cognizance of the even greater social, medical and technological advances of the present day and the pressing demand for 'integration' (Lowenfeld op.cit:vii) instead of isolation and segregation.

I mean also to test the accuracy of June Roses's assertion that 'most of us who can see do not recognise the blind as ordinary people.' She says that 'we set them apart', 'we see the blind through a haze of prejudice and misconception'. She believes that darkness still 'colours
our view, darkness and squalor and pity, all the legacy of Victorian attitudes to the blind" (1970:11)

Choice of Texts.

My selection of twentieth century texts proved to be much more complex than had been the case with the nineteenth century texts. The twentieth century provides a great deal more material which extends over a number of genre: novels (both of a 'light' and a more serious nature), poetry (including the work of a number war poets), books written for children and, not least, science fiction. However, since publications are listed by decade, I looked for at least one work in each ten-year period on the assumption that, as medical knowledge grew and societal values and provision changed alongside the century's events, these would serve to inform the writings of the time, to provide a kind of on-going and evolving commentary.

Experience now shows that anticipation was only partially fulfilled, even when exhortatory texts such as those of Fr. T. Carroll and Bernard Lowenfeld appeared in mid-century (together with those of Monbeck, Hirtley and Farrell which I have already cited) alongside the deliberate promotion and dissemination of information about the nature of handicap and its consequences in literature for children. Nevertheless, although the task seemed simple enough, the initial search was, in the event, somewhat random and dependent largely upon library catalogues since most of the material was new to me. Although there is considerable variation in literary presentation, depth of perception and characterisation, and actual knowledge about blindness, I decided to retain this mixture since it provides examples of what continues to be offered to the
reading public as representations of blindness. However, since my aim throughout this thesis has been to trace the persistence in literature of the notion of blindness as a consequence of sin and the belief in divine gifts as compensation for affliction, I have retained only those texts where the protagonists are made directly subject to myth and the stereotypes which arise from it. Thus, I have excluded from discussion a whole range of different kinds of novel: novels where blindness is expressed largely in metaphorical terms e.g. The Day of the Triffids (John Wyndham 1951) where loss of sight is synonymous with the disintegration of society; novels such as Blind Man with a Pistol (Chester Himes 1968) where blindness indicates random violence, and novels such as The Outsider (Ernest Sabato 1950) where lack of sight is equated with lack of insight, self-deception and besottedness. I have also excluded from detailed discussion The Eyes of Max Carrados (Ernest Bramah 1923) because though it is full of stereotypical comment and belief, it adds no new insights. A more recent novel, James Kelman's How late it was, how late (1994), is omitted for similar reasons although it brings reminders of the story of Samson. The protagonist, Sammy, also feels beset by his enemies and claims to have been beaten up by the police, the 'sodjers'. Sammy, however, is not to bring down the bureaucratic organisations which deny him help, but flees to England to start a new life. It is not clear whether Sammy's blindness is a result of the 'doing' by the police, or the outcome of a two-day drinking session, but his tale provides a vivid and immediate commentary on one particular man's response to sudden loss of sight. Though he describes his blindness as a 'new predicament' (ibid:10), a 'new beginning' (ibid:11) after a life of petty crime, he also, like Esther Summerson,
experiences it as a kind of Dantean 'limbo land' (ibid:175) where he
dwells 'suspended' (Dante, Canto IV of Hell 1949:91) between two worlds
and where he 'blunders' (op.cit:319), vulnerable, helpless,
disorientated and panic stricken, and is subject to both the blinkered
view of statutory organisations and the limited vision of the police. He
believes they now see him as 'trapped' (op.cit:189) by blindness and
that 'being stuck inside yer head's a fate worse than death'
(op.cit:190). However, he finds, like Milton before him, that 'being
stuck inside yer head' has its own rewards and advantages. It does not
prevent him from leaving a confused trail at the end of the novel as he
supposedly heads for England and away from his life in Scotland.

Similar reasoning informed my decision to acknowledge, but not to use
for detailed comment, the work of two blind poets of this century, Jack
Clemo (1916-1994) and John Heath-Stubbs (1918-). Neither poet makes any
great issue of his lack of sight and indeed Clemo indicates that
blindness is 'a subject I would never bother to write about, except as
an incidental complication of religious or erotic problems' (1980:83).
There is a rare, and somewhat oblique reference to his condition (he was
both blind and deaf) in his poem Affirmative Ways (in Broad Autumn
1975):

The trite line of condolence
The blind glimpse truths that sighted people miss,
The deaf hear subtler tongues astir within
The paralysed thrill with a rarer bliss.... lines 19-22.

There is also an explanatory note, in his autobiography, that the
'quenched wires' of his poem Clay Phoenix relate not to his eyes (as
some critics suppose) but rather to his 'hope [or loss of it] of
marrying T'. (1980:83). Clemo writes that he never 'said anything which
blind people are supposed to say' because he suffers from 'white blindness' rather than the 'terrifying blackness which some blind people know' (ibid:95). He explains that the 'white scum' (ibid:95), the 'white phosphorescent fog', which prevents him from seeing is caused by 'damaged blood-cells at the back of his eyes' (ibid:93). However, as a poet, he claims some kinship with Milton since he, too, uses his 'talents on a controversial propaganda level' (ibid:91) but unlike Milton he makes no claims to be either a prophet or a messenger. He insists that he is 'not sealed off for a life of quiet meditation' and refutes any suggestion that 'blindness would make me more of an idealist—it could bring me no vision of God' (ibid: 96). He asserts that he is not 'the sort of mystic who would create poems which came exclusively from within his own soul' (op.cit:106) but is instead 'a spirit-and-sense mystic' since 'the artist' in him 'demanded realism—landscapes, people, events'. His 'inner vision' gave 'transcendent meaning to the external world' (ibid:107). Thus Clemo's austere and intensely personal poetry is of an idiosyncratically religious nature, in line with his Calvinist faith, and centred on the qualities he found in the bare landscape around the Cornish clay workings where he lived. He refused 'to think or write within handicaps' but preferred to 'feel normal enough to fit into the thought-patterns of a normal wife' (ibid:136).

In contrast, John Heath-Stubbs is described as a man of 'formidable erudition' (J.Van Domelen 1993:viii), 'an accomplished craftsman and all-round poet: an Augustan writer with more than a touch of Elizabethan about him'. Said to be 'a true servant of the Muse' with 'a remarkable feel for words [and] a fine metrical ear' (William Oxley:462), his
poetry shows something of the sheer breadth of his interests—witness his concerns in myth and history, religion, animals, music and 'fine arts' (Van Domelen op.cit:49).

Though Heath-Stubbs' poetry contains a number of biographical details he makes only passing reference to his blindness. He does not attempt to sublimate it or deny it, as Jack Clemo largely does—for many years Clemo refused help from the Welfare Officer, refused to learn Braille or the manual alphabet, or to attend clubs for the handicapped (ibid:90)—but acknowledges it as a fact. Two early poems (Epitaph 1951) and Scylla and Charybdis (1963) record the fact that he was 'wall-eyed' but it is only in later poems that he suggests that poor sight and eventual blindness is problematical to him. In Prayer to St. Lucy (1952) the poet describes himself as being 'sixty per cent in the dark' whilst in In Memory of Fr. Curtis C.R. (1985) he poignantly tells how he was 'brought a rose' as he lay

In a hospital bed. The darkness
Slowly encroaching through the years,
Had finally overcome, leaving me free
To recreate the world, from finger tips,
From voices overheard, from images
Vividly remembered, from drifts of scent. lines 3-8.

Though the rose is presented 'like any other gift' (1.10) it, nevertheless, becomes a symbol of hope for the poet since it comes from a garden which, once 'waiting re-creation' (1.16), still flourishes many years after the 'act of faith' (1.17) which created it. Now the poet can make his own 'act of faith' because the 'gift' of blindness has left him 'free to recreate the world' from his own unique experience, 'from finger tips, from voices overheard' and from 'images vividly remembered, from drifts of scent'.

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Thus, as I hope to have shown, the work of these two poets and the aforementioned texts add little to the particular thrust of this thesis and so have been excluded from detailed analysis. Before discussing the chosen texts, however, I intend briefly to place them in their social and medical context.

A. Toward Integration: Education, Employment and Medical Advance.
As already indicated, most of the novels discussed in the last chapter provided little challenge to existing views about the status and behaviour of blind people. It is true that there is evidence that some of the authors concerned had experience of blindness (albeit in some cases at second hand) and also knowledge, however limited, of causation
and treatment, but no novels, even those of the latter part of the
century, indicate awareness of the considerable changes that were taking
place in educational and social provision and the thinking that lay
behind it.

This criticism is perhaps too harsh when one takes into account
Rose's statement that, even a century ago, 'the prospect for all but a
privileged few was dark and depressing' since there was, at that time,
'no substitute for the human eye' (op.cit:11). The process of 'self-
emancipation' may have started with the work of Hauy, Braille and the
founders of the early European schools and workshops, but in this
country at least, provision beyond that of subsistence support provided
by the Poor Law was slow to accumulate. For evidence of this we need
look no further than the contents of a letter to the Editor of The Times
in 1860. The writer, Edmund C. Johnson, states that of nearly five
thousand blind people in London 'all [were] more or less struggling
against their dire affliction'. Of the five thousand, only one hundred
blind people were in 'affluent circumstances' whilst 'four hundred
subsist upon the bounty of their friends' and a further 'one thousand
drag on a poor, but independent existence by working at a trade, selling
a few baskets or matches, or by playing on some musical instrument in
the streets or at a public house'. Johnson notes that 'the remainder are
utterly destitute, just saved from starvation by begging from door to
door, recipients of the benefits of the several public charities for the
blind in London or inmates of the workhouse'. In the context of the
struggle toward independence and integration with the sighted world
which occurred over the next century, it is important to note that
Johnson goes on to report that 'Blind men of all classes are shut out
from the active pursuits and excitements of daily life. Their world is confined to the narrow spheres of their own immediate circle. Their industry is crippled by competition with the seeing; their literature is limited from the very nature of tangible typography and by the paucity of books whilst their ordinary tone of thought is fettered by the unconquerable feeling of dependence which besets them at every turn' (This letter is quoted in the Report of the Royal National Institute for the Blind 1992:3).

Although, as the writer indicates, there was recourse to the charitable organisations of the day, their help was limited and carried its own stigmatizing overtones. Since blindness was still regarded as a punishment (syphilis, with its attendant moral condemnation, continued to be a primary cause of blindness) the charities 'reflected the earnest intention of the donors'. They restricted their help to those of 'sober and good morals' (a requirement of Acton's charity for example), or those who could claim both 'poverty and respectability' as was demanded by the Dame Agnes Rushdale Society (Rose op.cit:16).

Similarly, the aim of the Indigent Blind Visiting Society (founded in 1834 by Lord Shaftesbury and Lord Ebury) was to 'raise the sinner'. Though the I.B.V.S. undertook 'valiant pioneer work' it was nevertheless imbued with the same stringent attitudes which dictated the rules of Acton's charity. Thus, blind people who indulged in 'habitual vice were outlawed from help' (Rose op.cit:6) as were those who married other blind people without permission. This powerful taboo on the part of the sighted continued until after the Second World War. When religious zeal over-ruled the need for temporal help, it became impossible to think of the blind except in terms of selective patronage.
Dr. Thomas Rhodes Armitage's three priority areas of 'education, training and employment' (R.N.I.B. Report op.cit:4) were however to offer a means of escape from the beggary and dependence which was still endured by the majority of blind people at the latter end of the nineteenth century. Armitage, 'ahead of his time, practical, scientific and with a gift of compassion' (Rose op.cit:16) had joined the I.B.V.S. as a home visitor on the failure of his own eyesight when he determined to spend the rest of his life trying to help the blind. Two years later 'with a clear, angry, unsentimental view of the needs and conditions of the blind' (Rose op.cit:17) he began to play 'a towering role in the education of blind children in England' (Lowenfeld op.cit:94) at a time when it was described as being in 'absolute chaos' (Rose op.cit:17). The existing schools were not true training establishments but rather asylums where the blind were 'kept out of sight and mind' only to become eventually, as Johnson had indicated in his letter to The Times, 'idle mendicants' (Rose op.cit:4). Armitage was destined to become 'the most influential person in British work for the blind of his time' (Lowenfeld op.cit:95).

i. Education.

Convinced that philanthropy by the sighted, however well intentioned, did not respond to the real wants of the sightless, Armitage realised the vital necessity of choosing and promoting an efficient means of reading and writing by touch. This facility would open 'educational opportunity...the key to employment and independence' (R.N.I.B. Report op.cit:4) as well as providing a means of communication between the worlds of the blind and the sighted and thus reducing the 'separation'
between them which had for so long encouraged misunderstanding and myth. Armitage, together with the four educated blind colleagues who had founded the British and Foreign Society for Improving the Embossed Literature of the Time in 1868, chose the Braille six-dot system (out of twenty other competing systems) as the most efficient method of embossed writing. In so doing they were following the example of the Paris school which had opted for Braille's invention in 1854. It is now used world-wide.

In due course, and under the leadership of Sir Arthur Pearson, Armitage's organisation was to become the Royal National Institute for the Blind and a major publisher of Braille and Moon* literature, music and tapes and other educational and recreational aids, all continuing proof of Armitage's concern for better conditions for the blind and designed to facilitate involvement in the life of the wider society.

Most important, however, is the ongoing influence of the R.N.I.B. in Armitage's 'priority areas' which are basic, not only to the self realisation of blind people, but also to the perceptions held by both blind and sighted with regard to visual impairment. Believing that the education of blind children should prepare them for a life of work and independence, Armitage brought his revolutionary ideas to a world where existing schools considered that 'if a blind child could make baskets and recite the catechism he was well and truly educated' (Rose op.cit:29).

Although he could not persuade the educational establishment of his belief in the vocational importance of music (particularly piano Moon-type, invented by Dr. William Moon in 1845, partly retains the outline of the Latin alphabet. It is easily learned by those who have become blind late in life (Enc.Britt. 1991.8:300).
Armitage was nevertheless able to establish The Royal Normal College and Academy of Music in 1873. This he did with the aid of Francis Campbell, a blind music teacher from The Perkins Institute for the Blind in Boston. The College offered both a thorough academic training and a 'truly superior training in music, piano tuning and repair and commercial arts, with a special emphasis on physical education and sports' (Lowenfeld op.cit:96). Rose (op.cit:30) reports that about eighty per cent of the pupils who passed through the school were able to support themselves, a fact well borne out by Alfred Hollins, an early pupil at the College whose autobiography will be mentioned later.

It is impossible to say whether the compulsory elementary education for blind children between the ages of five and sixteen years (introduced by the Education Act of 1893) was an inevitable sequel to the provision of a general state education facilitated by the Education Act of 1870 or whether social pressure and example from the voluntary agencies encouraged special provision. Some experimentation had, in fact, already taken place. The London School Board, for instance, had established classes for blind children in 1879. In Scotland, the Education Act of 1872 (and its Amending Act of 1890) stipulated that blind children could be taught, up to the age of sixteen years, in either a state school or in a specialist institution. Only in recent years, as theories of integration and non-segregation took hold, has there been a move away from compulsory residential schooling. Figures from a survey carried out by the R.N.I.B. show the impact of changed thinking. Thus, in 1988, only thirteen per cent of the sample were weekly or whole-time boarders, whilst fifty-three per cent attended a
neighbourhood or local school with extra support by way of special
equipment and visits from a specialist teacher (H.M.S.O. 1992:167).
Social, scientific and technological progress has been such that
residential or special schooling now tends to be provided only for blind
children with additional handicaps. These are the children who are
thought to be incapable of benefiting from a formal education because
of limited intellectual and physical capacity. Their very existence
arises from the 'tragic paradox' of medical advances which, whilst
eradicating some causes of childhood blindness, provides the knowledge
and technology which enables them to live (Rose op.cit:27).

The R.N.I.B. report of 1992/3 makes it clear that it was imperative
to review educational provision. The effects of changing medical
knowledge, new thinking about child care, and the effects of
institutionalisation together with the benefits of communication
technology necessitated rationalisation. Worcester College for the Blind
Sons of Gentlemen (privately founded in 1866, but taken over by the
R.N.I.B. in 1936) has now been amalgamated with Chorleywood College for
Girls which was opened in 1921. The R.N.I.B.'s five remaining schools
specialise in the teaching of multiple-handicapped children whilst only
three of the original nine Sunshine Homes exist. These Homes were
established from 1918 onward to care for under-fives when it was
considered that the parents of blind children were unable to nurture
them with sufficient understanding.

ii. Training and Employment

Training and employment opportunities, the remaining two of Armitage's
three priorities have, inevitably perhaps until recent times, developed
more slowly than that of education for blind people. Whilst the statement that 'only one in four blind and partially sighted people of working age today have jobs' no doubt reflects the effects of the current recession and the advent of multiple-handicapped unemployable blind, it also confirms the statement that 'attitudes change distressingly slowly' (R.N.I.B. 1992:13). The situation appears to be little different from that outlined in the findings of a survey undertaken, in 1896 by the then newly-formed League of the Blind which estimated that 'two out of every seven blind people were paupers' (Rose op.cit:58). It should, however, be noted that Rose does not say whether the survey was concerned only with those of working age.

Though there have always been exceptional blind persons and the fortunate few who achieved professional status or were supported by their families, regular employment opportunities for those of impaired vision only came about through the philanthropy of the late Victorian era which recognised the plight of the majority of blind people. An enquiry by the Charity Organisation in 1874 shows however that provision was limited. Only eight hundred blind people out of thousands were employed in Workshops. The Royal Commission on the Condition of the Blind which followed in 1889 recommended the establishment of Workshops in every large town. Providing the traditional crafts of basket, broom and mat making they existed as the main source of employment for the visually impaired until the outbreak of the Second World war in 1939.

Despite the seemingly slow progress made in raising awareness of both the needs and capabilities of blind people, agitation (by the blind themselves) for greater state intervention had been hastened by the onset of war in 1914, the consequent need for manpower and the large
numbers of war blinded who were supported in many innovatory ways by the 'pioneering and thrusting work' (Rose op.cit:64) of St. Dunstan's. This charity had been founded in 1915 by the R.N.I.B. in co-operation with the Red Cross and the order of St. John of Jerusalem. The same Sir Arthur Pearson, he who had transformed Dr. Armitage's personal charity into an important voluntary body, now 'characteristically used the tragedy of the blinded of World War One to build up a concept of after-care and rehabilitation' (Rose op.cit:89). The man who had said of his own blindness 'I won't be a blind man, I'll be the blind man' now 'brought a challenge, an arrogance and a spirit of adventure' (Rose op.cit:90) to the problems of blindness and rehabilitation.

Characteristically, Pearson demanded high standards of St. Dunstan's. He insisted on an initial period of separation during which newcomers could 'learn to be blind' (Rose op.cit:90) before returning to the sighted world. Pearson resigned from the Presidency of the R.N.I.B. in 1922 in order to devote his time to the organisation which undertook 'care for life' (Rose op.cit:90) for those who lost their sight in the service of their country. It continues to provide a noted standard of service.

It should be noted, however, that Pearson's confident approach and Lord Fraser's own cheerful account of the work of St. Dunstan's, which was published nearly fifty years after the first World War, are in stark contrast to the realities depicted by some of the poets of the time. Though Fraser (1961:31) describes those who were admitted to St. Dunstan's as 'fit, at the height of their powers, young, keen, lively and vigorous, ambitious, adaptable and eager to get on', 'on the point of conquering the world', more immediate portrayals of death and injury at the Front by Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon tell a different
story. Sassoon records that the young blind soldier who 'hated war'
died, even whilst 'cruel old campaigners won through' (The Death Bed).
Likewise, the man, 'blind, and three parts shell', who had 'tried to peg
out soldierly' now looked forward to only 'one Spring' more. His medals
were no more than 'discs to make his eyes close', whilst his 'glorious
ribbons' had been 'ripped from his back' in 'scarlet threads'. Here, in
his 'mummy case', he believes he will be better off 'peaceably' sharing
'the meadow and the shower' (Owen. A_Terra). Sassoon's satirical
question 'does it matter?' 'losing your sight' when there's 'such
splendid work for the blind' sits uncomfortably with Fraser's hearty
comments, made so long after the event. Equally uncomfortable is
Sassoon's remark that 'kind people' will excuse drunkenness because
'they'll know you've fought for your country' (Does it Matter.)
National Legislation and the Effects of War

'The most important Act of Parliament in the history of Blind Welfare' (Rose op.cit:58) was, however to be passed in 1920. Coming as it did at the end of World War One and as an outcome of pressure from the blind themselves, it made 1920 'a significant year for the blind' (Rose op.cit:58). The Act placed responsibility for all aspects of work with the blind 'fairly and squarely' (Rose op.cit:58) on Local Authorities. Under the supervision of the Ministry of Health the authorities took responsibility for maintaining a register of blind people in their areas (as they still do under the provisions of the National Assistance Act 1948) and for providing welfare services which, at that time, included employment though this last duty was eventually transferred to the Department of Employment. Further confirmation of the state's acceptance of responsibility for the care of blind people came with the Blind Persons Act (1938) when the age of eligibility for the then Old Age Pension was reduced from fifty years to forty years of age and, importantly for the status of blind people, institutional or medical care was provided under the Act rather than, as had been the practise, by way of the Poor Law which was itself to be repealed in 1948.

It was however 'necessity that opened the doors of the sighted world' (Rose op.cit:64) to blind workers. The 'necessity' was the coming of war in 1939, although in the years between the wars the then National Institute for the Blind had itself created a number of new employment opportunities. In 1915, the N.I.B. had taken over the School of Massage (later the North School of Physiotherapy). Home working schemes for brush-, mat-makers and piano tuners were established and kiosk schemes
started in the nineteen twenties. By 1939 however, the majority of blind men continued to work in traditional trades in the sixty or more workshops in Great Britain where they remained segregated, dependent on poor pay and forced to work in depressing conditions.

The great fillip to employment opportunity came in 1942 when Employment Exchanges were instructed to place suitable blind people in munitions work, light engineering, telephony and typing. Such was the success of those who were thus placed that it was claimed that the 'blind and partially sighted can work at almost any job thanks to computers. Opportunities have never been wider and there are (to name but a few) blind teachers, typists, lawyers, artists, computer programmers and factory workers' (R.N.I.B. op.cit:13). And yet, despite the enormously accelerated change in employment opportunity, public awareness and social policy legislation there is still, as recent autobiographies show, 'the prejudice and misunderstanding that keeps many visually impaired people out of the competition for work' (R.N.I.B.1992:13).

**Progres in Medical Care**

I hope I have shown that though there was some evidence, in the novels of the nineteenth century, of awareness of the 'immense advance' (Guthrie op.cit:374) of knowledge in the field of ophthalmology, there was little advance in the lay understanding of blindness, nor were questions raised about the nature of social provision. New scientific information neither lessened nor dispelled the commonly held mythical and religious views which found expression in novels' pages. Nevertheless, it might be anticipated that twentieth century literature
would show a marked decrease in the need for mythical explanation given the ever increasing dissemination and popularisation of scientific knowledge, the greater access to medical care, and the greater secularisation of society.

We now know that the 'classical causes' (Rose op.cit:83) of childhood blindness such as smallpox, trachoma, inherited syphilis, measles, diphtheria, scarlet fever and ophthalmia neonaturam have all been greatly reduced by better standards of health, hygiene, ante-natal screening and the vaccines which control rubella and toxoplasmosis. However, we are faced with the paradox that the technology which encourages the control of such hereditary diseases as optic atrophy and congenital cataracts and the elimination of the 'bad' gene now ensures the survival of the severely disabled children who would, in earlier times, have succumbed to an early death or would have been abandoned.

Similarly, though childhood blindness decreases, the likelihood of visual impairment in old age grows, as more old people are living longer to experience degenerative conditions. Though older people are encouraged to participate in the life of the sighted world by way of electronic aids, talking newspapers, radio, Braille books and the like, their lives are inevitably restricted.

This then is the setting in which the chosen novels have been placed. In this chapter I shall discuss the works thematically because, though the social and medical milieux have changed considerably, the impact has not on the whole been as profound as that brought about by the innovations of the nineteenth century.
2. Fictional Depictions of Blindness in the Twentieth Century

Persistence of Myth

Since cultural changes in attitudes towards blind people were so generally limited during the latter part of the nineteenth century, informed as they inevitably were by prevailing social and religious mores, it is not surprising that the literature of the period reflected similar ideas. It confirms Twersky's comment that between 1873-1914 there were 'far too few favourable depictions of the blind' which treated them 'as essentially normal' (Twersky 1955:45). Twersky found however that in the years between 1914 and the middle years of the century there was an increasing realisation that 'blindness alone cannot make any one extremely helpless' (ibid:45). He concluded that though 'sighted assumptions' (ibid:48) dictated attitudes, they nevertheless indicated 'a tendency to regard the blind as less of an element apart' (ibid:54).

Twersky's examination did not reach the literature of the post-1950 era, but he believed that the periods which he chose for survey related to significant landmarks in the lives of blind people which also affected the perceptions of those around them. Thus, he examined attitudes to blind people in the literature of the pre- and post Braille periods and that which encompasses the influence of the first World War and its aftermath.

And yet views based on informed cognitive awareness always seem to lag behind those ingrained attitudes which have their basis in the emotions, biases and prejudices of traditional belief transmitted across the ages by myth, magic and metaphor. It is not therefore surprising
that, despite the growing protestations of the blind themselves, stereotypical views persist in the literature of this century, though I will argue that the familiar theme of blindness as punishment for sin (with the occasional compensation of gifts of prophecy and second sight) greatly diminishes, no doubt encouraged by knowledge of causation and a lessening of organised religious belief.

i. Blindness as punishment.

Four novels whose publication dates span three quarters of this century continue to perpetuate ideas of blindness as punishment. The clearest depiction appears early in this century, in 1902, in Joseph Conrad's *The End of the Tether*, the 'reality' of which is left 'for the reader to determine' (Author's note 1917:vii). Conrad indicates that he parts from the protagonist, Captain Whalley, in 'affectionate silence', after portraying him as a person whose struggle to retain his independence in the face of increasing blindness is actuated by a desperate desire to preserve his investment and captaincy in the almost derelict coastal steamer, 'Sofala', so that he may in due course bequeath the money to his daughter and her chairbound husband. Conrad writes with admiration of the once 'daredevil Harry Whalley' who had been 'the pioneer of new routes and new trades, who had steered across the unsurveyed tracts of the South Seas' (ibid:167) and had 'never lost a ship or consented to a shady transaction' (ibid:168). Having lost his money in the 'great failure of the Banking corporation (ibid:170) he had sold his only asset, the barque 'Fairmaid', in order to help his daughter, Ivy, for whom he feels great love and responsibility.
However whether this feeling is reciprocated to anything like the same degree is left open to question by a final ironic comment at the end of the novel. As Ivy reads her father's last letter to her, she realises that 'there had been days when she had not thought of him at all...had no time'. But she tells herself that 'she loved him, she felt she had loved him after all' (ibid:339).

Conrad describes with considerable sympathy how Captain Whalley, after entering the partnership with the profligate Chief Engineer, Massey, fights a bitter battle to hide his encroaching blindness in order to safeguard the five hundred pounds he has invested in a three year partnership in the 'Sofala'. The agreement is now within six weeks of termination. Loss of sight and threatened dependency come hard to this man 'once rather proud of his great bodily strength...conscious of his worth and firm in his rectitude...who had proved himself fit in every sort of way for the life of his choice' (ibid:187) and who now wishes to 'die at the oar' (ibid:201).

Managing to steer the boat with the silent complicity of his old servant, the Serang, Whalley admits that in hiding his blindness he has 'tampered', 'in my pride' (ibid:300) with his conscience. He tells the tobacco planter, Van Wyck, that he does not consider that he has 'deserved' 'the visitation' even though, after initially 'deceiving himself from day to day, from week to week', he then determines to 'deceive them all' (ibid:301). Likening himself to Samson and insisting that 'not even the sign of God's anger' could make him forget his daughter, he resolves to find the strength to continue. Nevertheless, feeling that 'the hand of God was upon him' and 'as if in a nightmare of humiliation' where 'every featureless man seemed an enemy' (ibid:302)
Captain Whalley has been 'praying for death' (ibid:302) to release him from the 'curse of his blindness' (ibid:324). Finally, realising that for him 'the horror of death...apparently could not be overcome by the horror of blindness' (ibid:333) Captain Whalley deliberately puts into his own pocket the scraps of iron intended by Massey to upset the compass and bring about the ship's loss. Ironically his is the only life to be lost when the ship founders on a reef, its change of course being put down officially 'to an unusual set of currents' (ibid:334).

In his final letter to Ivy, Whalley writes that 'God seems to have forgotten me' (ibid:338). He had believed that 'God had not listened to his prayers' (ibid:337) but 'for Ivy he had carried his point, walking in his darkness to the very edge of a crime...The light had finished ebbing out of the world; not a glimmer. It was a dark waste, but it was unseemly that a Whalley who had gone so far to make a point should continue to live. He must pay the price' (ibid:333).

Although it is suggested here that death itself might be preferable to 'the horror of blindness', Conrad’s powerful and credible portrayal of Captain Whalley's heroic independence and determination in the face of what he sees as God-given blindness provides a striking contrast to the dispirited 'withered leaf' of the helpless, dependent blind sailor in Geoffrey Cookson's poem The Blind Sailor (1932:1.6) and to the self pitying dependency shown by Pauline Fanning in Norah Hoult's novel A Death Occurred (1954) to which I shall refer later.

John Haye however in Henry Green’s Blindness (1932) also meets loss of sight with initial despair and the belief that it would have been 'better to have died' (ibid:60). But unlike Captain Whalley who already has a successful career behind him and to whom blindness comes late in
life, John Haye, a seventeen year old schoolboy, is blinded by a 'small boy sitting on a fence' who 'threw a stone at a train (ibid:35) as he travels home for the holidays.

It is not clear if his blindness is to be seen as a punishment, a chastening for the hubris of an outsider who flouts convention and is full of an overwheeming aspiration to be a great writer but it is left to John's step-mother to suggest that it is God who has taken away her son's sight.

Captain Whalley uses all his life experience to hide his blindness from his partner and to face the punishment which he thinks God has imposed upon him. In contrast, John Haye develops from the 'caterpillar' stage of the first part of the novel, through the 'chrysalis' stage of early blindness, to emerge after suffering, as a 'Butterfly' in the third section, when he has learned to adjust to the absence of sight which Emily Haye says 'He has taken away' (ibid:45).

In the 'caterpillar' section John, the public schoolboy, is presented as a self-conscious, would-be writer 'who thought he was going to be a success in after life' (ibid:5). He is critical of the school mores, 'glories in eccentricity', is widely read and sees himself as 'the English Anatole France, a vista of glory_superb' (ibid:16). He is destined to go to Oxford. As a member of an upper class family he campaigns for the Conservatives, patronises i.e. 'talked nonsense at' (ibid:21) working men, before taking the journey home which results in his blindness. He returns to the country estate which his step-mother has administered since the death of John's father, 'the finest man to hounds in three counties' (ibid:45). Mrs. Haye who is 'red, red with forty years reckless exposure to the sun' is described as a country
woman who wears 'rough tweeds' (ibid:40). Anxious to do her best for John but finding blindness beyond her experience (though she is prepared to have 'the poor blind old' dog, Raffles, 'put out of the way since it would be kinder' [ibid:63/4]) she can only resort to some well-worn ideas.

Barbara Brothers suggests that in describing the very different reactions to blindness of Mrs. Haye, John, John's 'live-in nurse' and John's Nanny, Green is calling attention 'to the ideopathic nature of perception' since 'no two characters share the same sense of what a situation is or means' (1983:408). Their reactions to this 'tragedy of darkness' (ibid:53) are illustrative of a common range of responsive behaviours.

Mrs. Haye, for instance, finds it hard to comprehend what blindness means to John—or to anyone else. Shortly after his accident she asks 'What's it like with that thing [the dressing] in front of your eyes so that you can't see anything?'. She says that she would 'go mad' if she were 'not able to see where she is going'. He replies that he doesn't know 'every thing's black, that's all' (ibid:42). She is torn with pity and with the desire to protect him from the fact of the finality of his blindness. Her inability to say the word 'blind', together with her unaccustomed use of 'darling' (ibid:44) reveals all to him. At a loss she falls back on the cliche that 'God gave you your sight and He has taken it away' (ibid:46). She thinks to herself that it 'isn't fair' to criticise John as 'helpless' and decides that 'the great thing is to keep his mind off' (ibid:47). She thinks he takes very well the fact that he will be 'blind for ever, always, always, blind' since for her it
is a 'tomb of darkness' (ibid:49) where he will never see again, 'nothing but black...stifling' (ibid:51).

Though she knows that she must not be sentimental, 'must not slobber', she finds it difficult to accept that there will be 'no more light' (ibid:50). She thinks of the misery of it and of 'the tortures he must be going through' (ibid:67). Relying on scraps of knowledge she tries to think in practical terms of 'some occupation for the boy' and recalls the making of 'fancy baskets or pen-wipers, all those things that blinded soldiers did, something to do'. She says she 'must make enquiries about Braille books and find someone to teach him' (ibid:66). She tells John that she could 'dictate his books to him' (ibid:45). As much for herself as for him she says 'Don't let it worry you too much, dear' (ibid:50). She has a claustrophobic sense of the 'stifling', 'black'... and is aware of the difficulty of 'always being grateful and appreciative for fear of hurting [the feelings] of those who try to help. She avoids telling him that 'you will get used to it in time' (ibid:69) though she thinks it would have been 'better to have died' (ibid:60). She takes refuge in 'work' in order to 'forget till some plan emerged' (ibid:62).

There is no question here that John should look for occupation other than that deemed consonant with his social class. Mrs. Haye thinks that 'being blind he could work for other blind and so not feel solitary' (ibid:68). Since she had 'run the village according to her lights' (ibid:71) she considers that he too 'must take an interest in the village now that he had nothing to do'—'he could start a club for men and teach them something...talking about art or books...that would occupy his time' (ibid:70). Resenting platitudes from friends and
resisting the idea of selling Barnwood and living in a 'poky little suburban villa' (ibid:70) she decides that John must learn to care about the estate. She fears 'he could never marry' since 'he would not meet any nice girls now' (ibid:71) though without marriage he would not be a man—he would be 'left unfinished' (ibid:78). She appears to hold to the belief that to be impaired is to be less than complete and thus unworthy of marriage. Much as Emily Haye regrets leaving Barnwell she eventually moves to London with John since 'he was not made for the country' (ibid:217). She continues to hope that he will marry so that she can return home.

The views of the nurse and the Nanny have none of Mrs. Haye's ambivalence. Nanny is full of pity for 'Poor Master John' (ibid:160), weeps over him and reminisces about the past. She enjoys, and encourages his renewed dependence on her. Though the nurse is sorry 'for the poor boy' she prefers 'difficult cases' which would call for 'a great well of pity and that of course was love'. In her eyes John is 'not really suffering'. She believes that he is 'quite healthy, he was healing very quickly and he hadn't a trace of shock'. She dreams of caring instead for a case of delirium tremens that she will have to fight to save. There is no call to 'fight' for John's eyes because they have been removed. So practical is her attitude that she has kept his eyes 'in spirits on the mantelpiece of her room in the hospital' (ibid:158).

Contrary to her belief however John, now that he is 'blind, finished, on the shelf' (ibid:46), would like to 'choke the child' (ibid:59) who had blinded him. He shrinks from Nanny's 'sickening sentimentality' and fears that 'everyone would be sorry for him, try to help him' (ibid:53). He grieves for the things he will never be able to
see again_‘the sweep of lawn’ (ibid:55), a bird, a cloud, or a tree now that he is ‘shut up in the traditional living tomb’ in the ‘darkness’ which presses down on him and ‘chokes’ him (ibid:56). Nevertheless, he believes ‘the whole creed’ is ‘strength and not give way’ (ibid:53). He fears that reading by Braille ‘would be too slow’ (ibid:56) and realises that he will have to rely on touch and hearing. He decides it would have been ‘better to have died’ (ibid:60) because ‘so much of life had been made up of seeing things’ (ibid:83). Now, without sight, he is in ‘appalling desolation’, ‘sinking into a pit of darkness’ (ibid:81) and shut into himself. Comforting himself with memories of things seen, he decides to ‘cultivate his own sense of hearing’ (ibid:85) and to appreciate that though ‘colours had been wonderful’ (ibid:86) they were only words. The tone of many of these comments suggests that Green is emphasising, in the self-conscious musings of a schoolboy, many of the truisms about blindness which are prevalent both in common parlance and in literature. They are indeed ‘only words’ but none the less powerful in their effect for all that.

As Brothers states, ‘the “blindness”...that is depicted in the novel is not just the physical blindness of John Haye’ but the ‘blindness’ of ‘the world and the people in it’ (op.cit:419). She suggests that in the novel Green ‘parodies conventions of both the realist and the modernist novel in order to call into question the means by which we make sense of the world in which we live’. She adds ‘characters fail to see because they accept labels that society has affixed to actions and because they assume that what is visible is what is real’. Green’s novel, she says, is ‘a dramatization of the
individual's poignant, failed quest for meaning and understanding' (ibid:419).

Skewed and subjective perceptions also affect John's relationship with the 'bedraggled Joan' (ibid:100) to whom he turns for companionship. He feels 'surrounded by women' and regrets the 'unpleasant', too clever behaviour which had alienated his male acquaintances.

*Joan (whom he calls June)* is the daughter of the local unfrocked and alcoholic vicar whose wife has left him. Joan is 'also 'different' and it is with her that John comes to terms with his blindness. Though John hears in her voice that she is initially 'frightened at his lack of eyes' (ibid:147) she had been 'the first to be almost immediately at her ease' (ibid:149). He had become increasingly aware of voices, the 'horrified and frightened' the 'sympathetic' and 'the disgusted' but when Joan spoke 'it was with an eager note, and there were so few eager people' (ibid:1490).

John has come to realise that 'when one was blind one understood differently'. One 'did not try to see in terms of sight' but through touch and hearing. In this way 'one gained by being blind' (ibid:151). He accepts that 'sight was not really necessary' because 'there was so much in the wind, in the feel of the air, in the sounds that nature lent one for a little, only to take away again' (ibid:158). He decides it is only 'the deaf who were really cut off' (ibid:153). John determines that he will 'write about these things, there were things to say' (ibid:159) now that he 'knew things differently' (ibid:224). There are suggestions of insight in his belief that he will 'be the famous blind man who lends people, in his books, the eyes that he has lost' (ibid:191). He is
convinced that he will be 'a greater writer' (ibid:190) like Milton, now that he is blind. Joan, who thinks in terms of 'romance' (ibid:191), neither understands what he has gained from being blind, nor the fact that when he is with her he sees himself as a medieval hero. She thinks him foolish for calling her June and for praising her 'lovely blue eyes' when they are in fact brown (ibid:182). She can only think in terms of 'your easy life down there' (ibid:196) which is so different from her own limited existence.

In London, John is 'initially dazed' (ibid:237) by the multiple sensations induced by the 'terrifying' (ibid:243) streets. Nevertheless, he is determined to write about what he 'feels' is going on since 'it was the feeling that mattered' (ibid:239). Though he is 'only allowed the echoes' (ibid:240) he must tell people 'how he knew things differently'. He can 'show them how much better off he was than they' (ibid:250). He decides 'to start a crusade against people who had eyesight', against those who 'were content with only the superficial appearance of things' (ibid:250). Like the inhabitants of H.G. Wells's Country of the Blind he thinks his is the better way. He concludes that he is going to 'settle to writing now that I have a lot to tell' (ibid:254).

Blindness is a strange mixture of the profound and the mundane. On the one hand the story of John Haye's blindness is informed by stereotype and class expectation in the somewhat obvious frame of a journey. On the other hand it shows (in a comparable way to Kate Flint's discussion about Millais' picture 'the Blind Girl') that 'interpretation reflects the interpreter: the story, the story-teller' (Brothers
op.cit:419). It demonstrates the power of the writer to endow the fact of blindness with many meanings.

In sharp contrast however to Green's story, and to Conrad's tale which is set against an informed and believable background of sea, seamanship and boats, Norah Hoult's novel, *A Death Occurred* (1954) is ill-informed and stretches credulity to breaking point. Described in the foreword as 'a simple tale of middle-class flat dwellers' *A Death Occurred* means to be a novel of its time, redolent with 'spivs, milk-bars and coffee stalls' in a 'South Kensington' influenced by 'many waves from alien climes' (ibid:146). Yet, despite this superficial realism, the novel demonstrates and purveys many common misperceptions about the state of sightlessness and its treatment.

The author, for instance, in the foreword, suggests that Pauline Fanning's 'semi-blindness' is self-induced out of loneliness and attention seeking. She also implies that the imposition of blindness is a kind of divine chastisement and a means of redemption. A believer would hazard, she says, that loss of sight had resulted from the 'love of God in His compassion for the soul He had created for Himself'.

Similarly, Mrs. Fanning's sister-in-law attempts to have the patient 'certified' (i.e.declared mentally ill) and 'shut up in an asylum' (ibid:8). Thought to be incapable of looking after herself, and with no-one else to look after her, Mrs. Fanning is admitted instead to a Nursing Home where she meets an early death. This is described as 'a merciful release', 'a best thing' (ibid:179) now that she has become blind. The same fellow lodger who initially considered, somewhat contemptuously, that Mrs. Fanning was a 'bourgeois', comes to feel that with the onset of blindness that she had 'turned into a tragedy' (ibid:194). Another
tenant believes that the experience of blindness brings with it a kind
of insight. He says, of this self-absorbed woman, that from 'not seeing
very much...when she went blind, she did, in a way, start to see'
(ibid:195). Mrs. Fanning is also seen as 'blind and helpless' (ibid:25),
needing a 'protector' and the services of 'a trained nurse' (ibid:17).
Surprise is expressed that she 'didn't look more ravaged, making pity,
the giving of alms a natural reaction' (ibid:35).

Surprising though it may seem that views such as these persist into
the middle of the twentieth century, it should be born in mind that, in
1954, changes wrought by the Second World War in the world of the blind,
and the 'welfare state' generally, (in this country at least) were yet
to be assimilated and the far reaching medical, technological and social
changes of the later part of the century were still to come.

Nevertheless, and as though proof were needed of the slowness of
change where myth and metaphor are seemingly inbuilt, it is surprising
to find similar beliefs and prejudices appearing in a novel published
twenty years later in 1974. Evan Hunter's Streets of Gold, the fictional
autobiography of Ike, born Ignazio Silvio di Palermo in 1926 of a second
generation Italian/American family, illustrates, as does Hoult's work
before it, the apparently enduring prevalence of many interlocking
beliefs and attitudes about the condition of blindness and its effects.

Here the narrator blames himself for lack of sight. His teacher is
convinced that his musical ability is divinely given. Merely to state
these positions is to indicate the novel's atavistic prejudices. They
are significant here because they represent the opportunity for Ike to
escape membership of two discredited groups, one related to disability,
one related to ethnicity. His failure to do either completely is made
poignantly clear in the concluding sentences of the novel where he indicates that he 'is the realization of a myth that told us we were all equal, but forgot to mention that we were also separate' (ibid:470).

*Streets of Gold* tells the story of Ike who 'though blind from birth' (ibid:3) 'gets right to the top and stays there long enough to know riches and disillusionment' (Foreword). He was born into an Italian-American family who lived in an Italian quarter of New York during the second, third and fourth decades of this century. His grandfather had emigrated from a village near Naples in order to seek his fortune and, importantly in the context of this story, to acquire citizenship with its promise of fulfilment of the American dream. Ike's childhood was influenced therefore by blindness, cultural traditions, ambition and a desire to escape the discrimination caused by his race and his disability.

His story brings its own reminders of some of the real blind jazz pianists of his generation such as Art Tatum, 'the greatest pianist jazz has produced' (G. Sales 1992:122) and 'nearly three decades after his death...still the "musician's" musician' (ibid:219), the English George Shearing of quintet and 'Lullaby of Broadway' fame (ibid:132), and Ray Charles who was segregated twice over as a blind child and as a black child. He says that he was 'born with music inside me' (Ray Charles 1992:8) and 'liked it all' i.e. music of 'many styles' (ibid:10). He says 'maybe you'll have a hard time believing it, but even blind kids can adjust and lead normal childhoods' (ibid:56).

Ike recalls however that some of his childhood was not so 'normal'. Neighbours from the same ethnic background attribute his blindness to the 'evil eye' (1974:10) and to a sexual attack on his mother during her
pregnancy. Ike himself and his classmates, 'isolated in a virtual one room schoolhouse' (ibid:134) within a larger school building, believe that 'if only we'd been better...we wouldn't have been born blind' (ibid:135). He recalls that 'ashamed,' and trying to 'disguise self-pity with arrogance,' 'we referred to ourselves as little blind bastards.' They were, he says, 'convinced that we were misfits, a freakish band of outsiders isolated in a classroom at the end of the hall, or being marched to assembly or play in a chattering, sightless unit, the corridors around us going mysteriously still as we passed through' (ibid:135). Despite the 'loving care' of their teacher, Miss Goodbody, who 'tried to engender a feeling of self-worth in us,' these children believed that 'we were not as good as other people. We were an inferior product...Why didn't they simply throw us into the nearest incinerator' (ibid.136). Importantly for Ike, and notwithstanding his conviction that he was 'an outcast—a nothing' (ibid:136), Miss Goodbody saw his gift of perfect musical pitch 'as a sign from above that I was destined to study the piano' (ibid:136).

Taught by his grandfather to 'stand on my own, blind or not' (ibid:397), Ike was to become a 'successful American of the world', a blind jazz pianist (known by the very American name of Dwight Jamison) to whom 'success had brought power...power to command whatever I wanted whenever I wanted it' (ibid:398). 'Spoiled rotten' (ibid:397) and lionised 'by a world ostensibly full of Grandma Tessas eager to tell me what a darling little boy I was, eager to turn me into a hopelessly dependent vegetable' (ibid:397) Ike was, however, to find the world was unable to disregard the fact of his blindness, just as he himself could
not forget that he 'and thirteen other little blind bastards' were 'nothing' (ibid:398).

Like his grandfather, Ike dreamed of becoming 'American', a fully integrated member of that society, no matter what his ethnic background or physical disability. Sadly, he concludes that he 'became American, more or less, though I never did any of the things sighted people can do, but that was hoping for too much, really, wasn't it?. Even the land of the free and home of the brave can do nothing for the congenitally blind, although it can come a long way toward helping them to realize dreams' (ibid:468).

In this novel, and despite its low key ending, the narrator vividly illustrates how he did, in fact, 'stand on my own', a process which not only encourages understanding of the ways in which blind people cope, but which, coincidently, helps to dispel many of the commonly held myths which relate to extra-sensory gifts and abilities and the supposed uniqueness of the blind. This descriptive process is not to be found in earlier fictional literature and is certainly missing from the novels of Hoult and Conrad, possibly because they deal with adventitious rather than congenital blindness and possibly also because of the then general lack of detailed information about ways in which blind people operate. It should not be forgotten, however, that the blind Captain Whalley is shown as a competent officer who still utilises his long experience of the sea.

Thus, the adult Ike, with '48 years of touching, hearing and smelling (ibid:3/4) explains how, as a child, he had 'had to memorise the keyboard, chords, the value of notes' (ibid:138) as well as Braille itself. He recalls that he had been encouraged to know 'his
neighbourhood by heart' (ibid:157) and that he had once been mocked, his jacket torn because, having lost his way, he was also 'white in a black area' (ibid:160/161). He remembers how he progressed from the 'Blind School' to 'St.Lucia's School for the Blind' and how he found his way about by acquiring 'detailed mental maps of the exact transportation system we would use and the exact number of streets we would traverse after we got off a trolley, train or bus' (ibid:145/6). He recalls his annoyance at 'being shoved through the goddam crowd' (ibid:223) and explains that 'blind people can detect the presence of an object by the echoes or warmth it gives off, and even by changes it causes in the air pressure, which are felt on the face' (ibid:243). What the autobiographers will later define and identify as 'facial vision', Ike now describes as 'a little known fact, but scientifically authenticated' (ibid:243).

Though he admits that there are problems in 'being blind alongside sighted musicians' (ibid:304) Ike challenges some of the stereotyped attitudes to which he is subjected. He notes the unease that many sighted people experience in the presence of the blind and points out that 'blind people...accept the words "see" and "look" without any feeling of self-consciousness or embarassment' (ibid:246). More importantly, he remarks on the inability of 'the neighbourhood kids' to accept his relationship with the sighted Michelle because 'a blind person isn't expected to have a "girlfriend" in the accepted sense' (ibid:214).

Though there is no indication in the book (other than a comparison of Braille notation with that of the usual kind (ibid:138/9)) that Hunter himself has either experience of blindness or membership of an
immigrant group, he nevertheless presents a believable and vivid picture of the life and achievements of a blind child grown to manhood in a doubly disadvantaged world. He shows how Ike learns to be successfully independent despite the feelings of worthlessness and exclusion which pervade his life.

It is noticeable then, from the evidence of these four, very disparate novels, written over a seventy year period, that where ideas of Providential influence, punishment and redemption remain, they relate to the values of the earlier half of the century even if they become somewhat modified over time. Old beliefs die hard. For all the advances made by science and medicine these novels cannot, or at all events do not, free themselves from the shackles of earlier and largely discarded assumptions.

ii. Blindness and Stereotype.

It seems that sighted people, and indeed blind people themselves, whether from long indoctrination, myth or metaphor, or a too-keen awareness of the effects of disability find it difficult to lay aside the feelings and beliefs which, apparently assimilated without question into their very being, remain to colour their attitudes about those who make up 'the element apart' (Twersky op.cit:54). As I hope to show, it is common to find, at one and the same time, a multiplicity of beliefs which are clearly difficult to dispel.

a. Blindness and Evil

Just as the once-held beliefs in blindness as evidence of retribution and punishment fade in the light of informed ideas about the actual
nature and consequence of handicap so, in turn, do attributions of evil in those who do not conform to the norm.

Thus, it is perhaps not surprising to find only one novel, again of the earlier part of the century, which contains within it characters who, though in minor roles, embody and preserve many reflections of this past belief. The presence of Dominick Medina's mother, in John Buchan's *The Three Hostages* (1924) provides, as Janet Adam Smith remarks, an extra dimension in a 'thriller' of 'suspense, surprise, speed of narrative with a well observed background' (1979:78) in which Medina, claiming supernatural powers gleaned from 'diabolic lore' intends, out of 'his hatred of all things that men hold in love and repute' (Buchan op.cit:298), to destroy the established order.

Smith says Buchan's aim in *The Three Hostages* was to write 'romance where the incidents defy the probabilities and march just inside the border of the possible' (1965:252). She indicates that 'the energy that moves the fantastic plot comes from [the writer's] general concern with post-war unrest and also from Buchan's personal experience' (ibid:261). As a child he had been 'haunted'...by 'Alice in Wonderland's loss of identity' and it is this, Smith says, which informs Hannay's strength to resist the power of Mrs. Medina. He 'thinks it a great impertinence that anyone should rob him of his will and consciousness. Common sense and reason are his weapons against Medina's fanaticism and fascination' (ibid:261).

Mrs. Medina, who like her son is a student of both 'ancient lore' and the 'mysteries of the spirit' (1924:298), is compared to 'the terrible blind Fate that span' (ibid:147) and described as 'a sybil' (ibid:110) whose 'beauty of face' was yet 'devilish' with a 'soul
within...on fire with all the hatred of Hell' (ibid:140). Sightless as her clear, 'vivid blue', 'most remarkable eyes' are (ibid:139), they are, nevertheless, 'turned inward' (ibid:139), suggesting a source of inner vision and power. They seem to 'radiate an ardent vitality, to glow and flash like a soul within' (ibid:140). In a depiction designed to add mystery and awe, she is further described as if 'sitting on a throne', her presence enhanced by her 'regal profile' and 'the soft eerie music of her voice' (ibid: 143) which has its own hypnotic power. She is, like Ayesha, 'the divinely beautiful' protagonist of Rider Haggard's novel She (1887), possessed of 'vast stores of wisdom and magic' (N. Etherington 1991:xx), a "femme fatale", the woman whose encounters direct destinies to life eternal or death, according to the stature of the heroes' (H. Gougaud in Etherington ibid:xl).

In the novel, Mrs. Medina's acute, 'hound-like' (1924:145) hearing, together with her fine sense of touch, are used to add to the idea of additional mysterious abilities which unnerve and disturb that most adventurous and commonsensical of narrators, Richard Hannay, in his contact with her. He is unnerved as she uses touch, 'the one sense which can instruct me' (ibid:141) in order to familiarize herself with his face. He experiences it more as proof of her unusual powers than as her way (common to many blind people) of recognizing those she cannot see. As Smith says, Buchan 'can convey a sense of the real possibility of evil and irrational forces breaking through the facade of civilized life' and though 'many of the social attitudes of his thriller are outdated, not so their intimation of destruction and disorder, their warning that civilisation cannot be taken for granted' (op.cit:78).
Although, in this novel, Mediria is the would-be destroyer of civilisation, the fact of his mother's blindness is used to enhance ideas of occult gifts and access to the powerful knowledge of secret worlds. Such a depiction confirms superstitious beliefs whilst ignoring explanations based in more mundane reality. As will be seen later, it remains for autobiographers such as Hector Chevigny, Hugues de Montalembert and John Hull, and fiction writers of the later part of the century such as Peter Dickenson and Nina Bawden, to dispel the myths which superstitiously endow the sightless with special abilities.

b. Mockery

It is again a commonplace that, throughout the ages, the so-called 'normal' have tended to mock and reject, through fear and ignorance, those vulnerable members of society who suffer a 'spoiled identity' (Goffman 1968:14). They wish to discredit those who because of disturbed behaviour or abnormal appearance are seen to depart from the 'norm'. As Hauy found it was only too easy for the sighted majority, in full use of their faculties, to torment the blind beggars who, unable to see their tormentors, were dependent upon them for alms. Although this particular kind of dependence is largely a thing of the past, in this country at least, it is still possible to find some fictional writings of the early part of the century, both in Europe and in America, which show blind people as the butt of the sighted.

Thus, in *My Brother Paul*, a short story written in the last decade of the nineteenth century, (published here in 1947), Theodore Dreiser describes how Paul, the narrator's brother, who has 'a frivolous, childish, horse-playish sense of humour at times' (1947:246)
thoughtlessly makes fun of the blind beggar who has a habit of interrupting his song to express his thanks for alms. Deliberately changing coins of a larger denomination into small change Paul invites his friends to join in the laughter as the singer can barely continue with his song as the coins drop. 'All life and colour' (ibid:246) Paul may have been with 'sympathy...his outstanding characteristic ever more than humour' (ibid:248) but the vulnerability and helplessness of the target of his joke is well indicated when Dreiser comments that 'the beggar responded with an indescribably wry expression, half uncertainty, and half smile' (ibid:248).

The thoughtless mockery in this story, however, is mild when compared with the bitter story of actual and metaphorical blindness in Vladimir Nabokov's Laughter in the Dark (originally published in 1933 but here in a 1963 edition) and that exhibited in two poems of the early decades of this century i.e. Blind Man's Buff by Eleanor Farjeon and The Blind Boxer, written by W.H. Davies in 1918.

Nabokov's book which begins 'Once upon a time' (1963:5) may open in the way of most fairy stories, but like fairy stories it spells out a lesson and points a moral. In short, the story tells of Albinus who was 'rich, respectable and happy' but who 'abandoned his wife for the sake of a youthful mistress; he loved, was not loved and his life ended in disaster' (ibid:5). Though Nabokov states that this is 'the whole of the story' he promises to elaborate because there is 'profit and pleasure in the telling' (ibid:5).

Nabokov seems to derive a wry and sardonic pleasure from the story of Albinus, the art critic and picture expert who liked clever fakes. He depicts him as unable to see through the schemes and deceptions of his
mistress, Margot, and his supposed friend and colleague, Alex Rex, and also as physically blind after the car crash which destroyed his sight.

Albinus whom Margot sums up 'rather neatly' as 'a liar, a coward and a fool' (ibid:35) has never been 'lucky with affairs of the heart' (ibid:9) even though he was rich and good looking. Though he married the 'clinging...docile and gentle' (ibid:11) Elisabeth he still retains 'that secret foolish craving' (ibid:12) for romance. Believing that he has found what he has long yearned for, he becomes infatuated with the eighteen-year old cinema usherette and artist's model, Margot Peters, who 'was mad on the movies' (ibid:17). She aspires to be a film star. She is as self-deluding as Albinus when she dreams of being a 'screen beauty in gorgeous furs being helped out of a gorgeous car by a gorgeous hotel porter under a giant umbrella' (ibid:190. She believes that Albinus, with his money and his interest in films, will give her the opportunity she seeks. He finds it easy to believe her 'innocent' (ibid:32) of all self-seeking.

Through a series of coincidences, Elisabeth becomes reluctantly aware of her husband's affair (she reads his letters) and leaves the family home with their daughter, Irma. Since attempts at reconciliation fail, Albinus decides to 'forget his family' and 'abandon himself to the fierce, almost morbid passion which Margot's gay loveliness excited in him' (ibid:59). It is significant in the context of this story that Margot retains a similar passion for Alex Rex whose life had also been 'very secret' (ibid:23). Their affair had been brief. He left her after a month and 'never came back' (ibid:24).

The relationship between Albinus and Margot is dictated by their own interests. Margot is 'in love with the life Albinus could offer her'
She wants marriage and is prepared to lie to get it. She wants to live in his house and to meet his friends. Despite his infatuation he avoids being seen with her and hopes no-one knows that he is 'living with a mistress' (ibid:78).

The story takes a leap forward when Albinus hosts a party for film people and invites a 'cartoonist' from New York who has just returned home. The cartoonist happens to be Alex Rex, a gambler who has cultivated 'a penchant for bluff since his tenderest age. His favourite card game was poker' (ibid:96). As a child he had been cruel. He was still 'unfeeling and cruel' (ibid:91) and 'it amused him immensely to see life made to look silly as it slid helplessly into caricature. He loved to fool people and the more trouble the process entailed, the more the joke pleased him'. He was 'a dangerous man' (ibid:92) who had also worked 'as a faker of pictures' (ibid:94). In an 'irony of ironies' (ibid:81), Rex is partnered with Margot as Albinus tries to hide the fact of his affair.

Because 'the art of caricature as Rex understood it' was 'the contrast between cruelty on one side and credulity on the other' (ibid:92) it was inevitable that Rex should enjoy 'the farce' (ibid:106) of a renewed affair with Margot behind Albinus' back though she still hopes for marriage with the latter. He joins Margot in thwarting the attempts of relatives to tell Albinus that his child, Irma, is dying. After a 'hideous quarrel' (ibid:114) with Margot, Albinus reaches the child as she dies. Though he is aware of 'a layer of turpitude which has settled on his life' and 'hears Fate' urging a return to his former life (ibid:114) he cannot face the possibility of an 'empty life ahead' (ibid:115). He refuses to go to the funeral and confides his woes to Rex.
who views the situation as 'a roaring comedy at which he, Rex, had been
reserved a place in the stage-manager's private box' (ibid:118). Rex
sees the 'stage-manager' as 'an elusive, double, triple, self-reflecting
magic proteus of a phantom...the ghost of a juggler on a shimmering
curtain' (ibid:118), the epitome of deception and all that is
misleading.

Albinus, however, is only to realise that 'I was blind' (ibid:147)
after his suspicions about the true nature of the relationship between
Margot and Rex are aroused by an overheard conversation and confirmed by
an old friend. He believes Margot's denials but insists on resuming the
journey to the Riviera without Rex whom they leave behind. Rex is only
concerned to know if his account has been settled. Still infatuated and
upset, Albinus, driving erratically on a mountain road and dazzled by
the sun, runs off the road in an attempt to avoid two cyclists. He is
blinded in the accident.

He experiences claustrophobic panic and despair as he finds it
'impossible to force a way through the solid darkness which was like a
part of himself'. He experiences 'that unbearable mountain of oppression
which was only comparable with the panic of one who wakes to find
himself in the grave' (ibid:157). He bewails the loss of 'the prince of
all our senses' (ibid:159) and tells Margot that 'God has punished me
for distrusting you, but woe betide you if....(ibid:159). Unable to
believe in the finality of his blindness, Albinus consults a specialist
in Zurich. At the station he is, like John Haye and Petrik, bemused and
'stunned' by 'all the different sounds and finds it difficult to
'harmonize' (ibid:160) with the clatter and rocking of the carriage.
It is however in the chalet where he has gone to recuperate that
Albinus is viciously mocked and duped by Margot and Rex. Albinus is
unaware of the presence of Rex who poses as a doctor and discourages all
visitors. At this point 'the impenetrable black cloud in which Albinus
now lived infused an element of austerity and even nobility into his
thoughts and feelings' (ibid:164). It is in stark contrast to the
shallow antics of the other two. Albinus feels that he 'is separated by
darkness from that former life which had been suddenly extinguished at
its sharpest bend' (ibid:164). This suggests not only the death of a way
of life but also separation from the remembered scene of the life
which is in 'the gallery of his mind'. Aware that he has been misled by
the appearance of Margot it is as though she has 'returned to the
darkness of the little cinema from which he had withdrawn her'. But
Albinus 'could not always succeed in convincing himself that physical
blindness was spiritual vision' and tried to convince himself that 'life
with Margot was now happiness, deeper and purer—that she was still
devoted to him' (ibid:165).

Margot, and Rex 'who loved taking risks' (ibid:166), constantly
mock him. Albinus, unaware of Rex's presence, thinks it is Margot who
touches him lightly and tries to embrace her. Rex takes Margot on to his
knee as she reads to Albinus, mimics her or pretends to let her fall.
They derive 'exquisite amusement' (ibid:167) from misleading him about
the colour of his room. They become more daring as they become
accustomed to the 'safety curtain' of his blindness, more amused as he
strains to hear. Rex sits at table with them and eats with 'a masterly
noiselessness' (ibid:168). They cheat Albinus of a 'good deal of his
fortune' and decide to leave him when Margot has persuaded him to sell
land or pictures. They plan to buy him a dog 'as a small token of our gratitude' (ibid:169). There are reminders here of the mockery of January, the old knight in Chaucer's The Merchant's Tale.

Only when his brother-in-law, Paul, reads of the accident does the fact and degree of Margot and Rex's duplicity come to light. Paul, sent by Elisabeth, watches Rex teasing Albinus and denounces him. Understanding the truth at last, Albinus is taken back to Berlin and is given 'what had been Irma's nursery' (ibid:180). Though he intends to kill Margot when she returns to his old home, ostensibly to collect her things, it is Albinus who is shot in the ensuing struggle. She had intended duping him to the end.

The cruel mockery exhibited in Laughter in the Dark is only minimally less in Blind Man's Buff and The Blind Boxer. It may be thought that criticism of a poem --- for children about a familiar game, with its 'Mind you see the handkerchief is tied tight enough' (Farjeon in Something I Remember 1987:65), is too harsh but the poem conveys the idea that anyone who is blind is ripe for teasing, duping and ridicule. Blind Man's Buff is very decidedly a children's poem yet it carries, in a violence of language which is emphasised by belligerent alliteration, a message which can be only too easily transferred into the adult world.

'Buffet the old buffer! Biff him in the sack!
Tug him by the coat tails, turn him off his track.
Twisk and tease and tickle him, tweak him by the cuff,
Baffle the old buffer in Blind Man's Buff!

Bustle him and hustle him,
Muddle and befuddle him,
Bang him off his balance, don't be a funk!
Banter him, befouzie him!
Bewilder him, bamboozle him!
Baffle, bait and badger him, and then do a bunk!
Blind man! Blind man! See how he spins!
Bumping and stumping and barking of his shin.
Rumple him and crumple him, treat the buffer rough—
But beware if he should bag you in Blind Man's Buff.

Similarly, W.H. Davies, in *The Blind Boxer* (1918) describes how Boxer Bob, once 'the terror of his kind' (1.3) and 'a god to drunken men' (1.16) is now taunted by children who steal the nuts he sells 'from street to street' (1.2). He who, before being blinded by fighting, had

''.... had hard muscles, harder than
A schoolboy's bones, who held his ground
When six tall bullies sparred around'' (lines 6-8).

is now at the mercy of 'small children who have no grace' who take 'his nuts before his face' (lines 9/10).

''And when he threatens with his hands
Mock him two feet from where he stands.
Mock him, who could some years ago
Have leapt five feet to strike a blow.''' (lines 11-14).

Pityingly, Davies remarks on the reversal of fortune which has brought this once strong and skilful boxer to the present helplessness which encourages 'these cowards' (1.30) to harry and tease him.

Poor helpless Bobby, blind; I see
Thy working face and pity thee. (lines 31/32),

Pity seems to be the first and almost inevitable response to blindness but it is not as simple an emotion as it may appear. Though it is said to derive from 'piare—to purify, to expiate' and to signify 'a feeling of emotion and tenderness around suffering' (Partridge op.cit:498) it can also imply 'slight contempt for a person because of some intellectual or moral inferiority attributed to them' (O.E.D.1989 II:932) and thus give rise to a host of ambivalent feelings. As I hope I have shown, pity can be prompted as much from fear as from compassion.
and it is this fear which skews relationships and distorts evaluations of both achievement and failure. Pity also imposes beliefs about the ways in which blind people are expected to respond to their disability and is frequently resented because of this. It can lead both to presumptions of helplessness and dependency and the need for protection, and assumptions about additional gifts. It is clear that the pity which comes from a combination of gratitude for sight and the fear of its loss does not diminish even in the presence of increased knowledge about both blindness and the blind.

Though it is common to find a multiplicity of views about blindness in any one piece of work, pity as a response to lack of sight will be dealt with as a single theme in the poetry and prose under discussion in this section.

The poems by W.H.Davies, Wilfred Gibson and Andrew Young which I quote here show the 'honesty and directness of approach' (C.K.Stead 1964:82) which was a characteristic of the Georgian poets who came after Newbolt and Kipling, 'whose minds ran at the level of public expectation' of 'versified Imperialist sentiments, the public school spirit, or patriotic fervour' (ibid:49). Life for the Georgians 'was what they experienced' (ibid:82). It consisted of 'just looking at people and things as themselves—neither as useful nor moral nor ugly or anything else, but just as being' (Rupert Brooke ibid:82). They rejected 'large themes and the language of rhetoric' and attempted instead 'to come to terms with immediate experience, sensuous or imaginative, in a language close to common speech' (ibid:88). Their poetry was 'honest, personal, direct and its values were humane' (ibid:89) and showed
evidence of 'the new realism' which brought 'honesty' and clear
sightedness' (ibid:92) to their work.

Thus, in A Blind Child (1907) and The Fog (1913) Davies, whose
'strength lies in his fidelity to personal experience' (Church
1913:xxvii) and in his sympathy with the underdog, 'a few tramps, a few
hungry old beggar women, a cheated prostitute, a brutally used child, a
tortured animal' (ibid:xxxii), displays a sympathy similar to that shown
to the blind boxer. The strength of Davies's empathetic identification
is indicated by his observation that, to him, 'the presence of a child
that's blind/In a green garden' is worse than that of 'a stiffened
corse'. He is rendered 'dumb' at the realisation that she says she is
unaware of what he sees about him—the 'flowers of all kind/The sheep
and cattle on the lea', the 'flowers and buds and butterflies'. He is
uneasy at her practice of feeling his clothes in order to recognize
'worldly place' and pales 'for fear her hand would wrongly trace' his
face which she touches to ascertain 'if I was good'. Like so many other
writers, Davies implicitly suggests a belief in an extraordinary and
additional awareness given to blind people through their sense of touch.

Davies who testifies to feelings of near wonderment and awe at the
use of senses other than sight shows a similar amazement at the skill
and ability of 'the blind man [who] led me home' in the fog. Describing
his own helplessness he admits that he 'lost all judgement then/Of
distance and of space'.

Davies's gratitude for the sense of sight is mirrored in Wilfred
Gibson's poem Sight (1914) and in two poems by Andrew Young, The Blind
Man and The Blind Child (both published here in 1974).
Gibson's brief poem shows how, in a moment of sudden awareness, his keen enjoyment of the colours of fruit in the lamplight is given pause at the sound of a white stick and all that it implies.

My heart thanked God for the goodly gift of sight
And all youth's lively senses keen and quick....
When suddenly, behind me in the night,
I heard the tapping of a blind man's stick. (lines 7-10).

Similarly Young, contemplating caterpillar-eaten leaves, compares his ability

To see the leaves against the light
Rich and not ruinous,
Set with bright diamonds on the fire-fringed bough. (lines 14-16)

with that of a blind child whose visual loss is also experienced by the blind man to whom, despite a knowledge of their differing calls, all birds are as one.

Speak of the birds, he lifts a listening finger
And 'chiff-chaff', 'willow-warbler' names each singer,
'Hedge-sparrow', 'robin', 'wren', he knows their cries,
Though all are nightingales to his blind eyes.

Overwhelming as is Davies's pity for the blind child and the blind boxer it is as nothing when compared with that shown in Cookson's poem The Blind Sailor (1932) where the piping of a 'cheerful song' by the blind man is sufficient to move the narrator to 'salt drops of sorrow my sailor cannot see'. There is no tempering here of pity by appreciation of other abilities, nor pleasure in sight itself, but instead a depiction of blindness as dependency and decay with intimations of approaching death.

Helplessness and decline which have replaced youth, strength and confidence are indicated immediately in the opening words of the poem

Lead out the blind sailor that once was England's pride,
A bold man and a burley and a man of jest was he.
Lead out the blind sailor on the green hillside,
A pale light falling on the old gray sea. (lines 1-4).
The poem then compares the now 'withered leaf' to a once 'goodly tree'. The suggestion is clear that there is no future for the blind sailor who, again metaphorically, is likened to a 'blind ship' which 'crawls to her grave in the sea' in the 'weary winter'...a portrayal, indeed, without hope.

Whilst it is rare to find such a totally negative and sentimental attitude taken towards blindness, there is nevertheless, much uninformed pity in Rosamund Lehmann's novel Invitation to the Waltz (which was also published 1932) and, somewhat surprisingly, in Joni Frost's novel A Girl in Blue published as late in the century as 1968. The 1981 re-issue of Lehmann's novel, with its foreword by Janet Watts, is used here together with the 1982 reprint of Frost's work.

Invitation to the Waltz is set in the post World War One period of 1920. Watts describes it as an 'anachronism' and a 'period piece'. Although the views expressed are the untutored thoughts and musings of a 'well brought up young bourgeoise' during the coming out dance of an 'aristocratic local neighbour', they serve to perpetuate what can only be seen as the received ideas and imaginings of an adolescent girl from a sheltered and privileged background.

Olivia's reaction to the realisation that Timothy Douglas is blind brings into play a set of responses which range from pity and overprotectiveness to amazement at his achievements. She had not immediately realised that he was blind, though she had noted that her friend, Marigold, spoke to him with 'a softer, more caressing note than one ever heard before' (Lehmann 1932:245). Her feelings are made the more emotional since he had lost his sight in the recent war. Her immediate response, 'I'll guide you, I'll look after you. Depend on
me...Blinded in the war? There wasn't a scar...nothing to proclaim it' (ibid:248) is followed by a second, equally skewed assumption. She thinks that 'His hand, holding hers, vibrated as if it had a separate, infinitely sensitive life'. She notes that he has 'long fingers, exquisite nails' and thinks 'He'll guess what I'm like from my voice, from touching me. What will he guess? They say blind people always know, you can't deceive them' (ibid:248).

Having made the familiar imputation of additional and almost visionary gifts she experiences the common phenomenon of unease in the presence of blind people. But she thinks to herself that 'I suppose you soon get used...It all depends how you let yourself think about it. Even now, already, it was getting quite easy to behave towards him as his simplicity, his utter non-assumption of the role of martyr, his rather negative, low pitched but unforced cheerfulness demanded...to treat him as one like other men. It was as if he were tacitly demonstrating: You see, it isn't a tragedy at all. You needn't be sorry for me...Yet the first image persisted in the background of her mind: a figure in its essence far apart' (ibid:250).

Again, although Douglas explains that after a period at St. Dunstan's he is now a chicken farmer, married and with a child, and able to do 'pretty well everything for myself' (ibid:253), Olivia is unable to accept that he is 'a successful grown-up man' who has, by his own labours established his security. For her the fact that he has probably never seen his wife, nor would ever see his daughter 'was the sort of thing that brought a too easy sob in the throat (ibid:253). She imagines him as 'painstakingly independent, giving no trouble' (ibid:254) even though he confirms that 'I can do pretty well everything for myself. One
is taught not to... well, not to think of it as a misfortune, you know' (ibid:253). There is ample evidence of both disbelief, and undue praise at achievement in her surprise that he walks 'with a high quick step straight on his course, his touch on her arm almost imperceptible: not at all like one's idea of the shuffle and grope of the blind man. Only his head looked somehow vulnerable and wary' (ibid:257).

Olivia thinks that Douglas 'looks like a blind man' as, with 'the muscles taut in his face' (ibid:258), he waits, his cigarette burning away. She assumes, as he smooths his hair, brushes his sleeves that he's afraid of looking slovenly, neglected, ridiculous and not knowing it' (ibid:257). To Olivia, 'struck to the heart' at the sight of him sitting alone at the end of the party, 'he seemed to sit in shadow. Light had vanished, not from his eyes alone but from his ruined being. He would never emerge again. She saw how his young weak face was frozen, how it was wrenched, compelled into unnatural lines so that it was a mask, a grotesque mask of strength and patience... it was not what should have happened to him' (ibid: 285/60. Dancing 'with him in love and sorrow' she imagines he 'danced with his youth and his death' (ibid:288) since 'they [had] wronged him, they'd abused him... his murdered youth' (ibid:287). Olivia and Marigold (who is unable to bring herself to say the word 'blind' but also notices that 'he never stumbles or makes a mistake' [ibid:290]) find it hard to believe that Douglas's wife shows no sign 'of spiritual intensity, renunciation, suffering such as might fitly mark the face of one devoting, sacrificing all to a blind husband' (ibid:249).

Surprisingly, in the light of their eloquent, but misinformed and unquestioning views about blindness and the blind, these two adolescent
girls, in an apparent turnabout, hand an unexpected accolade to the woman, now his wife, who had once nursed him. Although unable to imagine themselves caring for him they say that 'he wants someone to take him for granted and make him feel ordinary and safe and practical and she does that' (ibid:290). This is an unexpected and down to earth conclusion and one in striking contrast to their earlier responses which owe much to stereotype and assumption.

As already indicated, more than thirty years separate the publication of the novels of Lehmann and Frost, and yet pity (in the form of over-protection) and assumptions of heightened 'perceptive capacity' (Frost 1982:114), are only two of the many stereotypical views which are purveyed in *The Girl in Blue*. This novel does much to reinforce familiar, but untested and unthinking, beliefs about blindness.

In an unlikely story, perhaps best described as 'light fiction', Anna Rita becomes, so the blurb tells us, 'the adopted child of the village' after being found as a six-year old, half-drowned on the local beach, and blinded by a fall on rocks. It is suggested that bribery of a local 'official' ensures that she remain in the care of her many unauthorized guardians. They are careful to make no reference to her 'obvious tragedy' (ibid:15), the 'one flaw in Anna Rita' (ibid:13), which is attributed to 'the providence that'd done such a needlessly cruel thing to so beautiful a child' (ibid:41). Concerned that she will prove to be a 'frightful handicap' (ibid:41) to the young man Hugh, who wishes to marry her, and worried about 'all the sacrifices' which he will 'have to make' (ibid:88), the guardians consider however that she
has 'now found a reason to be a woman' (ibid:69). Clearly, as single and blind she remains a neuter, a nothing, as 'unfinished' as John Haye.

Co-incidentally, and barely surprisingly in this story, Hugh's father happens to be an eye surgeon. Anna Rita is taken to him for the treatment which restores her sight. Her quick understanding of the reasons for the examination (kept from her by the ever secretive villagers) is attributed to the fact that 'the blind sense things other people only vaguely feel' (ibid:114). As might be anticipated, Anna Rita's recovery of sight is rapid enough to enable her to pick Hugh 'out of the shadows' (ibid:170) immediately after the bandages are removed from her eyes.

Since this novel was reprinted in the same year as its initial publication it can only be assumed that it appealed to a wide readership which enjoyed, and presumably believed, the messages which it purveyed.

d.Blindness as Death and Rebirth

It is easy to ascribe Olivia's belief that Tommy Douglas was 'dancing with his youth and his death' (Lehmann op.cit:288) to her overheated imagination and an emotional response to the fact and cause of his blindness, but she is doing nothing more than giving voice to the long held belief that the darkness of blindness is analogous to the darkness of death itself and therefore to be as much or more feared. As I hope I have shown it becomes a commonplace for people to believe that they would rather be dead than blind.

It is however now recognized that though loss of sight does in fact constitute a 'dying', since it signifies both 'the end, the death of that sighted life' (Carroll op.cit:11) and also the loss of physical and
psychological integrity in the loss of the 'eye' and the 'I', the self, it can present, as it did for John Haye, an opportunity for personal growth which is in itself a kind of rebirth.

This process of adjustment and re-awakening to a new self is evident in four works whose publication dates span the century i.e. in A.E.W. Mason's *The Four Feathers* (originally published in 1902 but quoted here in a 1939 edition), Walter Jens's novel *The Blind Man* (1954), Cecilia Bartholomew's *Second Sight* (1980) and John Galsworthy's short story *Late 299* which was originally published in 1925 but quoted here in a reprinted edition of 1968. This last work is more clearly limited to concepts of loss and death. Only the later novels indicate awareness of both the psychological steps to be taken toward acceptance and rebirth and the practical steps involved in rehabilitation and accommodation to sightlessness.

Thus, Galsworthy's blind man, comparing his grief at the onset of blindness with that of the deep bitterness of the sighted doctor who had been imprisoned after 'an illegal operation case' (1968:638), admits that 'losing my sight used to burn my 'eart a bit' (ibid:641). Initially it might be thought that the fellow feeling between the two men had been engendered by the experience of common misfortune, and an analogy drawn between the death of sight on the one hand and the death of spirit on the other of the man who had tried to 'save a woman going to the devil'. The doctor had thought it would be at 'a small risk to oneself' (ibid:633). It was however a risk which had resulted in ostracism by society in general and by a family whose metaphorical blindness to the reasons for the doctor's actions leaves them embarrassed and without understanding.
Uniquely, blindness itself facilitates the rapport and sense of trust between the two men. The doctor whose son 'likens him to a basilisk' (ibid:642) and who, rejecting the world, thinks 'little or nothing of human nature' (ibid:643) softens in the presence of the man whom he can see 'without your seeing me' (ibid:640), whilst the blind man, substituting touch for sight, is the better able to recognize qualities in a face 'sharp, a bit acid, suitable to saints, martyrs and that' (ibid:639/640). More is revealed to him by touch and his own sense of loss than is evident to the doctor's family through actual eyesight.

The man who feels there is no worse misfortune than that of blindness recognizes a similar depth of suffering in the doctor who 'touched bottom' (ibid:241), but whereas the doctor, not wanting pity, has responded with a protective self-sufficiency the blind man, in contrast, and out of his own experience, reaches out to Dr. Raider who is otherwise so alone. The blind man's gift to the doctor of a wooden figure of Christ, which he was carving for Christmas, becomes a symbol here of rebirth and hope for the future, offered by a man who in misfortune has gained in understanding of a man apparently despairing and hopeless.

Similarly, the one-time soldier, Durrance, in Mason's The Four Feathers also develops a heightened perceptivity, a new 'instinct of delicacy which has been born in him lately by reason of his suffering' together with the 'habit of thought' (1939:199).

What is described by a fellow officer as the 'calamity' (ibid:114) of Durrance's blindness does not bring the personal insights which, as will be seen, are given to Jens' 'Herr Mittenhauffer' or Bartholomew's 'Rozlinde'. Yet he too is able to claim that 'trouble and thought had
sharpened his mind as well as his senses' so that he 'saw ever so much more clearly now that he was blind'. He says that he had 'grown quicker since he began to see' (ibid:128). Indeed, Durrance who is initially described as having 'a slow mind' (ibid:79), comes to pride himself 'upon the quickness of his perception'. He found that 'it was a delight to him to make discoveries which no-one expected a man who had lost his sight to make and to announce them unexpectedly' (ibid:309). It is made plain that these abilities come from no supernatural source and are not an inevitable accompaniment to blindness since, for Durrance, 'it was an additional pleasure to relate to his puzzled audience the steps by which he had reached his discovery' (ibid:309).

It is a mark of the pragmatic approach to blindness of this 'man of courage' (ibid:81), that though he was once 'trained to vigour and activity' and had felt at home in the 'wild uncitied places of the world' (ibid:114) he is now able to say 'one can get used to blindness and take it as a natural thing' (ibid:195) and take amusement from his 'sense of helplessness during the first days of his blindness' (ibid:124). He had realised, in common with so many other blind people, that 'if one cannot see, one can at all events hear' (ibid:118), a realisation that will be shown to have great importance to the characters of both Jens and Bartholomew.

Mason presents a convincing and realistic picture of the accommodation to blindness of a man to whom once, the 'desolate tracts were home' (ibid:114) and who, on losing 'the only sort of life that suits me', admits that 'it takes time to get used to being blind after your eyes have served you pretty well all your life' (ibid:115). Aware of 'not having any intellect to buck about' (ibid:116), and afraid of
the self absorption and narrowing of interests he has observed in other
blind people, Durrance, honouring the code of his day, attempts to break
off his engagement to Ethne. He fears it would be 'a sacrifice'
(ibid:126) for her even though she is prepared to make it, realising as
she does all that he has lost and despite her dread of restraint upon
her freedom.

It is however this hard-gained perception which leads Durrance to
renounce ideas of marriage. Already fearing that Ethne would have
'married a cripple out of pity' (ibid:131) he learns that her once
fiancé, long believed dead, has returned. Alone except for servant,
Durrance goes back to the East, to the desert which he loved even
though years earlier it had 'smitten and cast him out' (ibid:316) and
caused his blindness.

Blindness, with its lack of immediate visual stimulation, had
clearly allowed this previously active soldier time for introspection
and thought. His apparently newly acquired gifts of sensitivity to the
thoughts of others and his ability to succeed at seemingly problematical
tasks appears to come from an increased inwardness of temperament
brought about by sensory deprivation.

A pain of loss similar to that of both of Galsworthy's characters
is also shown by Heinrich Mittenhauefer in Walter Jens' novel The Blind
Man. Mittenhauefer's experience of blindness provides just as important
and meaningful a crisis in his life as did that of Esther Summerson in
Bleak House.

We are told that Mittenhauefer feels that he had 'nothing left but
the past' (1954:29) when he is blinded by scarlet fever in 1950. He is
given a set of bricks which was once used by a group of prisoners in a
concentration camp in order 'to give [them] hope of one day being able to live again' (ibid:60). In the bricks he finds, not a promise of rebirth and freedom, but a return to the familiarity and security of his old world which he is loth to leave. What was intended as a kind of passport into the healing world of the imagination becomes, instead, a means of escape from the reality of blindness and the demands of a 'new world' (ibid:23). His anxious need to 'keep the situation under control' (ibid:6) by the compulsive recreation, with the bricks, of his home and neighbourhood is only brought to an end by the blind man whose support at the time encouraged the survival of the group in the camp. His advice never to play alone with the bricks and to 'bear in mind that you see as long as you do not forget the face of others' (ibid:116) brings Nittenhaufer to a realisation of his own self absorption, both now and in the past, and his 'blindness' to the needs of others. Here insight and increased awareness come, not as inevitable concomitants of blindness, but through the traumatic experience of loss of sight.

Although the psychological journey to acceptance and insight takes precedence in this story, Jens indicates that in practical terms, the journey to independence also has its setbacks, involving as it does learning of a different kind. Neither Nittenhaufer nor his sighted wife had appreciated the need to count steps, pavements and traffic lights, or envisaged the difficulties of negotiating a train journey. Whilst Nittenhaufer comes to feel he may be 'superior to everybody' in the dark, he bitterly reflects that 'this counted for nothing in the world of those with sight' since they had 'no need to hear, for at any moment...they could switch on the light and see' (ibid:97). Realisation
is to come only slowly that 'there was no need to see; everything that
happened could be clearly perceived from sounds and smells' (ibid:32).

In ironic contrast RozLinde (the name by which she is known as a
successful model and photographer in Cecilia Bartholamew's novel Second
Sight) does all she can to hide her condition both from herself and from
the outside world. The practical steps which she takes to provide for
the exigencies of blindness are intended as much to dupe others as they
are to facilitate her day to day living. Her struggle to accept the fact
of visual impairment and its consequences comes not from retreat into a
game of bricks but through a fight against victimisation and
intimidation, a fellow feeling for a deaf child and insight into close
family relationships. It is a mark of changed and changing perceptions
about blindness and the blind that RozLinde's inability to accept
disability should provide the theme for a modern day 'thriller' which
contains within it a realistic portrayal of some of the facts and
fantasies about blindness.

Unlike Mittenhauer whose condition is an immediate consequence of
scarlet fever, RozLinde's blindness is inherited from the father she has
always felt to be insignificant. In her mother's view he had 'gone blind
on purpose' (1980:114) because he was 'lazy rather than blind' (ibid:31).
Now, hating her father 'for the legacy' which sounded 'obscene,
shameful' (ibid:31), and having been taught by the 'strong' mother whom
she strives to please, to believe that 'the good man takes care of
himself' (ibid:111), RozLinde is determined to 'play the part of a
sighted person' (ibid:14) for the rest of her life. She had decided as a
child that she 'would need no-one' (ibid:31). She will never let
herself forget that she had once 'been a champion' (ibid:10), who was 'gifted on both sides of the camera' (ibid:31).

Because she feels that she is 'being forced out of one world into another' (ibid:20) RozLinde initially denies that there is 'blindness in the family' (ibid:119). She comes only slowly to accept the surgeon's verdict that 'blindness will be unimportant if you make it so' (ibid:122), and to decide that if loss of sight is inevitable she will fight 'helplessness and dependency' (ibid:124) to prove that 'a handicap was not a defeat' (ibid:107). At first RozLinde goes to considerable lengths to hide the extent of her disability. She moves to a poor area of town to make 'my own world where no-one knew or could pity me' (ibid:13). The purchase of a colour T.V. with remote control is both to hide her 'shame' (ibid:129) at loss of sight and to persuade herself that 'anyone would know that a sighted person lived here' (ibid:137). She enjoys the independence which the flat planned with 'vision' (ibid:29) gives her but refuses to use a white cane.

She thinks that 'nothing could be as bad as not being able to see' (ibid:29) and is 'humiliated to feel for things' (ibid:16). She feels that blindness is 'taunting me. He is a presence in the house like a relative' (ibid:137), who has 'an enormous appetite which fed on light' (ibid:138) but who cannot be evicted. Darkness becomes 'uncomfortable' because 'it could not be controlled. It was the unknown and the unknown always frightened' (ibid:36). Because she could not see, she could not trust and 'that was the true isolation of blindness' (ibid:45).

Insight into the reasons for her denial of blindness and the steps taken toward acceptance come only slowly through the blackmailing and terrorizing of RozLinde by her partner Arnold, her sense of
identification with the deaf child Gerald who 'was like the
externalization of my deformity' (ibid:84) and the percipience of a
neighbour who advises her to 'shrink' the blindness by 'saying it,
acknowledging it' (ibid:194).

Unable to accept that RozLinde's lucrative career is over, Arnold
tries to persuade her to become 'a heroine overnight as a blind model',
'an American myth' (ibid:78). When this fails he tries to convince her
that, now blind, she is not competent to run her own affairs. He tells
her that 'you're a blind woman, for chrissake Roz, you're helpless'
(ibid:75). He creates fear and uncertainty through anonymous 'phone
calls, implies mental instability and threatens to publish photographs
which will expose her 'deformity' (ibid.55) to the world. (There are
reminders here of Patrick Hamilton's play Gaslight(1939] and the film
Wait Until Dark (1967]). Arnold's attacks only lose their power when
RozLinde is able to acknowledge that 'Sight wasn't everything. I had my
ears' (ibid:152).

As with Mittenhaumer, however, acceptance does not come without
regret. Although RozLinde is able to say that 'there would never be a
change in the dark for me' she clings to the hope that 'perhaps there
would be a life of the dark' (ibid:152). She still feels that 'to go
blind was to die, and to be reborn into a different species, a
subspecies, a sub-sub, a minority of one'. She reflects that 'it was
difficult to hold on to my ego, to believe that I was not less than the
majority. I had not yet learned it, but I sensed that only blindness
itself could give me the pride I needed. Blindness was a loss of
identity...it was also a state without time and place...my uninvited
relative' (ibid:171).
True insight into the fact that she had 'never really accepted that blindness was final' (ibid:246), that she has reacted to it with anger, denial and shame, and 'hadn't been mature enough to face the world with a label on myself' (ibid:237) comes only with the late knowledge that her father had reacted similarly to his own loss of sight and to the realisation that she has, unconsciously, believed that her sight will be restored if she provides money for treatment to restore Gerald's hearing and speech. Her refusal to believe him incurable is matched by her own inability to accept that she will never see again.

It is significant that in this novel blindness is compared favourably with deafness. Here it is not the young blind woman who is learning to find her way about who is taunted by the local children but the deaf child who is unable to communicate with them. Similarly, the 'second sight' of RozLinde's newly honed sense of hearing proves to be more reliable than sight (or even that 'second sight' superstitiously accorded to the caul which covered her face at birth) when she is able to find Gerald hidden under the railway platform after his abduction from home. She tells the child 'If I had been able to see with my eyes I would not have found you down there. I don't have sight, but I have second sight' (ibid:246).

RozLinde's sudden capitulation to blindness, her willingness to carry a white cane, learn Braille and openly attend a concert comes as something of an anticlimax at the end of a novel where blindness has been used as a reason for terror and blackmail, as a focus for hatred, resistance and denial and as a means of rescue where sight would have faltered. The novel, like so many others, presents a confused mixture of ideas about blindness. Some are so close to fact that it might be
thought that the writer has direct experience of sightlessness. Others clearly depend on ingrained belief for effect. The fact that such closely interwoven sets of belief continue to exist together would suggest that we go on seeking for meaning in illness.

iii. Attribution of Special Gifts
As the novels of Jens, Hunter and Bartholamew have shown, fictional portrayals of blindness in this century becomes increasingly true to life with a greater understanding of how education, rehabilitation and training can encourage the substitution of one sense for another. This goes in tune with the advancements in science and educational theory and results in a lessening of belief in 'extraordinary virtue or preternatural powers' (Carroll op.cit:69). The once surprising discovery that a blind person is 'as one like another man' becomes a commonplace and negates the assumption that he is in 'essence far apart' (Lehmann op.cit:250). And yet, as will be seen, and despite the greater knowledge of the processes by which blind people live, their achievements are still commonly regarded with awe and attributed to more than usual skill by those whose sight remains unimpaired and whose sensory acuities are less vital as adjuncts to sight.

a. Hearing
'If you make a noise I can't see' (Lucy Lunt 1965). Startling as it may seem this remark, made by a blind child who is anxiously anticipating the arrival of a train, would no doubt have been appreciated and understood by the likes of Heinrich Mittenhauser with his awareness of 'sounds and smells', Ike with his musical ear, RozLinde with her 'second sight' and Young's blind man who had the ability to differentiate
between different kinds of bird calls. All these protagonists show how hearing, sharpened by usage, becomes a valued and vital alternative to sight. It is not, as they demonstrate, an inevitable gift made to those without sight.

However, Andrew Young's belief that hearing, no matter how acute, is no real substitute or compensation for loss of sight is brought bleakly home in Michael Hamburger's poem *Blind Man* (1963). Here blindness is experienced as 'a wound that has hardened to armour' even though it is possible to 'hear the owl's flight in daylight', 'the stag beetles blundering in the hedge/On the far side of the meadow' at night, and the honking of 'Geese half a mile away...near as hooters of swerving cars'. The blind man may be indifferent to the dogs 'that he feared when they slunk or bounded/Visible at him' now that he is 'secure from harm' in his 'carapace of darkness', but 'once the screech and the hum/Blend and subside into a resonant quiet' and 'the shapes he has fumbled to feel fall back/Into unbroken space when his touch forgot them' this man experiences blindness as 'his no man's land', without light and life.

A total negation of being is suggested as 'wombed and housed and coffined' he is unaware of, let alone able to reach, 'the apple that hangs unplucked, grown fabulous'. There appears to be no hope here either of fulfilment or opportunity to reach out beyond the inhibiting effects of blindness. Acute hearing there may be but it provides no recompense in a poem which ultimately presents an extremely negative and disturbing picture of blindness. Its implications are unexpected in a work published more than half way through the twentieth century.
b. Touch

Although Heinrich Mittenhaufer initially believed that 'sounds and smells' were enough, it was his sense of touch which both enabled him to take comfort from the re-creation of his old familiar world in a box of bricks and gave him the additional ability to function in the new world of sightlessness. It is an ability which has, in this past century particularly, opened up the world of communication and learning to the majority of blind people, thus reducing their isolation and encouraging integration and participation.

Basic however as this sense has always been to the very existence of the blind, for some characters, such as Galsworthy's blind man, Medina's mother and, in this instance Maurice in Lawrence's The Blind Man (first published in 1920 but quoted here in a 1981 edition), touch is seen to represent a means of communication and contact which reaches far beyond the world of Braille and other embossed literature.

R.E. Pritchard indicates that The Blind Man is one of three stories (the others are The Horse Dealer's Daughter and You Touched Me) in which Lawrence 'develops his aphorism "the mind is the Light; the senses, they are the Darkness"' (1971:109). For Lawrence, touch 'was the most vital of the senses' (R.H. Poole & P.J. Shepherd 1970:41) so that, not unexpectedly in The Blind Man, 'the physical reality of touch itself becomes a central factor in a story where we are shown in a number of ways precisely how each character operates in relation to this sensory experience' (Nancy Albon 1961:220). It is also a story where 'Lawrence once again examines the problem which most deeply concerned him throughout his life, the conception of the complexity of the relations between men and women' (ibid:215).
A sense of touch has become all important to Maurice who was blinded in Flanders and is now, like Tommy Douglas, a farmer. For the man who 'wanted blood contact with the substantial world' without 'intervention of visual consciousness' (ibid:185) it is 'a pleasure to stretch forth the hand and meet the unseen object, clasp it and possess it in pure contact. He did not try to remember, to visualise. He did not want to. The new way of consciousness substituted itself in him' (ibid:186). It gives him 'an almost incomprehensible peace of immediate contact in darkness' so that 'with his wife he had a whole world rich and real and invisible. He did not even regret the loss of his sight in these times of dark, palpable joy. A certain exultance swelled his soul' (ibid:126).

Ironically and disastrously however, it is this highly valued sense of touch which misleads Maurice into thinking that his attempt to get better acquainted with Bertie Reid is successful. Reid, the kinsman of Maurice's wife, Isobel, is 'the epitome of Lawrence's cerebral man'. He is 'devoid of any connection with a physical contact with life' (Albon op.cit:215) and is 'unable ever to enter close contact of any sort' (Lawrence 1920:190). The encounter between Maurice and Bertie leaves the latter 'like a mollusc whose shell is broken' (ibid:197).

Wishing to 'know' Bertie as Galsworthy's blind man 'knew' Dr.Raider, Maurice has asked to touch Bertie's face and, wanting reassurance that his own appearance was not 'horrible' (ibid:195) had requested that Bertie in turn touch the scars on his face and eyes. The catastrophic results are clearly visible to Isobel, if not to Maurice. Bertie's 'one desire—to escape from this intimacy which had been thrust upon him' (ibid:197) in many ways mirrors Isobel's own wish for release
from the same claustrophobic, 'unspeakable intimacy' (ibid:179) of this last year of her marriage to Maurice, from which, at times, 'she would give anything to escape' (ibid:176). She has invited Bertie as a welcome visitor from the outside world at a time when she is fearful of what has become both 'a terrible joy to her and a terrifying burden' (ibid:177). This burden is occasioned not only by their 'solitude and unspeakable nearness' but also by the 'devastating fits of depression' and 'the black and massive misery' (ibid:176) which were the outcome of what Maurice regarded as his 'fatal flaw' (ibid:187) and his fear of dependency.

Now, though Maurice feels that he has been accepted by 'the representative of civilised society' and is 'reconciled with the world of light...his being enhanced', the 'enforced physical contact and awareness have annihilated Bertie' (Pritchard op.cit:110). In this sense 'the dark God has proved more powerful than the frail representative of light and the social world' (ibid:110) although Maurice has not achieved the friendship he needs.

Significantly, whilst Bertie Reid's discomfiture is understandable in the context of that particular story, it is only in the other novel of the earlier part of the century, Buchan's *The Three Hostages* that there is any suggestion of touch being equated with uncanny properties and this is, doubtless, because of the reference to the Medina family's interest in 'ancient lore'. It is increasingly acknowledged that a heightened sense of touch is nothing more than the ability to compensate for the loss of one sense by the refined use of another.
iv. Extra Sensory Gifts

In view of the dissemination of knowledge about, and increased understanding of, the causes of blindness and the alternative use of other senses to compensate for the loss of sight, it is not surprising to find that there is comparatively little literary evidence of belief in uncanny powers and what there is appears to be limited to the earlier part of this century.

It is true that there are no suggestions of prophetic gifts such as those given to Tiresias or Milton even, but there are indications, in Gibson's *The Blind Rower* (1912) Buchan's *The Three Hostages* (1924) and Michael Stewart's *Blindsight* (1987) that ideas of the paranormal still persist. As already shown, Mrs. Medina's 'remarkable and inward turned eyes', alongside her love of 'ancient lore' and 'mysteries of the spirit', are enough to suggest powers beyond the ordinary, whilst Gibson clearly indicates the belief that blind people have not only special access to the things of the spirit:

Though blind from birth, he still could row
As well as any lad with sight,
And knew strange things that none may know
Save those who live without the light. lines 5-8.

but that they are also accorded special protection since, following his father's death in the boat:

His hand has never touched an oar,
Since they came home together.
The blind, who rowed his father home.
The dead, who steered his blind son home. lines 75-78.

I have chosen to conclude this section with the futuristic novel *Blindsight* (1987) not only because of its recent publication date but because it appears to offer, through the most sophisticated modern research and technology, the chance of sight for blind people whilst
continuing to purvey some of the most deeply ingrained beliefs about blindness causation. Though the work is described on the dust cover as 'a chilling novel of psycho-suspense' it appears to gain additional credence because of its prestigious sources. The author, Michael Stewart, acknowledges the help of Colin Blakemore, Professor of Physiology at Oxford University, The Department of Experimental Psychology at the same University, The Rehabilitation Unit for the Visually Handicapped in Oxford, The Royal National Institute for the Blind, The Society for Psychical Research and the Department of Clinical Psychology at Oxford's Littlemore Hospital (a psychiatric hospital). Such careful preparation appears to give weight to a novel whose views run so directly counter to those of the autobiographers who are writing of their own experiences of blindness at the same time.

As I have indicated, the novel moves strikingly between suggestions of startling and previously unimagined medical advance and the familiar themes of divine punishment, redemption and the gift of second sight when the scientist offers 'blindsight, the visual ability in a field defect in the absence of acknowledged awareness. That is the ability of a blind man to see' (dustcover).

The protagonist, Guy, is determined to 'live a normal life' (1987:35) after being blinded in a football accident. He plans carefully for the continuation of his career and for his day-to-day living activities. Yet despite the increased acuity of his remaining senses ('he uses his ears to detect tiny echoes and changes in air pressure' [p.94]) he views blindness as a 'sunless prison' (ibid:138) and avoids mingling 'with his tribe' so as not 'to witness their own daily battle of courage against despair, [and] to be seen to bear the same mark as
them' (ibid:143). For him sightlessness has taken away 'any hope of happiness' (ibid:78) with his girl-friend, Lisa, and like Durrance before him, he breaks off the relationship.

Desperate for cure he accepts treatment from the ambitious, but unscrupulous experimental biophysicist, Ross, who has succeeded in restoring 'blindsight' (ibid:21), 'a hopelessly rough and ready form of sight' (ibid:22), to a cat. Despite being warned that this 'state of the art research' is as yet unauthorised and still 'years away from clinical application' (ibid:16), Guy continues with treatment though he is unprepared for the unexpected side effects which produce brain tumours and intractable blindness. Futuristic ideas of cure by means of high technology are however challenged by that oldest of beliefs, divine punishment. This belief is tenaciously held by Guy's nine year old son, James, who believes that 'the Lord took Dad's sight away for a purpose ...It was his punishment' (ibid:127). Three years earlier James had witnessed his mother's murder at Guy's hands. The child however had no means of knowing that, ill with cancer, she had asked Guy to put an end to her suffering. Now he makes a number of attempts to stop the treatment believing that this is 'cheating God' (ibid:244). He is convinced that his father must 'take his punishment' because 'He made you blind. He means you to stay blind' (ibid:244). Convinced that the treatment is 'not right' (ibid:105) James fears a worse punishment to come, a fear which is in fact realised through another's cavalier behaviour.

In this most modern of novels as Guy also experiences second sight, 'this gift—this curse of foresight' (ibid:170) after each treatment. Though he initially discounts the gift, he comes to feel, in the wake of
further tragedy, that it would have been better used as a 'chance of
redeeming himself for the terrible thing he had done that morning'
(ibid:171). The biophysicist, Ross, however provides a scientific
explanation. He suggests that psychics who claim second sight 'probably
have a straightforward way of hypnotising themselves' (ibid:167) because
it comes more easily to those 'in a state of sensory deprivation'. This
explanation is readily understood by Guy since his treatment takes place
'in that damn chamber designed to cut out all sound and touch'
(ibid:167).

It is, perhaps, inevitable-in the climax to this suspense novel
that Guy, warned by 'foreknowledge' (ibid:251), but also helped by an
hour's return of actual sight, is able to forestall his son's attempt to
kill him and to explain fully the circumstances surrounding the death of
his wife. Acceptance and understanding come to father and son but, in
keeping with the prevailing tone the novel ends on a dark and foreboding
note. The now obsessed biophysicist quietly determines to continue with
his experiments despite knowing that his treatment causes Guy to develop
a brain tumour which destroys his sight.

Not all is darkness, however, at the end of this novel which
combines science fiction and ancient myth. In keeping with current
belief in the capabilities of young blind men, Guy concludes 'Blind,
yes, but active' (ibid:258) as he learns new ways of coping. It is an
assertion of independence and ability which is repeated time and again
in the autobiographical accounts which follow and which make no claim to
special gifts.

It is also interesting to note, that eight years after the
publication of Blindsight with its seemingly impossible cures,
American researchers have shown how a laser could help some blind or partially sighted people to see simple text and video images ' (Daily Telegraph 4.4.95).

**Depictions of Blindness in Books for Children.**

*It isn't dark for me*

'It isn't dark for me' (Peter Dickenson 1977:158). This robust claim to independence and refutation of pity made by Jake, the blind teenager in Dickenson's novel, *Anerton Pit* could be a late echo of the protest made by Colley Cibber's *The Blind Boy* more than two hundred years earlier. Here however it is part of a clear message promoted in a number of recent books for children and teenagers in an attempt to produce a more accurate understanding of blindness and the blind. Much of myth and magic is dispelled in the telling and a realistic picture painted of the ways in which blind people live their lives without sight.

Although some of the works to be discussed in this section predate the recommendations of the UNESCO report of 1980 which attempts to alert the publishing world to the needs of handicapped children, they nevertheless serve very well as 'imaginative writings which provide exemplars for interpreting the subjective and objective realities of sickness experience' (Porter 1985:22).

T. Orjasaeter's paper for UNESCO in 1980 acknowledges the powerful role that literature holds in both promoting and sustaining attitudes and belief. It was intended to make all those involved in children's books, publishers, authors, illustrators and librarians aware of the need to produce more and better books for and about handicapped children so as to overcome some of the barriers of isolation and loneliness that so often separates them from their peers and condemns them to marginal lives outside the mainstream of society' (1980:Introduction).
The author, who was a member of the Norwegian Post-Graduate Teacher Training Centre for Special Education, emphasized the need for appropriate learning aids for handicapped children, such as Braille and talking books, tactile books etc. He also indicated that not only was it important for handicapped children to meet themselves in books, seeing pictures and reading about people like themselves, their lives, problems, feelings and circumstances, but that it also gave opportunity 'for other children to get acquainted with handicapped children' (ibid:43). He pointed out that the scarcity of portrayals of handicap in children's books, and in any other media form, suggested 'a sort of affirmation that one is not good enough or does not belong anywhere or has no value' (ibid:43).

Although he acknowledges that a number of well intentioned books about handicapped children had appeared in the 1970s, Orjasaeter cautions that since 'literature influences us for better or worse, especially when we are children, it is important to evaluate it critically' (ibid:43) to ensure that it encourages understanding rather than confirming 'mechanisms of rejection' (ibid:44). He stresses that, ideally, such books should, in addition to a 'valuable literary experience' (ibid:43) give a 'broadening of our understanding of the handicapped person and his situation' (ibid:44) rather than confirming the view that 'handicap is somehow a punishment for our sins'. This is particularly important in a world which defines the norm as 'healthy, beautiful and charming' (ibid:44).

Orjasaeter also points out that the stressing in many books of 'a certain principle of compensation' constitutes rather 'a hidden sort of rejection' (ibid:44). He notes the all too common presentation of the
'brave boy in the wheel chair' who is 'the best companion anyone can think of and such excellent referees in football or baseball games' (ibid:44/45) and also that of blind people who 'automatically, almost by virtue of their blindness, are so exceptionally kind and have such a good ear for music'. He notes, perhaps somewhat tongue in cheek, that 'the blind characters in children's books are mostly girls—it seems so suitable that girls should be sweet and gentle and play the piano' (ibid:44). Although the heroine, Mary, in Laura Ingall Wilder's By The Shores of Silver Lake (1968) may not be 'a piano player' she bears out Orjasaeter's remarks in all other respects. She is described as 'patient and brave', her blue eyes 'still beautiful' though her 'beautiful golden hair' (ibid:8) has been shaved because of the scarlet fever which blinded her. Able to 'see with my fingers' (ibid:122), she is said to be an able needlewoman. Orjasaeter may have had her in mind when he concludes 'the handicap is compensated for beyond reasonable limits' (ibid:45).

Since he is also aware of the occasional presentation of the handicapped as villainous, Orjasaeter pleads for informed books which contain 'good psychological descriptions of the handicapped person as one of the main characters and books where handicapped children belong to their environment as naturally as do other people' (ibid:46). He insists that 'such books are useful sources of information to other children about what it is like to be handicapped. It can be a relief to read about the experiences of others' and a 'help towards seeing one's own situation in a wider perspective' (ibid:47). He concludes 'for some people fiction can be an inspiration towards giving new insights,'
awareness and acceptance' (ibid:47) so that 'It is important that we get acquainted with each other, in books and in real life' (ibid:49).

Although Nina Bawden's *The Witch's Daughter* (1966) and Peter Dickenson's *Annerton Pit* (1977) predate Orjasaeter's article, they do in fact satisfy his request that handicapped children appear as main characters. The blind children here 'belong to their environment as naturally as do other people' (op.cit:46).

In a non-didactic, realistic and gripping way, these novels of adventure and suspense represent a 'useful source of information about what it is like to be handicapped'. In both novels blindness is shown as bringing its own benefits and therefore as not necessarily and inevitably disadvantageous. The blind eleven year old, Janey, in *The Witch's Daughter* is not 'sweet and gentle', nor is the thirteen year old blind boy, Jake, in *Annerton Pit* chairbound, though, as will be shown, he is both 'brave and clever' and a good companion. Both novels, which have many themes in common, show adults whose unthinking behaviour infantilizes the children, denying their abilities. Importantly however both novels show great understanding of the processes by which other senses are used to compensate for lack of sight. Since, coincidentally, this understanding is shown largely in the context of escape from dark and confined spaces, a sea cave in *The Witch's Daughter* and a disused, reputedly haunted mine in *Annerton Pit*, it is not surprising to find many of the comments overlap. What is important here is that an understanding of how competent blind youngsters bring all their skills to bear is put in a straightforward, comprehensive way into well told stories, set in modern day milieux, where senses other than sight are the means of escape and the sighted are helped by the blind.
Both children, in common with most adolescents, and indeed with most blind people, strive for independence. Janey resents the pity of the seaside landlady who calls her 'a poor little thing' (Bawden op.cit:48). Jake takes exception to the way in which a friend's mother 'switched her fussing...trying to lead him round the house and settle him into chairs as though he were a helpless old cripple and muttering about how far he was from home and what would his mother say if she knew' (Dickenson op.cit:31), and then 'tried to talk him into a Home while they [Jake's parents] were away, as though he were some kind of pet dog which could be put into kennels' (ibid:32). She is so convinced that Jake is not safe as he and his brother search for their missing, ghost-hunting grandfather, that she alerts the local Police. The police stop the brothers but do not impede their journey. Jake is only too aware that people want to help him because 'it makes them feel good' (ibid:13).

Janey also 'knows her way around' (Bawden op.cit:48) though she 'had had a hard struggle to learn for herself' (ibid:56). Since her father had been anxious that she 'should not be spoiled because she was blind' (ibid:42) she is able to feed and dress herself. Similarly, Jake who 'always had breakfast in his dressing gown' (Dickenson op.cit:90) to protect his clothes from spills, 'now never put on odd shoes or wore his jersey inside out' (ibid:10) before going to the normal school where the 'proper blind teacher comes sometimes' (ibid:10). We are told that both children read Braille and that Jake's grandfather has taught himself the six-dot system so that he can communicate directly with his grandson.

Jake, unlike his 'incredibly impulsive' brother, Martin, who is 'mad on motor-cycles' (ibid: 13) is particularly attuned to the moods
and reactions of other people. He aware of the 'extra heartiness' (ibid:64) of the pub landlord who is embarrassed by blindness, the lying of the motor-cycle salesman and the confusion of the man who says 'I see' (ibid:49) to indicate that he understands. Though Martin disapproves, Jake can joke about his blindness. He can also cope with the 'well meaning' (ibid:18) jests of the old men who bet he is unable to ride a push-bike (he wins) and the attitude of those who 'never dream a blind child might be lying' (ibid:12) as he does after truanting from school to comfort his brother who has failed to obtain a place at University.

In The Witch's Daughter, and again contrary to general expectation, it is not the young blind girl, Janey, who is said to have 'Power' but the lonely ten year old orphan, Perdita, whom Janey befriends whilst on holiday. The local children believe that Perdita is the daughter of a witch. Though Perdita describes Janey's ability to get them out of the 'pitch' dark cave as 'second sight...it was magic' (Bawden op.cit:143) Janey prefers her father's more realistic explanation that 'some people were special...Blind ones like me and girls who've been alone a lot like you. He said we've learned to see and hear things other people don't have to because they're always too busy just looking and playing. Dad says people like you and me__well, it's as if we'd grown an extra piece of ourselves that other people don't have' (ibid:143). It is significant that 'second sight', together with an extra sensitivity to the feelings of others, is not attributed here to the fact of blindness but seen rather, as in Blindsight and The Four Feathers, to be a consequences of sensory deprivation.
The detailed awareness shown in both these books of the use made by Janey and Jake of the senses of hearing, touch and smell, not only in their everyday lives but in the imprisonment they both suffer, gives the lie to any suggestion of 'magic' or 'second sight' and is indicative of the greater reality in which blindness is viewed. Both authors detail in a matter of fact way the processes by which the children achieve their objectives. Descriptions of methods of coping are clearly, and without undue stress, woven into the narrative.

Thus, although Perdita notes that the blind girl does not respond to her smile when they first meet, she observes that she 'bent her head sideways, as if listening'. She hears Janey say, like Lucy Lunt's child waiting for the train, 'Don't shout Mummy. How can I see if you shout' (Bawden op.cit:9). Later, when they are trapped in the cave, Janey says 'How can I see if you talk?' (ibid: 115) as she listens to the echoes. Perdita only realises that Janey is blind when, as the family arrives on the island, she hears her say 'It smells like a lovely place' (ibid:10) and when Janey responds to her very quiet bird-call which goes unheard by the rest of the family.

Similarly, Jake who relies on 'sounds and echoes' to win the push-bike bet can tell a person's height 'from the level of his voice' (Dickenson op.cit:18). As they travel on Mark's motor-cycle he is aware of the terrain through which they pass. He notes that 'a big blank wall caught all the noises on his left, and on the right little houses and gaps between them sent back confused replies. A strong smell of fresh timber filled the air backed by a vague mixture of old cabbage and wood ash and manure. It was too early for the flower smell. Half way down the
street bristle hissed on stone as somebody scrubbed a doorstep' (ibid:17).

It is, however, when they are trapped that both children come into their own. As already indicated, both novels have modern day settings. Janey and her friends find a cache of stolen jewels hidden in a sea cave whilst Jake, his brother and his grandfather are imprisoned in an abandoned pit tunnel (said to be filled with explosive) by a gang of 'archaeologists' who plan to hi-jack an oil-rig unless the 'Epping Five' are released from prison.

Janey considers that she has more advantages when she compares herself with 'people who can only see' (Bawden op.cit:41). She is able to recognise Perdita by the feel of her clothes and to find a 'fossil shape which her brother had missed' (ibid:41). It is Janey who first 'saw with her fingers' the 'stone' which happened to be one of the stolen jewels hidden in the sea-cave. She learned 'the shape...so well that she would always be able to pick it out from all the other stones he [her brother] had found since he came to Skua' (ibid:40). She is able to lead her friends to safety from the cave 'by feeling with her fingers and 'with her feet' (ibid:105) and by listening to the echoes until she 'can't see any more, there aren't any more walls' (ibid:108). She may not have physical sight but Janey makes it plain that 'I can see in my mind (ibid:156).

There is no suggestion in Nina Bawden's autobiography In My Own Time (1994) that she has any direct knowledge or experience of blindness nor has an approach to her publisher proved any more informative. She does indicate however that she has tried in her children's books to make sure that the characters in them 'should feel and think as children do'.

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She wanted to write solid, grown-up novels for children: stories that
treated them seriously, reflecting their opinions and acknowledging the
strength of their feelings. She appears to have succeeded in *The
Witches Daughter*.

Though Bawden's depiction is clear and informative, Dickenson, no
doubt writing for an older readership, provides much more detailed
information about Jake's abilities and carries the reader along with him
as Jake makes his discoveries. Like his grandfather who is 'nutty about
explanations' (Dickenson op.cit:26), Jake uses reasoning to order in his
mind what his senses tell him. Thus, approaching Annerton Pit where his
grandfather is already held hostage, Jake feels 'a sort of gap in the
wide march of the wind off the North sea'. He realises it is the old pit
tip 'like a ruddy great burial mound' (ibid:59) and though he does not
expect 'ever to come here again', registers 'from habit...direction and
distance' (ibid:62). Similarly, when he in turn is taken prisoner, he
'automatically...counted the paces...23 to the edge of the cobbles, 62
along a track gravelled in places with tinkling ash, 12 down a steep
slope rutted with car tracks, 9 across a wooden bridge' (ibid:61) to 'a
caravan, itself distinguished by a range of smells' where he and his
grandfather are imprisoned. Though he had 'long ago learnt that blind
children are no good at hide and seek' (ibid:90) Jake, trying to 'drain
all his senses into his soles' (ibid:83), escapes. He does not get far
but his captors note that he runs 'like he wasn't blind at all'
(ibid:88).

Jake escapes from the mine by 'arguing himself into a position of
sensible disbelief' (ibid:p115) about the ghosts which supposedly haunt
Annerton Pit. He realises, during his fight against panic and terror,
that 'it isn't dark for me' (ibid:138). He brings together his ability to reason and his use of senses other than sight in order to find his way out. He clicks his tongue and claps his hands 'to set up a few more echoes' (ibid:118) and feels the changing nature of the floor through the soles of his feet. Jake listens to the 'small sounds in the shaft' (ibid:143) and tests the air currents which 'audibly moved in a muddled way' at a 'sort of junction' (ibid:147). He reached a point where 'his senses, particularly his hearing, seemed to have grown beyond the frontiers of his skin, forming a sensitive shell of awareness outside his body, so that he knew the shape and nature of things around him without having to stop and think' (ibid:151).

Escape is achieved and the gang rounded up in a novel which is both gripping in its story and unobtrusively instructive. Senses which are honed through practice and used with skill are seen for what they are and not interpreted as extra-ordinary and compensatory gifts, nor is there anywhere the slightest suggestion of punishment for current or past sin.

The remaining books to be discussed in this section have all been published very recently. They were, as the Children's Co-ordinator for the local district of Nottinghamshire County Library Service told me, chosen for library stock as part of a deliberate policy to encourage small children to be aware of some of the problems met by children who are handicapped.

Thus, Lucy's picture by Nicola Moon (1994), a book to be read to small children, tells how Lucy makes a collage picture for her blind grandfather. Lucy, who likes 'feeling with her eyes shut, in a box of scraps', guides her grandfather's hand over the picture, explaining to
him as she does so her use of twigs and leaves, feathers, sand for a path, and 'her own hair for a dog'. Not surprisingly, her grandfather greatly appreciates the picture.

Similarly, in *Mark Spark* (1992), a book for children who have just started to read, Jacqueline Wilson tells how Mark helps to raise money at school for a Guide Dog. His great-grandmother is 'a little deaf as well as blind'. She explains that she is too old and ill to have a dog herself but she helps by knitting for the Bring and Buy Sale. This great-grandmother who looks after Mark each day after school also helps him to come to terms with his fear of the dark since she 'is always in the dark herself'. She is shown as cheerful, fun-loving and independent and able to care for others. As Mark goes 'bounding straight on top of her' she tells 'the human whirlwind' to 'get off me, you great lump. But she laughed and tickled Mark'. When he gets home from school she asks 'You hungry?'. She tells him 'the tea-pot's brewing and there's Marmite and crisp sandwiches and jammy buns' (ibid:13). When Mark acts out a puppet show for her 'she chuckled and clapped called him a proper caution, good enough to go on the stage' (ibid:37). Wilson provides here a modern, realistic portrayal which is far removed from the old stereotyped views of helplessness and dependency.

It is worth noting here that Orjasaeter's message also appears to have been heard in France. A recent publication, *Le Joueur de Plume, A Cache-Cache avec L'image* by Olivier Pouces (1984) is particularly interesting because it can be read by both blind and sighted children. Written in Roman text and in Braille it also has pictures in relief. These can be read by the eye or the finger.
It is of little matter here that the story tells how a bird trapped in a room manages to cause mayhem with the pen and the ink which the old man, Simon, uses to 'capture his ideas in writing'. What is important is that the reader is invited to 'try to recognise everything which Simon has left on his desk with your eye but also with your hands'. The reader is told that 'if you close your eyes and touch this page with your hands, you can feel many lines of little dots in relief. It is a text written in braille, the writing of the blind, each letter is an assembly of one to six points. To understand what this picture in relief illustrates [the picture is of hands and curtains] it is necessary first that you know the shape of each object in the picture—here the hands and a curtain'. Other shapes e.g. those of a man, a bird, a pen and a candle relate to other aspects of the story.

This is not a story written about, or for, handicapped children. It is a story for all children. It is easily accessible to both blind and sighted and has the added dimension of being able to show those with sight how those without it learn to read and link words with shapes.

Blind children were also involved in the production of the final piece of work to be discussed in this section. Berlie Doherty's Spellhorn (1989) was written, as the author indicates in the foreword, with the help of four children from Tapton Mount School for the Visually Handicapped in Sheffield. Having been asked to write a play about unicorns for the B.B.C. Radio programme 'Living Language', Doherty had thought 'it might be exciting to involve children with a visual handicap in creating a story through sound since all the pictures are in the mind of the listener'. She relates that the children brailled their own chapters and story lines, reading them to her and talking to each other.
in the language of 'the Wild Ones'. Doherty concluded that 'writing a fantasy is like flying into a world of darkness and I had to learn a lot about that'. Her 'learning' reveals here a symbolic world conceived by blind children, a world which in this instance is opened up to the sighted but, for once, not of their creation.

In the book, Laura, like Janey in *The Witch's Daughter*, also sees with her 'mind's eye' and 'sometimes senses the existence of a special world of her own which her friends and family cannot share--only she hears the Wild Ones' (dust cover). Like Janey her senses of touch and hearing are also acute.

The story may appear to be fantasy but it encapsulates, symbolically, a child's journey into acceptance of blindness so that it is Laura's alter ego, the sighted Midnight, who goes back at the end of the tale to the Wilderness, the home of the Old Woman and the Wild Ones, and Laura who goes home to the 'black, deep swim of darkness' as 'all the lights of her world went down' (Doherty 1989:131).

Initially, Laura who 'walks slow, as if her eyes see darkness' (ibid:27) in the 'shadowland of blindness' (ibid:25) is the only one amongst her family and friends who can see the unicorn, Spellhorn. This creature is said both 'to belong to a better time, a simple time that we all have a yearning to go back to' and to possess a horn which is 'valuable as a cure against a range of illnesses' (ibid:68). Because she so greatly desires it, the unicorn appears to Laura and takes her to the Wilderness where she regains her sight. Here it is Midnight who is blind. Laura had not been able to differentiate between her two selves since the early days of the 'shadow light of her poor failing sight...she wasn't sure which she was' (ibid:88).
Though she had at first been keen to stay, as a sighted person, in the Wilderness, 'a wild one for ever, sure' (ibid:71), Laura finally goes home, to 'homeland place' (ibid:131) 'where you'll be right heartglad all time' (ibid:128). She is persuaded to do so by the unicorn's rightful owner, the Old Woman, who tells her 'You have eyebright too girlchild. That's your special thing'. She explains that 'eyebright' is the quality which 'enables us to see things' (ibid:45). She confirms 'But you have the mystery, girlchild. It is your mind's eye. You can see where there's darkness. You have midnight eyes like mine' (ibid:94). Fantastic as these representations seem to be, it is clear that Laura's ability 'to see where there's darkness' comes, in reality, from a heightening of the senses of hearing and touch; it is, though, valuable to have access here to an appreciation of these faculties as seen through the imagination and understanding of blind children themselves. They represent the current generation who look for, and offer, their own explanations from direct experience.

This chapter ends with the voice of blind children offering their insights into some of the ways in which they visualise and come to terms with, their blindness. It is, however, important to notice that their views are presented through the medium of an author who not only has a particular purpose in mind (the writing of a book) but a purpose that here has been determined by an outside authority, the B.B.C. In contrast, the next chapter will be concerned with a discussion of a number of autobiographies written by blind adults, mostly of this century. These accounts, written from individual and direct experience, demonstrate the ways in which, through personal rather than fictional representation, they have responded, both from within their own
personalities and in relation to society's dictates, to a life without sight.

Significantly, these comments, coming as they do from actual experience, give additional weight to the opinions of some of the critical theorists of the past half-century, particularly the deconstructionists. The deconstructionists have pointed to the 'blindness' within all intellectual sight; it is a blindness, they argue, that comes from the 'duplicities of language' (Howard Felperin 1985:29), and what they see as the inevitability of 'misreading' (Robert Crosman 1984:3). Particularly important in this context is the work of Paul de Man.

In his key essay, 'The Rhetoric of Blindness', de Man opens up the question of adequate reading and examines the both 'the deluding interplay between text and reader' (Blindness and Insight 1983:ix) and the 'interaction between critical blindness and critical insight' (ibid:111). This, he says, is exemplified in Jacques Derrida's reading of Rousseau:

Rousseau is one of the group of writers who are always being systematically misread. I spoke above of the blindness of critics with regard to their own insights, of the discrepancy, hidden to them, between their stated method and their perceptions. In the history as well as the historiography of literature, this blindness can take on the form of a recurrently aberrant pattern of interpretation with regard to a particular writer. The pattern extends from highly specialised commentators to the vague idées recues by means of which this writer is identified and classified in general histories of literature. It can even include other writers who have been influenced by him. The more ambivalent the original utterance, the more uniform and universal the pattern of consistent error in the followers and commentators. Despite the apparent alacrity with which one is willing to assent in principle to the notion that all literary and some philosophical language is essentially ambivalent, the implied function of most critical commentaries and some literary influences is still to do away at all costs with these ambivalences: by reducing them to contradictions, blotting out the disturbing parts of the work or, more subtly, by manipulating the systems of valorization that are
operating within the texts. When, especially as in the case of Rousseau, the ambivalence is itself a part of the philosophical statement, this is very likely to happen. The history of Rousseau interpretation is particularly rich in this respect, both in the diversity of the tactics employed to make him say something different from what he said, and in the convergence of these misreadings toward a definite configuration of meanings. It is as if the conspiracy that Rousseau's paranoia imagined during his lifetime came into being after his death, uniting friend and foe alike in a concerted effort to misrepresent his thought (Paul de Man 1983:111/2).

What de Man is doing in this essay is explained on page 139 where he points out that Derrida's blindness with regard to Rousseau leads him to misread 'possibly because he substitutes Rousseau's interpreters for the author himself--maybe whenever Derrida writes "Rousseau", we should read "Starobinski" or "Raymond" or "Poulet"...Derrida's blindness merely confirms Rousseau's foreknowledge of the misinterpretation of his works. It would be a classical case of critical blindness, somewhat different in aspect but not in essence from the pattern encountered in such as Lukacs, Poulet or Blanchet' (ibid:139).

De Man argues that the blindness of the reader/interpreter is itself a kind of insight (because it is so precise, so specific in the way it misses a certain theme or point)--in so arguing De Man is, unwittingly, perpetuating the romantic idealisation of blindness as insight.* Thus, De Man suggests that we are always blind to our reading procedures and do not sufficiently recognise or question the bases on which our knowledge system rests. By extension it might be said that the physically blind are forced back on to a concentrated form of introspection (a kind of interiority) and can thus be expected to 'scrutinise' their own thought processes. It is this which has inevitably led those who have first-hand experience of blindness to

* I am indebted to John Schad for this insight.
challenge the prevailing orthodoxies of those who at any time seek to explain or categorize them under those terms which we have looked at in previous chapters.

It was to be expected that this challenge to long held views would become more vociferous as educational and work opportunities became more accessible to 'the element apart' (Twersky op.cit:9) as the century progressed and as knowledge about the genesis of handicapping conditions became more widespread. Thus, if as Porter suggests (1985:9) literature does indeed provide a reflection of the society whence it comes, it might be anticipated that there will be an increasing match between autobiography and fiction and a decrease in 'misreading' as greater knowledge of the causes and effects of blindness percolate more widely through society. This expectation will be examined in the next chapter.
I hope I have shown, in the fictional writings which have been examined in this thesis, that ideologies which influence cultural attitudes toward blindness and the blind still hold sway. The fact that their origin is in ingrained belief and uncritical thought appears to have little effect on myths which suggest that blindness follows sinful behaviour and that loss of sight is inevitably followed by gifts of insight, prophecy and additional senses with eventual redemption after meet punishment. Sighted people are commonly portrayed as behaving with pity and embarrassment, revulsion and avoidance ___or more frequently a confused and confusing mixture of the two.

It is true that the novels of the latter part of the twentieth century have increasingly incorporated information about the real causes and consequences of blindness, with more accurate delineations of the abilities of those who lack sight but, as already seen, some of the more articulate and thinking protagonists e.g. Rozlinde in Second Sight, Guy in Blindsight and Ike in Streets of Gold are depicted as resenting their condition, denying its effects, and resisting stereotypical expectations which are thrust upon them.

With this in mind therefore I now want to consider a number of personal accounts which have been written over the last one-hundred year period and compare them with those provided by fiction.
written thoughts of those without sight (apart from those like Milton
who had a number of amanuenses) did not of course become possible until
the more widespread use of what the Americans term 'punctiform'
(Chevigny & Braverman 1950:101) i.e. Braille or Moon type writing, at
the end of the nineteenth century and with it the ability of blind
people to write for themselves and give voice to their situation.

Many of the works to be discussed would not, perhaps, wholly accord
with the definition of the 'autobiographical archetype' as

'the Bildungseroman, the tale of the progressive travelling
of a life from troubled or stifled beginnings; in which obstacles
are overcome and the true self actualised or revealed; and the
tale may, prototypically, end, or it may go on to document yet
further trouble turned to triumph' (Liz Stanley 1992:11.)

They nevertheless do respond to Roy Pascal's comment that
autobiographies 'satisfy and legitimate curiosity about the ways of men'
and 'offer an unparalleled insight into the mode of consciousness of
other men'. He suggests, that 'we are won over simply by being admitted
to this intimacy' (Pascal 1960:1).

The 'intimacy' offered in the texts under review will be seen to be
extremely variable in degree, ranging from the didactic texts of W.
Hanks Levy (1872) and Pierre Villey (1930), which are intended to inform
and educate about the nature of blindness as the authors themselves
perceive it, to the very personal, often painful and sometimes angry
reflections of Hector Chevigny, H. Garland Minton, John Hull and Hugues
de Montalembert. Other texts, such as those by Borghild Dahl and Jessie
Hickford are, in their own ways, as instructive as those by Levy and
Villey but offer more homely accounts of accommodation to a late onset
of blindness whilst Sheila Hocken's comments about her visual impairment
are woven into the stories of her dogs, not the least among which is her
guide dog, Emma. I shall make only passing reference to the texts of
Lord Fraser of Lonsdale and Colonel Sir Mike Ansell since the topic of
blindness in their accounts is only incidental to their theme.

These varied works do present, however, truly individual accounts of
the experience of impaired vision in a society where views continue to
be influenced, even if subliminally, by fictional representations which
appear to transmit fact. Coincidentally, these personal accounts,
ranging as they do from the last quarter of the nineteenth century to
the current decade, present a commentary on prevailing social attitudes
and provision which becomes increasingly articulate and critical. Taken
overall they provide the additional dimension of a kind of ongoing
historical account of the struggle toward recognition and integration
which goes beyond individual experience and puts it into the context of
their own particular period.

Choice of Texts.

I had hoped to find a wide ranging selection of autobiographies in order
to compare their depictions of lives without sight with those in the
fictional accounts already discussed. The final choice was random
depending inevitably on what had been published and what was available.
It came from a variety of sources.

I had already read and appreciated the insights provided by Hector
Chevigny's *My Eves Have a Cold Nose* (1946) and H. Garland Minton's *Blind
Man's Buff* (1974) whilst the strongly recommended *Touching the Rock* (John
Hull [1990]) was a source of rich material. A passing reference to Laura
Ingall Wilder's *Little House on the Prairie* series offered unexpected
information and a bibliography from the Royal National Institute for the
Blind produced a number of titles. Fortuitous findings on library shelves also proved useful. I had heard of Sheila Hocken as something of a local celebrity but I had to rely on a variety of library catalogues for other material and particularly so in the search for other blind women writers.

I decided not to include the works of Helen Keller because, after comparing her comments with other writers, I agreed with Thomas Cutsforth's statement that 'with all her education in visual verbal concepts, there is far less experiential reality and insight in the adult Helen Keller than there was in the untutored child' (Cutsforth op.cit:23). Cutsforth criticised Keller's use of 'verbalisms' ('the use of abstract concepts not verified by concrete experiment' [op.cit:48]), offering his considered opinion that she favoured the language of the sighted rather than that which would have conveyed her own experience of phenomena.

My own view is that, in this instance, the achievements and experience of the icon, Helen Keller, added nothing extra to the insights provided by the other autobiographers whose stories show how, in their various ways they reacted to, and coped with, what to most was a crisis in their lives. Although many of the writers report similar stages of adaptation, depression and despair, frustration and determination, and not a little joy at achievement, the accounts of education, rehabilitation, vocational training, employment and experience of public attitudes are highly individual. They vary considerably in depth of thought and feeling and present a mixture of catharsis, reminiscence, anger, instruction and a fair amount of wry, not to say bitter, humour. Each writer reports his or her experience in
isolation and as if unique to themselves... which in one sense, of course, it is. Only Hull reports having read other autobiographies although he found none which related 'to aspects which were significant to him' (op. cit: Preface.1X.). For Hull particularly the advent of blindness provided an opportunity to reflect on its meaning for him, for his family and his faith, and to share this with his readers.

Hull, a university teacher and a man of ideas like his predecessor, John Milton, was, like other writers in this group, both highly educated and skilled at communicating his thoughts. Villey, Dahl and Hickford were all teachers whilst Chevigny and Albert Vajda were able journalists. Only Chevigny, however, attempts to relate the changed behaviour which confronts him, as a blind man, to the long history of assumption, myth and explanation which surrounds the condition of sightlessness. It can be assumed that it is this experience which provoked him into his later study (with Sydell Braverman) of adjustment to blindness.

All the writers come from the Western world and, with the exception of the Frenchman, Villey, live either in the United Kingdom or America. As is to be expected, the accounts are influenced by such varied things as national mores, education, social status and milieu, life experience, social provision as well as motivation, insight, hindsight and memory.

It is noticeable that only three blind women writers are represented here. This is possibly because limited educational, work and social role opportunities inhibited those who might otherwise have shared their thinking with potential readers. The texts however are not comparable and so few general conclusions can be drawn from them.
Regardless of all other factors, however, blindness is the main theme of these autobiographies and not, as in the fictional accounts, an interesting but subsidiary topic. The protagonists here are articulate and assertive on their own behalf and the conflict which is often apparent in their stories more intense than that portrayed in the redefinition of the lives of the likes of RozLinde and Guy.

Problems of Autobiography

As already indicated, the texts to be discussed here do not easily fit into conventional definitions of the autobiographical genre. Despite this I have decided to retain the word 'autobiography' since it is a commonly accepted and understood term which encompasses many 'ways of writing a life' (Liz Stanley, 1993:3). It is clearly employed by these authors to indicate that they write about themselves and their lives as affected by blindness. Thus Minton describes his book, Blind Man's Buff, as 'a fragment of biography that spans a period of six years' since this was, for him, a time of crisis which involved great change and personal challenge. Similarly, Chevigny indicates that his is 'an autobiographical story'.

However, whilst the reader of any autobiography anticipates that it will 'involve the reconstruction of the movement of a life, or part of a life, in the actual circumstances in which it was lived' Pascal warns that actual 'reconstruction of a life' is an impossible task and is rather 'a shaping of the past' (Pascal 1960:9). It is based 'on personal experience, chronological and reflective' (ibid:5) and affected by motivation and intention, the problematic nature of time and memory, hindsight and insight, objectivity and subjectivity and truth itself, all of which shape 'the artful enterprise' of 'life writing' (Stanley
op.cit:3). Pascal's provisos are very well demonstrated in the 'life writings' which will be discussed in this chapter.

Motivation and Experience

A central theme of autobiography, the importance of beliefs about the nature of selfhood and identity, 'one's inner standing' (Pascal op.cit:182), assumes particular importance in the writings of this group of blind persons whose very sense of being has been challenged by the loss of that organ, the eye, which in so many ways represents its synonym, the 'I', the self. Here the organ of sight, perception, and orientation which recognizes the self and others is lost. The so called 'window of the soul', being dimmed, no longer allows the essence of a person to shine through. Since the blind person, perforce, has to have recourse to different methods of 'seeing' and communicating, it is small wonder that sighted people, unfamiliar as they usually are with the problems of blind people, fall back on common belief or with embarrassed and unthinking strategies. The story of the blind person being helped across the street against his will, out of the misplaced kindness of the onlooker, is all too common and one which is reported here by Minton and de Montalembert.

Thus, not surprisingly, affirmations of self and identity, often hard come by, provide an over-riding theme in these personal accounts. The theme is frequently interwoven with information about blindness and is intended to inform, instruct and enlighten. Inevitably the emphasis varies from writer to writer as he or she imparts a particular message which is frequently borne as much out of their own previous beliefs about blindness as the response elicited from others.
Although, as already indicated, the implicit intention of all these writers is to share and explain the experience of blindness and to alert the public to the effect of common attitudes toward loss of sight, only two of the twelve authors to be discussed here indicate their clear intention to instruct the sighted. Whilst Levy and Villey, both blind from childhood, cannot share the painful experience of adventitious blindness with the reader as do, for instance, Hull, Chevigny and de Montalembert who all became blind in adult life, their comments show, nevertheless, that they are well aware of the power of unquestioned stereotypical views—indeed Levy might be said to subscribe to some of them.

A. Autobiographies 1870-1940.

W. Hanks Levy F.R.G.S. b.? 


Although Levy's book contains little about his own life as a blind person I have included it here partly because it can be assumed that it was one of the first books to be actually written by a blind man and partly because it provides a telling picture of the impoverishment of the lives of many blind people at a time when there was a burgeoning of interest in their welfare. It is written, coincidentally, at the time
when Dr. Rhodes Armitage began his influential work which was to result in the establishment of The Royal National Institute of the Blind.

Levy states that he writes as the Director of the 'Association for the promoting of the General Welfare of the Blind'. He explains that in the previous twenty-five years it had been his 'constant practice' to make embossed notes of whatever appeared worthy of preservation, his motto being that 'a thought unrecorded was a thought lost'. He says that during that time he had been 'engaged in matters connected with the Blind' so that 'it can easily be imagined that a large portion of such memoranda would be on the subject relating to loss of vision' (ibid: Preface).

'Without sight from early infancy' himself and responding to the growing interest in the plight of the numerous blind poor, Levy writes that he had 'in the course of his experience acquired a certain amount of information and arrived at some conclusions which are considered likely to be of use to the Blind and their friends' (Levy 1872: Preface).

In a book whose tone is didactic, paternalistic, simplistic, and what can only be described as homely at times, Levy both shows his concern for the poor conditions in which many blind people live as well as his acquaintance with much of prevailing belief and attitude. His views, and one might assume that these represent those of the well-to-do middle class, are well meaning but informed by the then prevailing mores. In order to inform his readers Levy provides not only a kind of potted history of belief, both mythical and historical, about blindness and the blind but also lists the many medical conditions which at that time led to sight deprivation. The kindly, but rather patronising, advice given in his chapter on 'The causes of Blindness and Hints for the...
Preservation of Sight' shows an awareness of the social conditions endured by many and provides, in itself, a social documentary of the times.

Levy states that 'it is generally admitted that blindness is one of the greatest evils to which the human race is liable'. He indicates that until recent times small-pox had been 'the most prolific cause of loss of sight', the cause of 'so heavy a calamity' and 'an affliction [which was] dreaded alike by every class of the community'. He recommends vaccination, avoidance of contact with the sufferer 'unless... duty renders such contact unavoidable', plain diet and 'above all, strong faith in the goodness of God' and behaviour becoming to 'the Christian' as the best defence against 'the fearful scourge' (ibid:2). He attributes other causes to Scrofula (tuberculosis of the lymphatic glands [the King's Evil]), 'damp, ill ventilated dwellings, want of cleanliness, insufficient and bad food, and intemperance of all kinds'. He notes that those who owe 'their privation to this malady, have not merely to contend with the loss of sight but they have also the misfortune of possessing very great physical symptoms'. As an antidote to this 'double affliction' and the likelihood that its 'ill effects...descend to posterity' Levy recommends 'nutritious diet, pure air, moderate bodily exercise and diversity of mental employment'. He also notes the prevalence of measles, scarlet fever and typhus fever as 'among the most potent enemies of sight' (ibid:2).

Levy, however, is aware that blindness has causes other than common infectious diseases. He notes that ophthalmia was not limited to those who served in the Middle East, from the days of the Crusaders onward, but comments on its prevalence in Ireland due to the extreme poverty of
the people and the state of the 'workhouses as managed in that country' (ibid:16). He also reports that more than seventy children were affected by an epidemic of ophthalmia in 'Dover Union Workhouse in 1863' (ibid:17).

Levy does not mention the disease specifically but, voicing a moral attitude typical of his age, he is dammingly aware of the incidence and effects of congenital syphilis which was then 'a primary cause of blindness' (Rose op.cit:16) and without cure until the causative organism was isolated in 1905. The subsequent development of Salvarson ('the magic bullet') by Paul Ehlich in 1909 went some way to reduce the effects of the disease but it was only to be effectively treated after the development of penicillin in the 1940's (Cartwright op.cit 1972:79/80).

From 1519 onward it had been known that syphilis was usually transmitted by venereal contact (ibid:62). It was also recognised that one of its 'more terrible attributes' (ibid:56) was its transmission from parent to child and that it could result in 'bone defects, impaired sight and hearing and deformed teeth' (ibid:57), if not in early death.

Thus, Levy comments that 'no inconsiderable number of persons have never seen the light. Many were born blind and many more lost their sight from want of better attention being paid to their eyes immediately after birth' (op.cit:17). He attributes this 'loss of sight from birth, or congenital blindness' to 'a peculiar state of the nervous system in one of the parents, but chiefly in the mother'. He notes that 'when one or more children are born blind, others of the same family are either idiotic, deaf, deaf and dumb, or are subject to fits' (op.cit:18), a
familial incidence which is also quoted by Cartwright (op.cit:57) in his outline of the effects of congenital syphilis.

In addition to noting the effects of untreated venereal disease Levy comments that 'some writers are of the opinion that intermarriage of relatives tends to produce blindness' though he admits that there is little evidence 'to sustain the hypothesis' (ibid:19). A century or so later a greater knowledge of the theory of genetics would show the theory to be correct.

Levy attributes other causes of blindness to 'hard mental and visual work' (ibid:18) and the belief that the sight of a blind person by a pregnant woman can result in the birth of a blind child. It is, perhaps, not surprising in view of the general tenor of his remarks, that Levy includes smoking, obesity and intemperance as possible contributing factors to the onset of blindness.

In a further mixture of half understood fact and supposition Levy suggests that 'a very large proportion of the cases of blindness result from the social habits and the employments of the people' (ibid:4). He notes that an 'eminent ophthalmic surgeon' considers 'small print and gaslight' and the 'additives which increase illuminating power' to be among the 'prolific causes of blindness' (ibid:4) and advises against reading by 'artificial light' particularly when travelling. He directs this last advice to 'commercial men and those whose profession causes them to travel much' (ibid:5). Probably more realistically, Levy notes that the sight of needle-makers, blacksmiths and watchmakers is particularly at risk. Though he regrets the privations brought about by the decline of lace-making he nevertheless considers it 'a blessing'
because 'the corporeal evils inflicted on the workers almost surpasses description' (ibid:6).

In view of the tone of many of his observations, and no doubt in keeping with ideas of the times, it is not surprising that Levy concludes this chapter by insisting that 'it cannot be too forcibly urged' that 'fresh air, wholesome food, moderate work and a virtuous life are the best means to prevent the loss of sight' (ibid:24).

Levy's ideas about the education of blind children are also in keeping with the times. His proposals for the schooling of poor blind children are markedly different from those he anticipates for blind children of the 'upper classes' (ibid:43) and appear to be influenced by assumptions about ability, existing patterns of practice and the mores of the time. Though many of his suggestions exhibit certain ambivalences and restrictions, some of his ideas match those of Dr. Rhodes Armitage. Thus he recommends the development of the remaining senses so as 'to expand the mind, strengthen the judgement and the general health of the pupil' (ibid:27) whilst promoting 'habits of self reliance' (ibid:32). He recommends that children be allowed to explore freely with a minimum of over-protection.

Levy proposes that reading by means of 'raised letters' should begin by the age of 'about four' (ibid:28) and that writing commence 'when the pupil is about seven or eight years old' in the style 'which can be read both by the blind and the sighted' (ibid:33). It would be said, many years later, however, that this practice helped to perpetuate Haüy's 'fundamental fallacy' of making 'the teaching of blind children conform to that of the seeing not only in method but in material appliances as well' (French op.cit:87). French believed the fallacy 'lay in thinking
that touch becomes a substitute for sight when [in fact] the touch senses remained just what they had always been'. It also led, he believed, to the 'erroneous assumption' that 'what looked well to the eye must appeal equally to the finger tips' (op.cit:87). French thought Havy had been wrong to tailor education 'to the limits of the blind'. In his view it had led to a narrow curriculum with limited 'vocational ends' (op.cit:90) which ignored other skills.

Thus Levy's proposals for an education aimed at the cultivation of the 'perceptive powers' rather than the 'reflective powers' (ibid:37)), (which he says is the goal for the sighted) mirrors an established pattern of thinking about the abilities of blind children which limited the majority to routine work, based on the use of the senses, in sheltered workshops.

At the same time, Levy, seems to be aware that this 'very little' (ibid:43) provision for the children of the poor is not enough since he advises parents to 'seek the aid of the benevolent institutions that exist for the assistance of the blind' whilst at the same time taking advantage of 'parochial day and Sunday Schools' for 'comfort' (ibid:42). He sees eventual admission to one of 'the institutions for the education and employment of the blind' as inevitable (ibid:43). Patronising and divisive as these views now appear it should be remembered that not only do they reflect the social attitudes of the times but, as we have seen, in Chapter 2, compulsory education for all children, let alone that for blind children who were long thought to be ineducable, was in its infancy.

In contrast to the 'very little' (ibid:43) provision suggested for the children of the poor, Levy makes very different and surprisingly
adventurous recommendations for the education of 'the youthful blind of the upper classes' (ibid:43). He expresses surprise that so little attention has been paid hitherto to the 'imparting of knowledge...suited to their condition' because 'no human being, however favoured by social condition, was created to be a useless inhabitant of the world' (ibid:43). He cites the achievements of a significant number of blind people to support his contention that 'the paths of usefulness open to the blind of the upper classes are neither few nor unimportant' and points out that 'there is scarcely any branch of science that has not been adorned by the labours of the sightless' (ibid:44).

Levy recommends, for the 'upper classes', an education commensurate with that 'obtained by the sighted of his own social grade' (ibid:44) and connected with 'the greatest educational establishments of the land' (ibid:45) because 'blindness is such a privation that it needs all the accessories of wealth and station to enable those who suffer from it to compete successfully with their equals in the social scale who enjoy the blessings of sight' (ibid:45). He makes it plain that his comments apply only to the privileged. He states bluntly that should any other sightless person who 'feels himself possessed of some talent' expect 'consideration and indulgence' he will meet 'with nothing but bitter disappointment' (ibid:45).

Levy concludes with a mixture of Victorian piety, respect for the work ethic, and acceptance of an immutable class structure. He writes 'there are paths of usefulness for all, be they poor or wealthy, distinguished or obscure...to be really useful is what should be sought, not to gratify personal vanity and to be considered a prodigy, but simply to do the will of God and love all men' (ibid:45/46).
Notwithstanding his awareness of the general lack of opportunity available to the blind of his time, Levy reinforces old habits of thought and belief when he intimates that 'a sound and healthy religious education' is more important for the blind than for the sighted since 'the privation under which they suffer exposes them to many evils to which those who see are not so liable'. It is not clear whether Levy believes blind people to be more susceptible to wrong-doing because of the myths which connect blindness with sin, but he does point to 'the special temptation which leads a blind person to question why he is 'made to differ from the mass of mankind', 'excluded from the beauties of nature', made 'dependent on his fellow man' and 'mocked of blessings which he knows to exist' (ibid:29).

Levy is concerned about those who are 'without faith in God'. He encourages the blind to think themselves better off than 'the lame and the deaf' and insists that it is 'the first duty of the Christian ..to acquiesce cheerfully and thankfully in whatever is unmistakably the will his Heavenly Father' (ibid:185/6).

Surprisingly however in view of his seeming acceptance of the status quo, Levy blames society for its lack of provision for blind people. Yet, whilst he criticises 'a Christian community' for not doing more to prevent beggary in general he reserves special condemnation for the 'professional vagrants' who 'play, sing and read the Bible from one public house to another','become keepers of houses for abandoned women' and 'entice young girls from their homes'. His depiction of such a 'mass of evil' (ibid:470) is enough to confirm any stereotype of evil in those who lack sight.
Though Levy deplores the 'helpless dependence' (ibid:467) which gives rise to such beggary he has particular sympathy for the 'Peculiar Position of Blind Women' because they are usually regarded as unmarrigeable and unemployable. He says they either 'have to endure a state of wretched dependence on poor relatives' who can barely support themselves or go to the workhouse 'where companionship with the vile and debased makes life so insupportable' that death is preferable (ibid:37). He stresses that his 'exceedingly wretched' picture is not unduly 'coloured' because he has known 'many such cases' (ibid:373). So concerned is he for them and so strong his belief that 'home is the true sphere of women' (ibid:375) that he says his organisation will make provision for them to live with relatives or even in their own homes.

To remedy society's shortcomings Levy concludes with a list of 'requirements of the blind of the United Kingdom' which includes

1. Religious, intellectual, industrial and professional instruction for all who need it.
2. Regular employment, (with extra wages to compensate for lack of speed.)
3. A school for training instructors of the blind, pensions for the aged or incapable and Homes for the friendless. (ibid:491).

I acknowledge that it may have been stretching a point to describe Levy's work as an autobiography since it can hardly be said to be 'concerned with the self in its delicate uniqueness' (Pascal op. cit:180) nor does it, in the strictest sense, give 'an almost unlimited opportunity for the exploration of the personality' (Pascal op. cit:162). Neither can it be said to be an 'attempt to understand the self and to explain the self to other men' (Laura Marcus:1994:3). Nevertheless it does 'chronicle' and 'expound' (Pascal op. cit:180) showing Levy, as an intimately concerned blind man himself, alert to the current social and
medical conditions which affected many blind people at the time. Though many of his comments are informed by the conventions of late nineteenth century England, he reaches out beyond their limits to promote a number of habit-breaking ideas in order to improve the limited lives of so many of his fellows.


Professor of Literature, Caen University.

I have chosen to consider Villey's statement, The World of the Blind 1930 next, partly because it follows that of Levy chronologically, despite a gap of sixty years, and because, more importantly, it is a spirited defence of the abilities and coping strategies of blind people now that basic financial provision had been secured and beggary was no longer necessary. As I have already shown The Blind Person’s Act of 1920 ensured that all blind people in the United Kingdom received a regular income. Similar provision had been made in France in the 'Ordinance' of 1905 although in this case it was available only to those without other means of support.

Levy’s focus had been on the material conditions of the blind. In contrast Villey challenges the attitudes (born, he says, of fear) which see 'the blind [as] a strange being living outside the common life' (Villey 1930:15). His approach is an intellectual one, partly no doubt because of his background and experience and partly because it was necessary to address other issues now that many basic needs were being met.

Born in France and blind from the age of four years, Villey now writes as the Professor of Literature at Caen University. He reveals many of his own feelings, leaving the reader in no doubt about the ways
in which he considers blind people to be denigrated. His intention 'is to prove that, contrary to the opinion so widely spread, the blind man's intellect, intelligence and personality do not differ from the intellect, intelligence and personality of the man who has eyesight'.

(ibid: Foreword). He insists that 'the blind are victims of the ignorance of the public concerning their real condition' and intends 'by explaining something of their psychology' to help 'to defend them against the prejudices which are the chief barrier to their professional activity' (ibid: Preface 9.). He says 'Before anything else, it is necessary to establish the fundamental truth that blindness does not affect the individuality but leaves it intact' (ibid: 16). His writing, 'is addressed more particularly to those who can see' so that out of his experience 'it may, perhaps, help them to form more equitable judgements concerning the blind' (ibid: 69).

Villey believes that the blind are judged 'not by what they are, but by the fear which blindness inspires' in the sighted. He believes that those whose 'world is organized around visual impression' (ibid: 15) fear that without sight 'the whole life must flounder' (ibid: 16). They view blindness as an 'overwhelming burden' because it implies a darkness which 'nails to the spot' (ibid: 15) and results in 'the revolt of all one's sensitiveness in the face of the most atrocious of infirmities' (ibid: 15).

Villey attacks those who believe that, without sight, 'everything is dulled, the intelligence, the will, the sensation' so that 'the faculties of the very soul are numbed' (ibid: 14). He is convinced that the able blind are themselves the most competent propagandists, 'the best champions' (ibid: 373) of their capabilities, and he goes to some
lengths to explain not only how they cope, sightless in a sighted world, but also how they experience and react to, the many legends and beliefs which surround them. Using one of the many martial metaphors which characterize this work, and which are presumably symbolic of his own fight against stigma, he regrets that there will never be enough 'facts of proof' of ability with which to 'wage war against established prejudice' (ibid:69).

He takes issue with the comments of the French 'philosophe', Diderot, whose 'Letter on the Blind' (1749) had long influenced 'scientific and professional' workers in the field of blind welfare (Arthur N. Wilson 1972:99). Diderot, influenced by the English empiricist John Locke and a powerful figure in the French Enlightenment, believed that 'the only thing the mind has to work on is the evidence conveyed to it by the senses' (Wilson ibid:100). Thus, to be blind was to suggest 'that a man's intellect, personality and ethical motives are different from those with sight' (Wilson ibid:99). Villey contests the suggestion that blindness changes the 'very essence of the intelligence' and the consequent belief that 'the blind man was different from a metaphysical point of view from other men...that his mind was peculiar to him'. He says that Diderot 'altered facts to fit into his theories' (Villey op. cit:181).

Villey insists that the immediacy of visual impression is the only essential difference between the blind and the sighted person. He is the first, but certainly not the last of the autobiographers discussed here, to produce 'facts of proof' of ability to show how the skilled use of 'touch at a distance' (ibid:103), 'obstacle sensations' (ibid:111) and 'muscle memory' (ibid:126) combine to form 'veritable tactile sight'.
which informs 'the inner eye of consciousness' (ibid:126). Only spatial image is missing, he says, where memories 'consist of touch, sound and hearing, resonance and smell' (ibid:278). He wishes to demonstrate that, contrary to common belief, the blind person does not 'live in a cocoon', but in 'communication with the persons and things around' (ibid:281).

For Villey, as for many of the other writers who follow him, (regardless of culture), 'it is not the face which is the mirror of the soul,' but 'the voice, or rather those characteristics of the voice which one cannot describe with precision, but which speak directly to the heart' (ibid:274).

Levy brought to notice the limited and limiting conditions under which many blind people had been forced to live. Villey, in his turn, makes the reader aware that, though a person may lack sight, he is yet able to lead a full life by compensatory use of his other senses.

Though he argues for recognition of the abilities of blind people he says he intends to be 'scrupulous' in his endeavours 'to mark the limits' of what they can do out of the 'absolute conviction...that the truth only can serve efficaciously the cause I am defending' (ibid:9).

Dismissing legend, he denies that blind people are endowed with particularly acute, or additional senses, or that they are able to distinguish colour and he challenges the belief (which he attributes to Binet) 'that blindness is a cause of cerebral degeneration' (ibid:81).

Villey blames poor adaptation to blindness on lack of appropriate help and is highly critical of those who do not differentiate between the able man who happens to be without sight and those who 'are incapable of normal development' and who thus 'injure the reputation of their companions in misfortune' (ibid:35). He carefully distances
himself from the 'incapable' and states that the cause of 'intellectual deficiency' is not in blindness itself but 'may be found in the various maladies which frequently accompany blindness', particularly 'those deep seated maladies which affect brain and nervous system' (ibid:35). Villey does not refer specifically to the effects of congenital venereal disease but his antipathy to the sufferers (and doubtless his fear of inclusion in such a group) is obvious. He regrets that 'preventative treatment' has 'saved' some who would not otherwise 'have escaped' and concludes 'with all our hearts we long for that time, which still far off, when oculists will not allow any but idiots to lose their eyesight. If ever that day should come it must be clearly understood that it is not blindness which leads to imbecility, but that blindness and imbecility both come from a deeper cause'. (ibid:35/36).

It is difficult to imagine what kind of experience might have precipitated these remarks which suggest a fascist 'cleansing' or theories of eugenics. Views expressed when Villey was still a young man by the Congre des Typhlophiles (Croisade contre la Cecite. Les Aveugles en France 1910), and by Maurice de la Sizeranne in his book (Les aveugles par un aveugle) (1912), suggest that such beliefs were far from universally held. It is, of course, possible that the recommendations of the Congress, and the comments of de la Sizeranne, were made in an attempt to redress existing conditions, particularly since many were only tardily implemented, but nowhere is there any suggestion that the blind were not viewed as other than 'objects of general and universal sympathy' (Congress Report 1910:1).

Both the Congress and de la Sizeranne seek recognition for the capabilities of blind people, together with greater social provision and
changes in attitude. De la Sizeranne, like Monbeck and Kirtley fifty years later, explains the coping strategies and qualities of blind people and makes a plea for greater opportunities, whilst the Congress report addresses social and medical provision. Its recommendations range from provision of a definition of blindness and compilation of a register of blind people, provision of medical treatment, facilities for early diagnosis and preventive measures, to adequate education, training and employment. Far sightedly, the Congress suggests that blind and sighted children, deaf and hearing, handicapped and able-bodied should be educated together, whilst parents should have the choice between schooling locally or in residential units.

The degree to which these laudable aims was implemented is questionable however, since an 'ordonnance' on 'the Social Care of the Blind' (No. 45-1463 du 3 Juillet 1945, Relative a la Protection Sociale des Aveugles) was introduced, after the Second World War to 'fill the gaps left by charitable organisations' and to co-ordinate the efforts of public services and private organisations' (L'Aide Sociale aux Aveugles de France 1946:2). The 'ordonnance' extended the law of 1905 under which indigent blind people received financial assistance and included many recommendations for the provision of education and employment. Traditional trades such as mat- and brush-making were recommended for the unskilled whilst the more able were to be trained in telephony, physiotherapy or piano-tuning. Though there appears to be no mention of higher academic training for either men or women, there is no suggestion of a prevalence of mental inadequacy amongst blind people. The instructions on the front cover of the booklet are however somewhat
peremptory in nature. They read 'Take care of your eyes. Help blind people. Get them working. Discourage them from begging.'

Thus, the vehemence of Villey's fight for understanding becomes more understandable given the tardiness of official response and the lack of appreciation for the needs (and gifts) of blind people. He pleads for a more realistic appraisal of those without sight and challenges myths and 'daring generalities' (ibid:303) which imply that blindness 'belittles the moral personality' (ibid:302), destroys aesthetic enjoyment and 'creative genius'. The blind were thought to be incapable of 'creative genius' since this was said to need 'integrity of senses, heart and intelligence (ibid:303). Somewhat ironically, Villey notes that music is said to be 'instinctive' to those without sight (ibid:302). He also deplores the fact that blind people are encouraged to describe their experiences in 'the language of the man who sees' (ibid:197) and, like Thomas Cutsforth, criticises Helen Keller who, he says, is 'the dupe of her dreams' because 'she does not distinguish between sentiments suggested to her by words and sentiments inspired by sensation' (ibid:313). In the view of both Villey and Cutsforth the practice of using the words of the seeing implies the inferiority of the blind and adds to 'the great difficulty' that a 'a blind man has in making his place in a society made by those who see' (ibid:375).

Villey's use of the present tense and his frequently emotionally-charged language bring an even greater sense of immediacy to the final section of his book in which he enumerates the enduring prejudices to which the blind man is 'a plaything' (ibid:376). He notes the 'bitterness of the tribulation' which begins when the blind person 'is compelled to succeed' (ibid:375) in order to prove his worth in the
world of work where achievement is greeted with 'unbounded admiration',
and failure with 'contemptuous pity' (ibid:376) and where the constant
struggle to overcome obstacles and disappointment gradually cause 'the
heart rending sentiment that blindness is a disgraceful infirmity.'
(ibid:377). He alerts the reader to the dread of humiliation, worry of
being a nuisance and obligations of gratitude experienced by the
ambitious blind man who aspires 'to equal the man who sees' and who
wants 'to make people forget his physical defect'. He is aware, as is
Sally French sixty years later (AUT Woman.29: Summer 1993), of the
tension caused by the disabled person's wish to see handicap as no
impediment, whilst being aware of the realities of its demands.

Although Villey writes feelingly about those who, knowing what is
lost, 'suffer bitterly' (ibid:374) at the 'catastrophe' of blindness in
later life, he nevertheless believes that in time there is a lessening
of both memory and regret for lost sight even if these are never
forgotten. He admits that there will always be 'difficulties of
adaptation to social surroundings but insists that 'the suffering
occasioned by blindness is not inherent in the heart of the blind.' They
are not, he says, 'necessarily haunted or tortured, as is supposed, by
the wish to see the light' (ibid:373). He criticises the Russian writer,
Korolenko, for misleadingly using 'writer's fancy' for ascribing to his
protagonist 'longings for light and colour' that were 'innate and
painful' (ibid:374). In Villey's view 'the soul of a blind man is just
as accessible to joy as that of the man who sees' (ibid:373).

Villey concludes that the 'vices' of claiming 'special insights',
freedom from obligation to others, and the expectation of service all
arise from the blind person's attempt to counteract the sense of inferiority felt by him 'in the society of those who see' (ibid:382).

This thoughtful and thought-provoking work also stretches the boundaries of conventional autobiography but the detailing of such a catalogue of painful responses and reactions to blindness can surely come only from personal experience, observation and reflection. Although the work cannot be identified simply as a personal statement it is nevertheless a much more inward looking testament than that of Levy and make the more so by the habitual use of emotive language and military metaphors which describe the battles for recognition and acceptance.

In contrast however to his usual combative style, Villey uses metaphors of nurture and growth to illustrate the influence of those who, like Valentin Hauy, had brought 'into the "darkness" of the 'outcasts of society' 'light for their souls [which] fertilised so many hearts and minds which until then would have been barren' (ibid:13). It will be remembered that it was Hauy who, angered at the plight of the blind 'musicians' in Paris, had begun the first systematic attempt at education for the blind with the establishment of his 'L'Institution Nationale des Jeunes Aveugles' in 1784. It is possible that without the work of Hauy and that of a later pupil at his school, Louis Braille, Alfred Hollins would not have received the education he did.


I have decided to consider next Alfred Hollin's book, *A Blind Musician Looks Back* (1936) despite the fact that, thematically, Chevigny's autobiography *My Eyes Have A Cold Nose* (1947) and his subsequent study (with Sydell Braverman), *The Adjustment of the Blind* (1950), continue and extend Villey's explanation and discussion of both individual and societal responses to blindness. I have taken this decision partly because, chronologically, Hollin's work appears before the watershed of the Second World War, partly because, like Levy and Villey, he was blind from a very early age, unlike most of the writers whose work follows, and partly because his life span overlaps with both of theirs.

Hollins states, at the end of what can only be described as a very lengthy reminiscence, 'I trust there may be found in it something to interest the general reader and something to help and encourage young blind musicians. I have written almost entirely from memory' (Hollins 1936:451). Hollins' book, which was published towards the end of a long and successful life, is much less aggressive in tone than that of Villey and demonstrates an apparently more accepting attitude toward the conditions and attitudes of the times. This is not though to say that Hollins is unaware of the effect which blindness has on the lives of many blind people. His book, like that of Levy, is more of a commentary on contemporary conditions but, in this instance, written from inside experience of some of the new educational provision of the times.

Hollins recalls, from a seemingly phenomenal memory how, blind from birth (cause unknown), he went at the age of ten in 1875 to the 'Blind School at York' where Braille had just been introduced due to the persuasive powers of Dr. Armitage 'to whom we owe so much' (ibid:34). Although the majority of the children at the York school were from poor
homes, Hollins relates how his father paid 3/6d. per week in a fee which covered food, clothing, education in music, basket and brush making, all in a narrow curriculum designed to equip for occupation in later life. It provides a striking contrast to the curriculum offered to the blind girl, Mary, in Laura Ingall Wilder’s *Little Town on the Prairie* where, at the College for the Blind in Iowa, she is said to be studying 'political economy, literature, higher mathematics, sewing and knitting, beadwork and music' (Wilder 1969:91). Although it comprises a strange mixture of subjects, Mary's education appears to be more academically based than that of the York children where the emphasis was on sense training in the traditional belief that blind people lacked cognitive ability. Hollis describes the life at the York School as regimented and sparse, the forty-seven boys and thirty girls leading segregated lives and mixing only on the annual school outing.

Hollins showed enough musical promise to be able to continue his education, from January 1878 onwards, at the Norwood Royal Normal College and Academy of Music which Sir Francis Campbell (1832-1914), together with Dr. Rhodes Armitage, had founded in 1871. Blind himself, Campbell had worked, prior to coming to England, as Resident Superintendent and Musical Director of the Perkins Institute for the Blind in Boston, alongside its founder Dr. S.G. Howe. Campbell 'sought to equip [the students] to take part in life with their sighted fellow beings on equal terms and to gain recognition as might have been theirs had blindness not handicapped them' (ibid:54/55). He was a firm believer in physical fitness and was the first blind man to reach the summit of Mont Blanc...a feat which, like the establishment of the College, was
intended to draw public attention to the abilities of blind people (ibid:111). He was knighted in 1909.

Though Hollins describes the reading of Braille musical notation, which at the time was barely known in England, as 'laborious' (ibid:63) he achieved a career as an organist and pianist, giving recitals and concerts, touring at home and abroad and receiving an Honorary Doctorate at Edinburgh University in 1892. He asserts that 'given equal opportunities in musical training and education a blind musician can take part in the world with his sighted brethen' (ibid:360).

Despite this brave statement and his belief that 'to be able to listen intelligently and assimilate the best in everything is to me one of the greatest assets a blind person can have' (ibid:49) Hollins has no illusions about the ways in which blind people are disadvantaged and misunderstood. He notes the dependence on hearing when sight is lacking but denies that this 'a sixth sense' (ibid:61). He says that it is 'simply a refinement of one of the senses common to mankind, or possibly two of them, hearing and sound' (ibid:95). He comments on the tendency of many sighted people to either avoid the blind or to treat them offhandedly. He notes that, though collective help is available, 'as individuals they are slow to do anything to give a blind person happiness'. 'Pity is plentiful' he says 'but of friendship or comradeship very little' so that blind people are 'condemned to be a race apart' (ibid:61). Hollins sees this as a disadvantage to blind and sighted alike. He is critical of the lack of understanding about blindness. He deplores the assumption that he might not know his whereabouts (he did) and the barber's belief that he need not close his eyes against the lather (ibid:207). He contradicts the common belief
that he 'never sees anything in my mind or in my dreams' saying that he does, in fact, 'imagine the occurrence just as it impressed me at the time'. He uses the word 'see' in order to 'be as natural as possible' (ibid:220). Like Levy, Hollis also comments on the disapproval shown to the concept of marriage between blind people. Of his engagement to a 'sighted music reader', in November 1886 whilst he was a college music teacher, he says 'A College engagement had never been heard of before, and it is quite certain that if it had been between two blind people, both would promptly have been sent about their business' (ibid:168).

Perhaps because of, rather than despite these comments about sighted behaviour and attitudes, Hollins recommends that 'parents of blind children should do their utmost to make them as much like sighted people as possible'—a sad commentary borne of a lifetime of experience of the pressures which arise out of the expectations of sighted society. It will be seen that though the expectations change little in the next fifty years the responses of blind people themselves become more widespread and vociferous.

B. Autobiographies 1945-1990

The predominant aim of the pre-Second World War writers was to explain and instruct about the state of blindness out of observed, if not always direct, experience. As I have shown, these writers ask for greater understanding and opportunity, with varying amounts of implicit, if not explicit, challenge to the representations which were promoted in fictional accounts.
In contrast, post-war autobiographies place a much greater emphasis on personal reaction, response and expectation partly, no doubt, because of discredited and abhorrent theories of eugenics and ethnic purity, partly because of post-war hopes for greater social justice and partly because handicapped people themselves (some having been injured in war, some having played a productive role for the first time) grouped together to fight for equal rights with the able-bodied.

The accounts also show how examinations of the history of ideas about blindness, when combined with medical advances which identify cause, cure, eradication and amelioration, serve increasingly to discredit myth and magical belief. Above all the autobiographies 'offer an unparalleled insight into the mode of consciousness of other men' (Pascal op.cit:1) and, as already indicated, provide rich material for comparison with fictional representations of blindness.

With the exception of Sheila Hocken, who was registered blind as a child but regained sight at the age of twenty-nine years, and Albert Vajda who, having lost his sight in a car accident, regained it after operative treatment, all the works to be examined here are by people who became blind in adulthood, either as a result of disease, events of war or, as in the case of Hugues de Montalembert, a vicious mugging.

Variable though they are in degree of intimacy about a life-changing experience and dependant on subjective response, these articulate accounts illustrate how many of today's blind people refuse to conform or behave according to traditional expectation, particularly as opportunities for integration increase. They are typically the 'innovators' and 'rebels' of Lukoff's typology in that 'their avowed goal is to alter the scheme of things' (Lukoff 1960:38/39) and because
they 'refuse to accede to any of the special conditions laid down for blind persons'. Though they are 'viewed as aggressive and deviant and incurring hostility for refusing to "play the game" in the approved way' most of them 'do not wish to be identified as blind' (ibid:39). Some confirm Cutsforth's suggestion (op.cit:124) that adaptation to blindness can be exciting in itself. There are few signs of the patient acceptance so frequently anticipated by the sighted but instead their accounts are imbued with warlike metaphors of battle and conquest, imprisonment and release.

The reasons for writing are as varied as the authors themselves. In some instances the focus of the work and the reasons for writing are interwoven so that as might be anticipated from the rather predictable titles e.g. *My Eyes Have A Cold Nose, Eyes at my Feet*, the accounts of Chevigny, Hickford and Hocken are all centred on the acquisition of a Guide or 'Seeing Eye' Dog whilst that of Mike Ansell has as its raison d'être the organisation and planning of Show Jumping events. The works are not considered in chronological order. I have chosen instead to deal with them thematically in order to point up similarities and differences and the commonality of reaction of both the sighted and the sightless to the crisis of blindness.

To this end I shall consider first the accounts of two Americans, Dahl and Chevigny, both born (as far as can be estimated in the case of the former) in the early years of this century. In cannot be said with any certainty that both are representatives of a WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) culture because, although Dahl is the daughter of Lutheran Norwegian immigrant parents, it might be assumed from Chevigny's text that he is either a Roman Catholic or a Jew. During a discussion on the
influence of religion on belief and attitude, he says 'I was reared in a very old and strong faith and deeply respect those who hold a sincere body of beliefs' (1947:158). Nevertheless he is deeply angered by the 'minister of a Russian Evangelical sect' (ibid:161) who tells him that sin caused his blindness and that repentance might restore his sight. Regardless of religion, however, it is clear that both writers come from a culture which places great value on individual motivation and the will to succeed and which typically offers little in the way of state intervention and help.

Though Dahl and Chevigny can be seen to adhere to this ethos, their stories and their reasons for writing are vastly different. Visually impaired from birth, Dahl's 'little book' (1962:6) is a personal and intimate account of her attempts to come to terms with the effects of blindness after she had finally 'lost the battle' (ibid:8) for sight following its lengthy and insidious deterioration. Persuaded to write her story after a successful lecture about her accommodation to blindness, (she had gone to talk about her recent book about her childhood) her work can also be seen as one of a series about her life as the child of immigrant Norwegian parents in the Mid-West. Though Dahl's intent is to show that blindness involves 'just one more way of living' (ibid:6) and written to encourage 'those of us who are blind' to 'try to make ourselves better understood' so that 'those who can see' might 'try a little harder to put themselves in our place' (ibid:141) her book is more a demonstration of Christian faith, acceptance and patience in adversity than a challenge to existing thought and practice.

In comparison, Chevigny's account has a more powerful and challenging impact, encompassing as it does a wider context than one
individual's experience. He is less willing to accept the world of the blind and is far more questioning about both it and its mores. His visual impairment was not of gradual and insidious growth but of sudden and dramatic onset whilst he was in New York to discuss new employment opportunities. This experience and the ensuing personal crisis led him to research the history of belief about blindness and the common reactions to it. The narrative becomes much more than the recounting of a struggle back to independence. It is a conscious effort to put his story, and that of blindness in general, into a study of beliefs and myths which he then places in their religious, historical, philosophical and psychological contexts. The account of his training with a 'Seeing Eye Dog' thus becomes secondary to his main theme and provides a vehicle for an erudite, thoughtful and critical commentary about blindness and the blind. Written during the Second World War, at a time when thought was being given to the provision of appropriate help for returning blinded service personnel the book gives Chevigny the opportunity to compare the limited services offered to him as a civilian with those being hurriedly assembled for the rehabilitation of war veterans. Widely read in its time, the book becomes a protest against the imposition of stereotyped expectations whilst Dahl fights on a more limited and personal front. Both books illustrate that whilst there is an inner struggle to come to terms with blindness there is at the same time just as difficult an outer struggle to convince others of the blind person's capability, integrity and independence. Since their accounts are set at such different times I shall consider Dahl's work first.
Einar Dahl (?1900-?)

Born in Minnesota, U.S.A.
Education. Public Schools in Minneapolis.
Graduate of University of Minnesota
M.A. (Sociology) Columbia University, New York.
Sometime Professor of Literature and Journalism, Augusta
College, Sioux Falls, S.Dakota.
Norsk Akademiker, University of Oslo.

Dahl's accounts are imbued with her early 'fear' of total blindness and
her determination 'never [to] let my eyes keep me from most of the
things I wanted to do' (1947:1). She records that the rejection she had
encountered on her first day at 'public school' (ibid:35) had affected
the rest of her life. Facially disfigured and left, when still a baby,
with only a very limited amount of vision after the 'inflammation'
(ibid:88) in her eyes had subsided, she was told by the teacher, who
realised she could see nothing on the blackboard, that 'this isn't a
school for the blind. We don't take children who can't see' (ibid:36).

She had met no problems at the kindergarten she had attended so that
this was a particularly dashing remark for Dahl who had keenly
anticipated joining her siblings at the 'big school' (ibid.35). Now she
was to look in a mirror for the first time in her life following taunts
from other children and to find such a lack of understanding for her
problems that she was deemed to have learning difficulties. She
describes how she had to 'stand right up to the board' after lessons,
'walking back and forth...where the writing was' (ibid:43) and how she
read by crouching over heavy books on the floor. Later she was warned
that she was unlikely to get a teaching job because the students would
'ridicule' her and the parents think her incapable (ibid:70). She found
that school experiences 'left scars on my memory which time was never
really able to erase'. They left the impression 'that I had no right to
live and that I was guilty of something' (ibid:41). These feelings were
to return when, in the midst of a successful teaching career, which had
included the acquisition of a Master's degree and Fellowship study in
Norway, the offer of sabbatical leave for doctoral study was withdrawn.
She was convinced that this was because of her poor sight.

Although leave was subsequently granted, Dahl never completed her
studies because of a breakdown due to too intensive application. She
turned to full-time writing following the loss of her job and when
operative treatment had averted further threats to her sight. Now able
to see 'forty times as well' (ibid:218) as at any other time in her life
and recalling an earlier comment 'that all of us have handicaps'
(ibid:220) she embarked on her life story having been advised 'Your
story would convince them' (i.e. other people with handicaps) 'that a
person with even a serious handicap can be both useful and extremely
happy and that the greatest kindness anyone can show such a person is to
treat him exactly like anyone else' (ibid:221).

Despite the hope of the doctor at the Mayo clinic that 'God cannot
be so cruel as to take her sight away' (ibid:174) Dahl did in fact 'lose
out' in the 'battle' (ibid:8) to save her sight as she records in
Finding My Way (1962). Nevertheless, buttressed as ever by a strong
religious faith and the fierce independence instilled by her pioneer
immigrant parents she was determined to seek help from no-one and to
strive to maintain her usual high standards. It is 'in this little book
(1962:6), born of a lecture intended to be about her latest publication,
'A Minnetonka Summer', that Dahl shows how the change 'from a seeing to
an unseeing world...where everything has to be done a new way' (ibid:6)
can be achieved. Written two years after the onset of blindness, in an
informal, conversational style, it becomes a kind of manual of how, and how not, to behave toward blind people, with detailed examples of 'good' and 'bad' behaviour.

Dahl vividly describes her dread of being alone, now that she can no longer see. She says the 'fear of the unknown' was 'almost more than I could bear' (1962:11). Her earlier methods of coping were as nothing when it came to finding her way about, dressing, cooking, and housekeeping in general. Everything took 'much longer than I expected' (ibid:29) and required planning to the last detail' (ibid:140). She recalls, however, that her mother 'wouldn't have pitied her' but 'would have encouraged me to go ahead. And she would have found something to praise in each accomplishment, no matter how clumsily I had done it' (ibid:48).

Dahl relates how, after eating numberless cold meals, she forced herself to use the cooker, make coffee and pour it successfully and identify the food which her sister had left for her. Although she appears not to have had access to the various 'aids to daily living' which would most likely have been available to her under a state system of care she learns to commit to memory the details of her apartment and to appreciate that 'my ears could do for me what my eyes could no longer accomplish' (ibid:21). She speaks, tellingly, of waking 'to find myself in darkness', a darkness which she feels 'I should have been used to... by now, but somehow whenever I wake out of a deep sleep, the overwhelming blackness never failed to give me a shock' (ibid:27). She was uncertain, in the early days, whether or not it was morning when she woke.
Having learned 'not only to feel, but actually to smell' she comes to think it a fallacy that 'if one faculty is denied a person the others will naturally be much keener' (ibid:63). She learns 'how useful one's feet can be' and that hands are 'an even better guide in the need for constant vigil' (ibid:64). Significantly, bearing in mind the struggle to maintain a sense of self when stigmatized as a 'spoiled identity' (Erving Goffman 1968:9) (when the damaged 'eye' may itself be synonymous with the imperfect 'I') Dahl indicates her own sense of lack of being. She spells out her feelings using words which signify a sense of nothingness. She says as she 'moved in the vacuum of total darkness' she sometimes found herself wondering if she were a real person. She could only reassure herself by letting her hands glide over her features, 'touching my hair and the top of my head, even my arms, my legs and my feet' (ibid:72/73). She challenges 'any seeing person, with mirrors at his command and the eyes to use them' to laugh at her idiosyncrasy (ibid:73).

Dahl had realised early that 'blindness isolates from the rest of the world' (ibid:115) but she is aware of needing appropriate help. This realisation had come hard because 'during my seeing days it had taken all the wits I possessed and a great deal of subterfuge to give the impression that I could see almost as well as anyone else'. She had always 'wanted so much not to be thought different from other people'. (ibid:31).

The book ends on a triumphant note as Dahl relates how, her problems overcome by keeping 'an orderly home' and preserving 'order in her mind' (ibid:82), she feels impelled to 'get back to the work which meant so much to me', the 'all absorbing passion of writing' (ibid:141). It is a
passion which culminates here in a flight to Minneapolis to launch her new book. By way of her own story she had shown that blindness can be 'just one more way of living' and that 'it can be done'.

As I have already indicated, Chevigny's personal account is subservient to his wider interest in the beliefs which surround the state of blindness.


b. Missoula, Montana, U.S.A.

While in New York to discuss new employment opportunities in November 1943 Hector Chevigny quite suddenly went blind. The cause was a detached retina in his right eye. He had thought himself 'safe' from further trouble, after losing the sight in his left eye (also from a detached retina) earlier in the same year, and after a history of childhood eye problems. Ill advised by a New York ophthalmologist who was unfamiliar with his case, and having lost 'the ability to think' in his anxiety, Chevigny underwent the surgery which was to cost him his sight.

Chevigny goes to some lengths to explain his reasons for writing My Eyes Have A Cold Nose(1947). He is convinced, after reliving 'again the experience of the past three years' during which he wrote the book, that 'the tragic aspect of blindness does not inhere in the condition nor can it do so' because 'in nature it is absent'. He concludes that 'it is an entirely civilised idea. The world in which a man finds himself creates a tragedy for him and in him' (ibid:7). Chevigny says that he does not write to prove the assumption that 'a man can be lifted out of himself'
in the 'face of what the whole world tells him is the most tragic
misfortune that existence can offer' because the same assumption
presents him, at the same time, with contradictory ideas which suggest
he is 'inspirational' whilst yet needing 'the inspiration to solve the
problem' (ibid:8).

He affirms that he writes, not as an inspiration to others, but as a
man 'trained to be a reporter' who, having gone through a new experience
which provoked 'strong feelings', wished 'to give his story the stamp of
truth and to show, chronologically, how he came by his opinions'
(ibid:8). To this end, he says, 'he tells it autobiographically'
(ibid:9). Preferring not to wait until 'perhaps my judgement might be
expected to be more mature and the subjective feelings less strong',
Chevigny 'pleads the habits of a reporter who sits at his typewriter
immediately after having had an experience'. He knows 'that time will
not change the circumstances he encountered except to help him forget
them' (ibid:29). He writes of his introduction and initiation into a
world which 'is in society but not always of it' and which has 'feelings
and emotions about which society might be very surprised to hear'.
Importantly, he says 'I was surprised to hear them, and even more so to
find that my emotions and feelings were often in keeping with what I
heard' (ibid:9).

Once blind Chevigny is quickly alerted to 'the most ingenious
paradox' (1947:96) which informs attitudes toward blind people in
genral and is now brought to bear on him. In his view it is a paradox
which arises from the confused beliefs of the sighted. He thinks that at
a conscious level sighted people wish to help blind people live ordinary
lives at 'the common level of existence' whilst, unconsciously, they
wish to 'remove them to a place of safety' (ibid:117). Chevigny comes to believe that there is 'no escape' (ibid:85) from the powerful hands of the sighted which pressure blind people into conformity with their views whilst providing services which make no demands nor offer any stimulus but are 'geared down to the capabilities of the least fit' (ibid:113).

He fears that few become members of the 'Turtle Club' which is comprised of 'those who have stuck their necks out' against interference by the social agencies (ibid:112).

He believes the paradox also comes from the 'world's fixed notions' (ibid:78) which unremittingly endow all blind people with the same inescapable set of characteristics which make them figures of tragedy, pitiable, helpless and dependent and so destroy their integrity as human beings by identifying them as unfit for normal living. Chevigny argues that this dichotomy of belief, this 'cleavage in thinking' (ibid:92) by the sighted, is the cause of many ambivalent attitudes. On the one hand the blind are to be regarded with pity, as incapable of anything more than their helplessness merits (e.g. 'in the mop or broom factory (ibid:92)) whilst on the other hand there are those, like the blind psychologist Thomas Cutsforth, who consider that blind people should have work of their own choosing even though it might be thought 'not quite right' (ibid:92) that they should 'struggle for existence' (ibid:81) and earn their living like everybody else. Chevigny thinks that though it is to the world's credit that 'the blind...need not want' (ibid:81), the idea nevertheless demonstrates a destructive kindness. It is possible (though not recorded) that Chevigny shares Cutsforth's conviction that those who beg on the street show more independence and spirit than those who sit at home.
Chevigny explains that he had read Cutsforth's book on the education of blind children 'with glee' since it 'saltily and forthrightly' endorses his view that they too had been subject to unchanging ideas and thus ill-prepared for adult life. He notes that the book was 'anathema to many' and 'dropped like a hot potato' (ibid:119).

Chevigny finds that the world's 'fixed notions' about blind people's lack of ability also spills over into his training with the 'Seeing Eye Dog' and into his life with friends and colleagues. Disagreeing with the idea that a newly blind person should take time to become 'adjusted' before training, and in the absence of any other form of rehabilitation for civilian blind at that time, Chevigny seeks early admission to the programme before poor habits of gait and carriage can be established. Though he finds that possession of the dog forces him into 'action and responsibility' (ibid:234) and a greater physical fitness, he experiences an overprotection that 'vitiated' the 'will to effort completely' (ibid:101). He recounts that he is never allowed to walk unassisted or helped to find directions and assess distances. He feels he is being reduced to 'the norm' which society 'with entirely unconscious intent seeks to reduce the man who is blind' (ibid:101). He finds that workers for the blind frequently act on their belief that 'blindness renders a man helpless in every way' (ibid:79).

Comments from friends and colleagues also convince Chevigny of the accuracy of the observation that 'People will be firmly convinced that you consider yourself a tragedy. They'll be disconcerted, even shocked, to discover that you don't' (ibid:78). Having been 'treated like a child', 'talked down to' 'in false hearty tones' (ibid:74) at the barber
shop, he is warned by a friend 'you're a blind man now, you'll be expected to act like one if you don't want trouble' (ibid:76).

Though Chevigny does act like a blind man in so much as he learns that 'touch is no good at a distance' (ibid:59) and that he has to depend on 'hearing, taste, touch and smell', 'positional sense' (ibid:63), 'facial vision' (ibid:62) and 'muscle memory' (ibid:60) he, nevertheless, claims 'three years in' that he has 'made a dent in the education of the world' (ibid:79). Disliking the idea of conformity and prepared to take the more difficult role of rebel, he rejects the notion that there is 'any special significance in blindness'. To him there is 'nothing occult' in the origin of blindness, nor does it 'have unusual spiritual meaning as a calamity' (ibid:142). Whilst for him there is no necessity to search for meaning he recognises that adjustment is difficult for some unless there is explanation or purpose even though the search for it may result in bitterness and unhappiness. As already indicated he rejects the accusation that he has been 'a great sinner'. He does not expect faith to heal him and says he is 'fighting as hard' as he can against the notion that 'he had been marked out in some way, against the suspicion that it might be a personal visitation after all' (ibid:161/162).

Chevigny also firmly rejects the commonplace assumption that all blind people are pitiable, tragic, dependent and helpless and in perpetual darkness. He is aware that he is seen as 'doubly different' (ibid:197) because, though now a member of an identifiable minority group, he is determined and articulate enough to brush away stereotyped expectations which would preclude his return to his own profession.
Chevigny is confident enough to ignore 'fixed notions' and to maintain his own identity.

Chevigny's book appeared in 1947. With its publication he thought he had 'made a dent' in the world's carapace of ignorance about blindness. Yet twenty years later, in 1969, Robert A. Scott still finds it necessary to say that 'various attitudes and patterns of behaviour that characterise blind people are not inherent in their condition, but rather, are acquired through processes of social learning' (Scott 1969: Foreword). It is this acquisition which is so roundly resisted by the likes of Chevigny who shows that well-worn myth originates in early attempts at explanation rather than in actual fact.

Similar challenges, expressed in a variety of ways, can be seen in the autobiographies which follow. Written from direct experience these accounts are both reactive to blindness and proactive in that they too show defiance of habitual belief and practice. Some are at the forefront of new thinking and are harbingers of real change.

I have decided to consider next the works of Sheila Hocken and Jessie Hickford because they too show that blindness need not result in despair or patient acceptance, inactivity and dependency, but that it is possible to enjoy a fulfilling life with a breaking of old barriers. My choice comes not from the fact that they both found freedom and extended horizons with the help of Guide Dogs but because their accounts bear comparison with those of Dahl, despite disparities of time and milieu. Their stories reveal a host of similarities of reaction and response to blindness which though possibly lacking the drama of fictional accounts demonstrate that there are numerous ways of mitigating the restrictions imposed by sightlessness.

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Currently Canine Counsellor.
One-time contributor to local radio programmes for the visually impaired.

Sheila Hocken's accounts of her early life as a blind child and teenager illustrate the hackneyed thinking about provision for blind and handicapped children which was prevalent until the 1960s. The period was as yet untouched by radical thinking and challenge, and ignorant of technological aids which were still in their infancy. Nevertheless Hocken's books are more than accounts of 'how it can be done' on a personal and individual basis like those of Dahl. They are more critical of sighted attitudes and are intended, as she told me, to inform and educate about the state of blindness. They are imbued with her own sense of the inequalities which blind people experience.

Now sighted herself (she regained her sight in 1975) Hocken thinks that every blind person should be valued in their own worth and no longer seen as members of an homogeneous group, worthy only of pity. They should, she says, be regarded as equals with the same opportunities as the sighted in both education and employment. She applauds the fact that since the 1960s blind children attend neighbourhood schools alongside the sighted since this both reduces segregation whilst correcting the belief which both endows the blind with extra senses whilst implying that they lack the ability to walk alone down the street.

Hocken herself had been born with congenital cataracts inherited from her father. For her, life really opened up when she entered 'into partnership' with her Guide Dog, Emma, an event which 'changed
Feeling that she too could see, she found 'the sense of freedom was incredible' (ibid:51). She no longer felt 'ashamed of being blind', embarrassed at having to use a white stick and ask for help.

Blindness and the clumsiness which went with it had always been 'accepted as a fact of life' (ibid:15) at home where Sheila's parents and her brother all suffered from defective eyesight and experienced similar problems. Recognition of home and family was not visual for Hocken, but dependent on touch, smell and sound to the extent that she says 'even to this day I still do not know any object fully until I have touched it' (ibid:18). Realisation of difference was only to come when she learned that 'other children watched T.V.' (ibid:16) and 'did not walk into lamp-posts' or 'put their noses right on the pages of books to enable them to read' (Hocken 1990:1).

Hocken was registered blind whilst still a small child following unsuccessful eye operations. She was able to attend the local day school due to the good offices of the head teacher and the persistence of her parents who resisted threats of legal action by the Education Authority which advocated residential schooling. Their resistance stemmed from the fact that her father had found it difficult to integrate into a sighted world after education 'in the blind way' i.e. 'in braille, at a residential school,' where he was 'discouraged from making use of his existing sight' (op.cit 1977:19). Though Hocken missed out 'on the basic three R's' (op.cit 1990:1) she was pleased that she had avoided the segregating effects of special schooling, though she had not been, as she had hoped, 'one with the rest of the school' (op.cit 1977:20).
Her experiences at school bear a remarkable resemblance to those described by Dahl some fifty years earlier. Like Dahl she says she 'ended up with my chalk on my nose' (op.cit 1990:2) after a too close study of the blackboard. She too was taunted by other children, likened 'to a dog smelling the pages' (ibid:1) and called 'Boss-eye' (op.cit 1977:20). She concludes that 'these knocks' helped her 'to cope with adult life' (op.cit 1990:1). Like Dahl she depended on the development of an excellent memory, though unlike her predecessor, who was also educated in a state system, albeit in a different country, she seems to have had a more limited education with little career opportunity. Though Hocken was 'mad about dogs' (op.cit 1977:24) she was given no choice other than to train as a switchboard operator where sight was not essential.

At nineteen years of age and wanting to be 'like other teenage girls' (op.cit 1977:28) Hocken describes 'the sense of restriction' as 'overwhelming' (ibid:23). Taught, like Dahl, to be as independent as possible, but able only to read Braille and unable to find her way about, she felt that her field of reference was 'shrinking', a feeling accentuated by her own 'simple refusal to be considered apart from sighted people' (ibid:23). The advent of the Guide Dog, Emma, changed Hocken's life despite her initial resistance to the idea because she still 'didn't want to admit to being blind' (ibid:30). Now no longer caring 'if you see that I'm blind. I can see too' (ibid:51) and 'determined to show that handicap was not as bad might have been imagined' (ibid:67), Hocken nevertheless found it difficult to admit that she was still unable to achieve as much as a sighted person. In a similar way to Dahl she describes how she came to terms with cooking and
learning to differentiate between different food stuffs. She explains, as do many of the other writers, how she learned to find her way about by counting intersections, 'writing' her route on a cassette recorder and by listening 'for the pillars' (ibid:54). Always 'mentally planning' (ibid:120), but too often 'treated as deaf....if not mentally defective' (ibid:105), she came to know her way by the smell of shops and streets, by the feel of sawdust under her feet and the roughness of the ground.

Despite success at work and a busy social life (flower arranging by touch and smell, dressmaking by touch and membership of a blind drama group) Hocken, like Dahl before her, was still obsessed with the idea 'that others would not accept me', because she 'was not good enough' (1977:81). She was only to realise 'the frustration, the sheer hatred of being blind,' the fact that 'underneath, like all blind people, I had never accepted it' (1977:137/138) when, in 1975, new surgical techniques offered a chance of sight. The 'flood of light' (1977:156) when the bandages were removed were to make Hocken feel she 'had escaped from the infinite black pit' (1977:157) and that she had 'never really known the depth of that former permanent darkness' (1977:156).

Now 'the life [which] had been bounded by the limits of my pool of blackness' 'stretched on and out, full of light' (ibid:159). Yet, like Mademoiselle P. (see p. ) and Wilkie Collin's Poor Miss Finch she was 'not able to relate previous tactile impressions to my present vision'. (ibid:175). Clothes and fruit, previously recognized by texture, were now distinguished by colour and she had difficulty in 'accommodating to walking' (ibid:172). Unable to recognize articles by sight she had to depend on touch, 'scared out of her wits' (ibid:184) at reliance on sight alone. And yet, having learned to use the switchboard by sight,
when asked to train a blind man, she suddenly knew 'in a terrible flash' 
how sighted people react to blind people. She 'knew how people must have 
looked at me' (ibid:189) because she too had thought the blind student 
slow now that she 'could see it' (ibid:189). Having also learned that 
she no longer needed 'to use my ears any more' (1983:42) for orientation 
Hocken proceeded to make a life for herself, writing, lecturing and 
training dogs. Convinced though she is that 'if I live to be a hundred I 
will never take the gift of sight for granted' (1990:6/7), she is aware 
that continuing sensitivity about limited vision 'goes back to my 
schooldays when I longed to be the same as everyone else' (1990:159).

Hocken had made the journey from her 'pool of blackness' to 'light' 
and in so doing had briefly gained insight into the perspectives of two 
very different worlds between which there appears to be an almost 
unbridgeable gap. In comparison, Jessie Hickford became one of 'THE 
BLIND' (Hickford 1973:21) in middle age after sighted life as a school 
teacher.

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4. **Jessie Hickford** b.?.

Blind at the age of 52 years (date unknown) after twelve years of 
failing sight. 
Teacher of English. 'She frequently lectures about the work of the Guide 
Dogs for the Blind Association. She lives in Colchester and has had 
articles published. *Eyes at my Feet* is her first book' (blurb). 
She has also written *I Never Walked Alone* (1977).

I have included something of Hickford's story here because her work, 
like that of Dahl and Hocken, was published within the period 1962-1975 
at a time when the voice of minority groups was becoming heard and 
noticed, and there was a noticeable increase in the interest engendered 
by their stories. Although she, unlike the other two women, did not
become one of 'THE BLIND' (Hickford 1973:21) until middle age, she was encouraged to write about the ways in which she adapted to blindness after a series of successful talks about her exploits with the Guide Dog, Prudence. The books are as much vehicles for publicizing the work of the Guide Dog Association as they are cathartic and instructional recountings of despairing, fearful and frustrating experiences once blindness causes a career to be abandoned.

Hickford's story differs markedly from those of Dahl and Hocken in that it demonstrates how the development of special aids, made available by a hitherto largely unknown technology, enables her to return quickly to independent living. Though she too was subject to misperceptions about blindness, her account shows that reliance on senses other than sight, particularly when these are assisted by aids such as tape-recorders and braille watches, can mitigate the effects of blindness and give the lie to the belief in helplessness, mental incapacity, despair and dependency which so informed Mrs. Fanning's story in A Death Occurred.

The effect of visual impairment was, however, a significant factor in the working lives of all three women writers notwithstanding the different periods in which they wrote. I hope I have shown that, although it was accepted by the middle of this century that blind women should be given the opportunity to work other than at home or in a traditional workshop, Hocken found herself steered unwillingly into an occupation thought suitable for her disability whilst Dahl had to struggle from her youth onwards to prove her ability to teach. Hickford lost her job after a period of trying to hide her handicap.
For the men whose autobiographies complete this chapter (three of which were published within the same decade as that of the women writers) the question of meaningful employment, commensurate with experience and ability, becomes an all important focus and the subject of much critical comment. Without exception these men reject the 'traditional role' described in Lukoff's typology. They refuse to 'see themselves defined primarily in terms of their blindness' (Lukoff op.cit:36) and, in keeping with a world which recognises the importance of work for providing income, role, status and occupational fulfilment, wish to engage in work which matches their talents and interests. They refuse to accede to 'prevalent conceptions that are held about people who are blind' and resist 'participation in agency programmes'. Like Guy in Blindsight, and Chevigny who felt 'no kinship with any minority' (op.cit:244), they 'tend to avoid association with other blind people' (Lukoff op.cit:36). Though often 'withdrawn' (ibid:37) in the first days after the advent of blindness, they become 'Innovators' or 'Rebels' (ibid:38) who 'have no wish to conform to the ideal notion of what [a blind person] should be doing' (Chevigny 1947:100). Their employment aims remain the same as when they were sighted.

I shall consider David Scott Blackhall's account first because he became both 'Rebel' and 'Innovator', and challenged established belief and practice from the onset of his blindness. Since his goals were still 'derived from the world of the sighted' he refused to give in to those who anticipated that he could no longer do his usual job, and managed to 'establish goals' not ordinarily believed to be accessible to blind people. Though often 'playing the game' his 'avowed goal was to alter
the scheme of things' (Lukoff op.cit:38/39). As an able and frequent broadcaster he had the benefit of a large audience for his views.


Housing Manager, Elstree Rural District Council.
Served for many years on Committees of The Royal National Institute for the Blind.
Founder of the Milton Mountaineers Climbing Club.
'He had an amazing range of interests—poetry, puzzles, mathematics and mountaineering. His advice was "Stick to your job if you possibly can. The time you have lost your sight is no time to lose your job as well" (Thena Henshel [Producer of 'in Touch'] in 'New Beacon' October 1981. pp.265/266).

Although David Scott Blackhall had lost the sight of an eye in a childhood accident, this had not inhibited either his education nor his career as a Local Government Officer. He became totally blind at the age of 45 years, in 1955, following an operation for cataract. Carelessly and thoughtlessly told of the failure of the operation, he says he did not 'make friends with the word "blind". It was a word infinitely terrible' (Scott Blackhall 1971:8). Feeling 'that it had happened to the wrong man, that divine or any other kind of justice "had misfired"' (ibid:25) he expressed his grief in poetry, saying 'farewell' (ibid:10) to his sight many times over. 'Very independent' and 'tending to scorn help and advice' (ibid:8) he, like RozLinde, was unable to accept his condition. Unlike RozLinde, however, Scott Blackhall taught himself both braille and touch-typing 'so as not to be cut off from the land of the living' (ibid:10). He was as anxious as Chevigny had been to maintain his old occupation and was determined, against much opposition from his employers, to return to his post as Housing Manager. His 'overwhelming
desire 'was not to written off', nor to be set aside'. It was, he says, 'not bravery' but 'self-preservation' (ibid:18).

Unwilling to be reduced, as were Mr. Rochester and Amyas Leigh, to dependency and quiet acceptance of blindness, Scott Blackhall wants 'to belong to the universe, to eternity' even if this 'means working a little harder...to keep abreast of the sighted world' (ibid:19). It also meant maintaining a resolve to abandon what he was unable to do. For him, unlike Guy in Blindsight, there was to be no searching for miraculous cures. He is left, instead with a determination 'to preserve something of myself from the turmoil which is called the mechanics of living'. To accomplish this he must 'watch from inside', must 'listen' (ibid:131/132).

Like Chevigny twenty-five years earlier, he points to the ambivalent beliefs which still surround the condition of blindness. Though he acknowledges that 'blindness is the one disability, more than any other, which evokes all that is gentle and compassionate in human nature' (ibid:22), he is strong in his condemnation of those who see the blind as an homogeneous group, as the afflicted whose 'only recourse...is the begging bowl' (ibid:158). He says that 'all they have in common, coincidently, is blindness' which is 'a handicap', not 'an affliction' (ibid:82). He recalls, as did Chevigny before him, how he 'had to contend with the difficulty of coming to terms with other people's concept of my situation'. He frequently found himself 'trying to stand apart from the black shadow which walked around with me', the 'black shadow' which was not of 'my blindness any more, but that created in the concept of others' (ibid:39).
Scott Blackhall is dismissive of 'what they quaintly call "the image of the blind"', asserting that 'there is no such animal' (ibid:164). He criticises the 'prejudice and stigma still attaching to blindness' (ibid:158) and decries the general disbelief about ability. Once a keen mountaineer he is later, successfully, to lead a party of blind people to the summit of Ben Nevis though not without having to contend with many dire warnings.

Unsympathetic to the all too-common avoidance of the word 'blind' (ibid:84) Scott Blackhall became the presenter of the B.B.C. radio programme, 'In Touch'. It was not, he insists 'a public relations programme' for the presentation of 'a so-called image of the blind' (ibid:90) or to encourage segregation, but rather one to demonstrate 'expertise in the stone-cold sober business of being blind' (ibid:91). He acknowledges that 'the nineteenth century gave the blind freedom from poverty and ignorance' but questions whether the present century 'can offer freedom from prejudice, freedom of movement, and a wider freedom of choice in working life and leisure' (ibid:33). There is still to be dispelled, he says, a measure of ignorance left over from the nineteenth century.

An 'Innovator' in that he was part of the establishment as a committee member of The Royal National Institute for the Blind and a presenter of a factual rather than a campaigning radio programme, Scott Blackhall became a powerful spokes-man for blind people. A 'Rebel' also, he showed that he could ably maintain the job he had held as a sighted person and thus could challenge the status quo. This was no small achievement but one that was not to be repeated by Harry Garland Minton who could not overcome entrenched belief.
More of a 'Rebel' than Scott Blackhall, Minton's account is far less restrained, no doubt because it was written so much nearer to his post-blindness experiences than that of Blackhall. It is true that Blackhall recalls his grief, shock and despair, his resentment of the insensitivity of sighted people, but he writes from hindsight after a successful career both as a professional man and as something of an exemplar for blind people. In comparison, Minton's anger and despair are palpable, his comments about the dated and unimaginative practices of The Royal National Institute for the Blind and the then Ministry of Labour almost vengeful. His was no patient and resigned acceptance but an articulate attack on the stereotyped thinking to which he was subjected. (It is interesting to note that Scott Blackhall himself had considered that The Royal National Institute had 'tended to become autocratic' in its attitude toward blind people [op.cit:89]).

6. H. Garland Minton b.? 1916-?
Management Consultant, London.

H. Garland Minton was already blind in one eye (a detached retina) when he lost his sight suddenly and completely whilst waiting on the concourse of London's Waterloo Station in February 1966. He was 55 years of age.

Requests for help were ignored by numerous passers-by. 'Acutely aware' that he was 'standing in my own personal midnight...that I have to share it with no-one on the station' (1974:11) he was later admitted to St. Thomas's Hospital suffering from 'an unidentifiable but very active virus' (ibid:13), 'a rare condition [which] hits about one in every five hundred thousand' (ibid:21).
Recently separated from his wife and children, 'vacillating between determination and despair' (ibid:17) and 'dreading the idea of becoming helpless, a grown-up child, unable to care for myself' Minton realises that he 'must learn to accept my loss without question' (ibid:13). He agrees, whilst still in hospital, to go to the R.N.I.B's Rehabilitation Centre at Torquay, only too aware of his need to 'acquire new habits of thought and behaviour before I can govern my blindness and not allow it to govern me' (ibid:18). His time at that 'Butlin's for blind people' (ibid:40) was to result, however, in frustration and anger and the bitter conclusion that in making the decision to go there 'I opened the door to admit me to the purdah of blind care' (ibid:82).

Blind Man's Buff(1974) was born of a 'terrifying awareness that the condition of blindness is beyond the comprehension of the average man' and 'a compulsion to do something positive to help make the condition more desirable' (ibid:Foreword). It becomes a critical analysis of what Minton describes as the 'Institutional approach expressed by the Bureaucratic mind' (ibid:40).

I have chosen to include this unique account for a number of reasons. Firstly, although Minton, like the other autobiographers, describes a common range of psychological reactions to blindness -apprehension, fear of dependency and pity, anger, denial and despair- his particular focus is on the nature and purpose of the then rehabilitation and employment services for blind people and the thinking and perceptions which informed them. Secondly, although Minton's story displays its own kind of heroism, his is not a brave account of accommodation to blindness despite vicissitude. His telling is imbued with disillusion and anger about a programme which he thinks is geared
to teaching him 'how to submit to being blind' (ibid:94). His
determination to overcome the effects of a sudden and dramatic onset of
blindness turns rapidly to frustration and disbelief in the face of his
failure caused by the inability of the R.H.I.B. to modify its practises.

Finally, and importantly in this context, Minton's story has no
counter-part in the fictional accounts discussed earlier. I have shown
how some of the protagonists of twentieth century fiction refuse to
submit to the imposition of stereotypical expectations, demonstrating in
the process their ability to lead active lives by using senses other
than sight. Nowhere, however, is there any description of the tedious
struggle to acquire these abilities and I find it difficult to imagine
how even the most percipient writer, without direct experience of the
processes involved, could make such a description as thought provoking
and interesting as does this writer. This being said, it must be
acknowledged that Guy in Blindsight was said to have received advice and
instruction from the Social Worker for the Blind.

Blind Man's Buff is both a personal story and, like those of Levy,
Villey, and to some extent Hocken, a commentary on the attitudes and
social provision of Minton's own time. Written for the most part in the
present tense, (though clearly with the benefit of hindsight), it
provides an immediately accessible account of Minton's initial 'battle'
for sight, his introduction to a world where 'blindness is a perpetual
struggle' (ibid:75) and his growing resistance to a system which he
believes induces him 'to lay my intelligence aside' (ibid:94). In the
beginning he had wanted to 'understand this Country of the Blind'
though he had no 'intention of becoming a prisoner in it' (ibid:83). It
becomes 'a prospect' which he 'cannot accept' (ibid:94).
In keeping with his claim that he is 'lucky' to have 'an extravagant preoccupation with my own individuality and freedom' (ibid:16) and his acknowledgment of a 'too ready aggressiveness and persistent obstinacy' (ibid:16) Minton's text is full of metaphors of war and resistance. Having 'lost the battle' (ibid:11) for sight, and now 'blind and afraid', he knows that he will 'have to fight fear many times in the campaign of adjustment that lies before me' (ibid:23). He is determined not to be 'shackled by blindness' (ibid:83).

Like Chevigny he is resentful of 'unwanted help' (ibid:23), fearful of being treated like 'a helpless child' or as if he 'were deaf' (ibid:72) or 'mentally defective' (ibid:57). He is aware that 'pity could be the fifth column that could undermine my confidence and destroy my determination' (ibid:18). He wants to be treated as 'normal' (ibid:19) but is aware that people are 'overcareful of what they say' (ibid:24), unable to accept that, though blind, he 'wants to be accepted, without reservation, as a full member of society' (ibid:83).

Remembering his 'own ignorance about blindness' when sighted, he is ready to forgive 'that same ignorance in most sighted people' (ibid:83) but he cannot forgive the insensitivity and complacency of the staff at the Rehabilitation Centre at Torquay. He had anticipated 'no miracles' (ibid:38) but he had not expected to find that rehabilitation here had 'more to do with occupational therapy' (ibid:40) than assessment for future employment. He is angered and disillusioned by the low expectations and poor mobility training given by partially-sighted instructors who do little to help those needing 'to cross the barrier of fear'. He considers that they could 'learn much from the blind' themselves (ibid:90).
Kinton becomes the epitome of Lukoff's 'Rebel'. Confessedly 'a not very patient man' (ibid:23), he comes to refuse 'the ends that are implicit in the blind as a reference group'. He 'refuses to play the game' (Lukoff op.cit:39) and is only willing to accept help on his terms and in line with his expectations. Though aware of his 'own defensive reactions' (ibid:134) he 'flouts the approved modes' (Lukoff op.cit:39). Much less of an establishment figure than Scott Blackhall he is unable to work for change within the established system and is highly critical of organisations which attempt to put him in the 'purdah of blind care' (ibid:82).

Long determined to look on 'the problems I meet as challenges' (ibid:62), and anxious 'at fifty' not to waste time in 'finding a new way of earning a living' (ibid:86), Minton refuses to enter 'the snare of segregation'. He does not want 'to be cast in the same mould as every other blind man' or to be 'measured by limited and abnormal standards that are not applied to people with normal sight' (ibid:82). He fears that 'the simple fact' that he is an individual who 'happens to have gone blind' (ibid:37) has escaped those who are responsible for his training. He comes to consider it 'futile' (ibid:39) to continue discussing his employment prospects since implicitly, he will have to 'alter my shape' to fit one of the 'pigeon holes' of employment for blind people as a brush-maker or basket weaver or, 'more rarely, as a physiotherapist or computer programmer' (ibid:39).

His 'horrible suspicion' that 'blind care' might be a 'greater threat to my freedom' than blindness itself, and that he would be guided into a 'quiet backwater' (ibid:61) proves only too true. Having fought for a more suitable programme for himself—it includes additional typing
and braille practice—he is told that he is 'difficult to please' when he refuses the offer of employment either as a capstan lathe operator or as 'an unwilling lily of the field' (ibid:112/3). He deplores the negative attitudes which imply that blindness has diminished his intelligence, rendered him unemployable, and without hope of matching his previous earnings. He has no intention of taking up some 'soul destroying occupation' that will allow 'his brain to rot and leave him on the rubbish heap' (ibid:38). Minton left Torquay with 'a jaundiced view and some bitterness' concluding that he would have to 'rehabilitate myself' (ibid:119).

It took three years and some highly critical radio broadcasts before Minton was offered tests by the chief psychologist of the Occupational Guidance Unit of the Ministry of Employment in London. Once taken the tests confirmed his 'proven ability as an organizer and creative thinker' with an 'ability to lecture and teach' (ibid:133). However, despite the further comment that he had 'refused to be intimidated by his blindness' and that the Torquay recommendations were 'most unsuitable,' (ibid:133) no other opportunities were ever presented to this writer, though he acknowledges that both 'the Institute and the Ministry' did make attempts to find suitable employment for him.

Shortly after leaving Torquay, but unlike the typical 'Rebel' who is said to look down on other blind people, Minton formed a group of 'kindred spirits' in order to 'promote integration'. They published articles in The Times, The Guardian and 'several other newspapers' but were unable 'to mount a continuous campaign' because of lack of money (ibid:121). Still angered by the suggestion that he was unemployable, and incensed by his treatment at Torquay, Minton finds that 'the urge to
protest grows in me' (ibid:121). He believes that it is only by
'intelligent protest' that 'each one of us could light a candle in the
dark' (ibid:125).

Minton uses all his articulate power to plead for the abandonment of
'emotionalist and sentimental ideas' which see the blind as constituting a
'lovable but inferior order of human beings' (ibid:139), because 'the
reality of blindness has very little to do with the positive or negative
virtues of the subject who is blind' (ibid:139). He urges immediate
'positive action' in the event of blindness so that the 'affected
person' can, to the best of his ability, 'participate fully in the life
of the community' (ibid:140). He had written earlier of his own dread of
'imprisonment'. Now he uses vivid imagery to advocate the lighting of
'the corridor' where 'too many blind people live out their lives,
imprisoned by the four walls of widespread apathy, public ignorance,
official complacency and private despair' (ibid:14). It is 'a corridor'
which he himself had been at no little pains to illuminate.

Significantly, in a postscript to his book, Minton acknowledges that
whilst it was in the making there had been some small improvements in
'the shape of blind care'. He attributes this to the 'greater
participation' in decision making by 'thinking blind people' (ibid:144)
who, presumably like himself, were no longer willing to accept dated
thinking. He had begun his book with the claim that 'no public body can
claim the privilege of privacy' and the somewhat vengeful statement that
he will 'make no attempt to conceal the identities of those that have
crossed my path' (ibid:Foreword). Now he pays tribute to the R.N.I.B.
(the organisation which he had 'not hesitated to criticise' [ibid:142])
for taking 'a step in the right direction' by promoting new ideas to
facilitate mobility training, for providing 'excellent residential accommodation for some working blind people' and for appointing the first blind Director General (ibid:144).

He concludes that goodwill alone will solve none of the problems though it provides a receptive audience for 'people like me who hope to promote a change in the structure of blind care' (ibid:145/6). He places main responsibility for the care of the disabled with the government rather than with voluntary organisations and criticises the Chronically Sick and Disabled Act (1971) for its lack of mandatory powers. Although this Act added nothing to the provisions of the Blind Person's Act of 1920 (which had been confirmed in The National Assistance Act of 1948) its significance lies in the fact that it was the outcome of much lobbying by disabled people themselves who publicised the extent and nature of their unmet needs. The Act, which had begun its life as a Private Member's Bill, was ill-thought out and poorly financed and had been rushed through Parliament in the last days of the then Labour Government. Laudable though its aims were, they have never been fully implemented. It is now hoped that this Act's failure will be remedied by the provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) which came into force in December, 1996.

Minton's account is notable for its truculence, pain and frankness. The fact that he is able to make such an open attack on institutionalised ideas about blindness and the blind, and get it published, is an indication of the distance disabled people have come in their determination to discredit myths which portray them as either supra-normal or incapable, but never as 'normal'. It can only be assumed, from the text, that Minton had the financial means to take time
to 'shape this book' (ibid:136) instead of having to accept work as a capstan-lathe operator, exist on state benefits or resort to beggary as in the past.

In contrast, Hugues de Montalembert's statement is as much a testimony against violence in general, and the violence in particular which blinded him, as it is directed at the treatment he received at the hands of the organisation which purported to help him. The focus of his rehabilitation is on a return to independent living rather than assessment for future employment.

I have included Eclipse. An Autobiography (1982) partly because it is another 'Rebel's' account of rehabilitation practice, albeit in a different milieu, and partly because it shows the sheer persistence of uninformed thinking about the blind.

Hugues de Montalembert b. 1943–.

'Hugues de Montalembert was a successful and charismatic painter who moved easily between the literary and artistic worlds of Paris and New York until he was blinded for life at the age of 35 years in 1978 in New York by two muggers who threw acid in his face. Before this he had travelled extensively, living at times in Africa and Bali'. (cover blurb).

De Montalembert's life before he was blinded was, by his own admission, 'hectic' (ibid:87) and 'hardly that of a saint' (ibid:106). 'Straight lines' had never been 'his forte' as his 'life style' (ibid:75) showed. He was 'violent by nature' (ibid:117), 'impatient and proud' (ibid:75). He had abandoned his Jesuit education because he no longer believed in 'their God' (ibid:11), and had instead had taken up voodoo practices. These, for him, meant 'peace, laughter, poetry and inner harmony' (ibid:15).
De Montalembert had been living in New York for two years when, returning home at the end of May 1978, he was attacked by two men who, high on drugs, demanded money from him. He was forced upstairs at knife point and made to strip naked. Acid was thrown in his face when he attempted to retaliate. He tried to wash the acid away, call the police and get help from passers-by. His attempts were as futile as Minton’s had been on Waterloo Station.

Because of evidence of voodoo rituals in his house, de Montalembert was variously suspected by the police and hospital staff of ‘black magic, blood and ritual murder’ (ibid:15), ‘sorcery and black magic’ and of being ‘a homosexual, raped, and a drug dealer’ (ibid:14). He says that even his ‘faithful ally’ (ibid:41), his wife Idanna, found it difficult to believe his explanation. Although they no longer lived together she had been called to the hospital after the mugging. She remained for a time to help him to ‘fight inch by inch’ for compensation in order to pay the ‘exorbitant’ cost of treatment (ibid:41). Two months later Idanna installed him in a new flat to be cared for by the Haitian maid, Desiree. De Montalembert thought it ‘unfair’ that Idanna should be expected to ‘share this misfortune’ though he realised that she might be ‘condemned’ if she didn’t (ibid:58). Condemned or not, there is no further mention of Idanna in his book.

De Montalembert’s account is spread across a much broader canvas than that of Minton. It is at one and the same time a highly personal account of a search for a new identity in a situation where ‘if there is no meaning’ in what has happened then ‘there is no worse punishment’ (ibid:78), a story of an intense but doomed love affair, and a critical commentary on the rehabilitation programme provided by ‘The Lighthouse’
in New York. Writing in the present tense, de Montalembert shares with
the reader his experience of the attack, the all-too painful treatments,
his waning hopes as operations fail, his abortive searches for a cure
and, not least, his reactions to the seemingly unchanging litany of
responses from the sighted.

In the early days of his blindness de Montalembert speaks, as did
Hinton before him, of feelings of imprisonment, claustrophobia and
despair. His feelings of panic, fear and irredeemable entrapment are
expressed in vivid metaphors. He writes of a 'labyrinth of darkness', a
'labyrinth with its twists and turns, dead ends and walls which I bump
against as soon as I want to believe I'm free'. In the labyrinth he
hears 'resounding in the passageways, as in the convolutions of my
brain, the growling of a monstrous beast, a blind Minotaur' (ibid:23).
He dreams of a sightless knight whose visor is stuck...filled with
distrust and fear because he can no longer see' (ibid:24). These
threatening images are intensified by the real fear that his left eye
may have to be removed. It leaves him with 'this fear in my stomach, a
disgust for my body, which will be irrevocably mutilated'. It represents
'a further plunge into darkness, a thickening of the nightmare, a
process of degradation that cannot be halted' (ibid:23). He 'hides
behind' 'a black blindfold' to conceal 'the wound' of his 'cooked-fish
eyes' (ibid:23) and his own vulnerability. In so doing he feels he is
're-establishing some degree of equality with the persons I'm talking
to'. Though he cannot see, he feels, like the child who covers his eyes,
that he in turn cannot be seen. Like Dahl, he is conscious of a feeling
of non-existence, of not being seen, because of his inability to confirm
his being through sight. He is eventually to wear a metal band which he
had designed 'to make up for not having my sight as a defense' (ibid:84). He says it 'covers my fear, my wound with a kind of brutal arrogance [which] rules out pity' (ibid:84).

De Montalembert speaks of the challenge which blindness posed to his sense of self. Six weeks after his admission to hospital, torn between fear for his eye and fear that his memory of 'the visible world is disappearing little by little' (ibid:24), he feels that he is 'between death and birth'. He is 'dead to my past life and not yet reborn to this new one. This whole period is merely an extraordinary labour through which I am giving birth to myself' (ibid:25).

He left hospital two months after he was attacked, with 'six stitches in each eye, blind, handicapped, feeling a nausea for life, for the rest of my life'. He is told that his left eye is holding 'for the moment' (ibid:56). He mentions this, he says, not 'to paint a gloomy picture or to make people feel sorry for me' but to explain, as far as he is able, 'the fear and mental anguish of those who, like me, have been stabbed in the heart of life' (ibid:57). Still bewildered by recent events he 'retreats' in to himself in order to 'analyze my own reactions' and 'to understand what I am for others and, if the image is distorted, to try to redress it' (ibid:57).

In October 1978, five months after being blinded, de Montalembert began his rehabilitation and mobility training at 'The Lighthouse'. He had already determined to deny anybody 'the right to belittle his life' (ibid:46) and was conscious of 'an animal force' (ibid:34) within himself which had already been a stay against pain. He was yet to find out that 'a vital instinct, still intact' was to give him 'a strength ... to fight the monster' of fear (ibid:51).
Despite the considerable differences in milieu, de Montalember's comments about his 'new kind of education' (ibid:68) in the 'protected world' (ibid:63) of 'The Lighthouse' bear a remarkable similarity to those of Minton about his programme at Torquay and serve to confirm the sheer endurance and pervasive nature of beliefs about the abilities of the blind.

At 'The Lighthouse' he finds that the helpers are 'more concerned with efficiency than love' (ibid:68) and feels, 'as a palpable presence' in the building, 'the instructors' frustration' and 'the anger and violence of the instructed' (ibid:68). Briefed almost immediately about 'blind people's rights' and sensing 'a begging bowl in my hand' he is 'bothered by this whole new windowless world' (ibid:69). He is 'dumbfounded' by the 'paternalistic approach' of the tutor who, seeing in his record that he had been a painter, arranged for him (without consultation) to spend time in 'the pottery and sculpture studio' (ibid:70). He rejects the 'Recreation Department' (ibid:71) and, like Minton, asks instead for tuition in braille, typing, cooking and housekeeping which will enable him to live independently. Successful though he is at these tasks, it is still thought 'inadmissible' (ibid:155) that he should live alone. Advised to find 'a nice girl', he wonders indignantly whether the two Commissioners from the State of New York which paid for his 'education' are 'civil servants or pimps' (ibid:155). He resists being drawn into 'the world of the blind' (ibid:96) and is critical of those who have 'taken root' (ibid:136) at 'The Lighthouse'. He tells the Directors that life there should be made 'uncomfortable' (ibid:136) in order to encourage return to the outside world. At the same time he is so angered by their lack of response to
expressed client need that he threatens to organize a demonstration 'with people carrying signs, in Braille' (ibid:137). 'Disgusted' he turns to 'my only hope' (ibid:137), an eye specialist in Barcelona.

In the meantime, though de Montalembert would have agreed with Minton that 'the actuality of blindness is less frightening than the concept of it before I went blind' (op.cit:28) he is determined to retain his visual memory. He is therefore relieved to find, after months of mobility training, that he is able to show a friend from Paris around New York. For de Montalembert it still seemed 'that both my eyes were there'. His 'brain' saw 'the pole, the grill work, the fur coat'. He knows it is 'an illusion' but it is important to him to know that his 'memory of the visible world is intact' (ibid:133). Although he had quickly understood 'the game' (ibid:62) of interpreting information provided by sounds and translating it into spatial terms which constituted 'facial vision' (ibid:95) sensitive enough to 'hear a tree' (ibid:168), de Montalembert began by experiencing fear, disorientation and the distraction of overwhelming traffic noise. Nevertheless he learned, as had Dahl in reality and Ike in fiction, to depend on an excellent memory for street lay-out and landmarks and to orientate himself at home by the position of the telephone.

In Spain, after yet another operation, de Montalembert learns that his loss of sight cannot be remedied. He had been strongly persuaded into seeking further treatment by his lover, the Russian dancer Valushka, whose presence in the book is fleeting and unclear, even though de Montalembert values her as 'Lucifer', 'a bearer of light' (ibid:89). It is she who brings memories of his island in the Java sea, who alone appears to understand his feelings about blindness, who
propels him into a search for a cure. She disappears as mysteriously as she had appeared, unable to cope with the final verdict.

De Montalembert comes to a hard-won reconciliation with his blindness after his eventual return to 'my Island'. For him 'loss of sight is a mechanical accident, not a state of grace or an event fraught with special circumstances' (ibid:79) nor does he expect any 'spiritual evolution' (ibid:106). When told that 'blindness is a blessing from God' he says 'Don't insult God' (ibid:79).

During the process of accommodation to his blindness he had become one of an increasing number of articulate blind people who refuse to succumb to ideas which define both them and their ways and the services which are meant to help them. He was determined to retain his own sense of identity and to continue to live by the values and life style which he has made his own.

Albert Vajda's account, which follows, has none of the passion of either Minton or de Montalembert mainly because he regained his sight and because the onset of his blindness was neither dramatic nor violent. His account differs from the others only in that it shows no commitment to the world of the blind and the forces which shape it. I have included it here briefly because it records Vajda's experience of an insidious onset of sightlessness, his awareness of groupings of blind people and, unexpectedly, in view of his understandable wish to forget a painful experience, his desire to retain what he gained from being blind.
Albert Vajda, b. 1919–

Journalist and Publisher.

Albert Vajda's story in (Lend Me An Eye, 1974) is more a cathartic exercise following 'twelve dark years' (ibid: 108) of sightlessness than it is a plea for understanding or a critique of attitudes and services. Widely travelled and a successful journalist and publisher in London and Hungary, Vajda initially lost the sight of his right eye in a road accident in 1960. A cataract in his left eye subsequently deprived him of sight. Unable to accept the situation, and advised by friends that modern technology ought to provide a cure, he sought help in London, Madrid, Vienna and 'a score of other towns' (ibid: 31). His dreams at this time, as he feared for his sight, were symbolic of a 'confused past and present uncertainty' (ibid: 25).

Modern techniques in Germany restored Vajda's sight after a relatively short period of blindness. He realises that had blindness occurred in an earlier period he would have faced, as he feared, 'eternal night' (ibid: 126).

Since he had never believed that he was 'irrevocably blind' (ibid: 72) Vajda keeps aloof from other blind people, preferring to observe them at a distance. Although he records many reactions in common with the other writers discussed here he refuses to identify with either the 'philosophic infirm' (ibid: 49) or those who insist that they are 'more alive', 'full of pep, ideas and energy' and 'better than the healthy' (ibid: 49). He remains an independent man who decides to 'come to terms with my new way of life' (ibid: 66) in his own way which is not to be influenced by other views. He continues with his professional activities.
and though he is forced to adopt new ways of coping the fact of blindness becomes, in many ways, incidental to his life.

A journalist, like Chevigny, Vajda takes the opportunity to use his experience of blindness as the focus of his book. He identifies six stages in the process of losing his sight. The two years of the 'First Gauze Age prove not to be too bad' since he can still discern 'faces, colours, landscapes' (ibid:38). Many of the stages overlap so that he 'slid into the Fourth Gauze Age' after 'living with one eye for eight years'. This is characterized by an inability to read as 'an increasing darkness invaded the world around me' (ibid:40). Longing for a good book is not relieved by listening to the radio, because at this stage the ear is 'an also ran' which cannot 'take the place of seeing' (ibid:40).

The barely distinguishable fifth and sixth ages follow closely when 'medically speaking' (ibid:41) Vajda is already blind. It is at this stage that he only knows that he is not alone when someone speaks. He finds that 'nobody smiled any more nor did anybody weep of course', nor did he know whether he faced 'a man or a woman' (ibid:41). However, though he regrets the loss of eye contact and the instant recognition brought by sight, Vajda treasures his mind and the opportunity to give time to music, friends and good books. Though he finds the 'instinct of sensing' (ibid:69) difficult to achieve he bars self pity and accepts necessary help.

Because of his ambivalent attitude toward blindness it was no doubt inevitable that within a few days of regaining sight Vajda reported that 'all my sense organs had retreated' (ibid:173). Yet, because he had come to appreciate his heightened senses during blindness he hopes that 'his nose and ears' will 'remain as acute as ever' (ibid:156).
Vajda is the only writer here who, having gone blind in adulthood, is able to return to a sighted life. His experience of the two worlds convinces him that there is little understanding between them. He says the able-bodied are alienated by complaining and embittered groups, because they are unable to 'try to understand what it [means] to be deaf, paralysed or blind' (ibid:47) whilst most handicapped people 'live in a world of their own, form a group of their own' (ibid:47). He is aware also of divisions amongst blind people in view of the 'unbridgeable chasm' (ibid:47) between those blind people who accept their handicap with 'serenity' and those who despairingly ask 'Why me?' (ibid:46) and remain embittered.

Despite these comments Vajda subscribes to the belief that suffering can ennoble. He believes that it gives rise to 'a deep philosophy of life', which itself promotes an enjoyment of 'the pleasures that are left' (ibid:47). This view is echoed in many ways by John Hull whose account follows.

Vajda's telling had no doubt been cathartic but it conveys little of the depth of experience found in most of the other autobiographical accounts examined here nor do his comments bear comparison with the complexities discussed by John Hull in his book Touching the Rock (1990) which is the final autobiography I shall consider here.

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B.A. (General Arts) Melbourne University, Australia, 1956.
Post-Graduate Diploma in Education.
Studied Theology at Cambridge University, 1959-62.
Teacher in schools and a College of Education before current post in Birmingham.
John Hull was born in Australia in 1935 and underwent operations for cataracts in childhood and again in his teenage years. His history of visual impairment bears a remarkable resemblance to that of Chevigny.

The 'familiar dark disc' (ibid:5) of a detached retina reappeared at the end of Hull's first year at the University of Melbourne where he studied for a general Arts degree. Although diagnosis and surgery followed swiftly he spent several weeks in hospital during which time he taught himself enough braille to be able to read the Psalms and part of St. Mark's Gospel. After taking a post-graduate Diploma in Education (specialising in Religious Education) and teaching for a number of years, he entered Cambridge University, in 1959, to study Theology. At this point the sight in his right eye was regarded as excellent, though care was still needed with the left.

After graduation Hull taught in schools and a College of Education before taking up a lectureship at the University of Birmingham where he specialised in the theory and practice of religious education. However, in 1970, less than two years after his appointment, he 'began a decade of failing vision' (ibid:8). Hull was registered as blind in 1980 although he had been unable to see to read by 1977. He became totally blind in 1983.

_Touching the Rock_ covers the years 1983-1986, after 'the last light sensations faded' and Hull 'finally learned how to touch the rock on the far side of despair'. He had 'fought bravely' for thirty-six years, but 'all to no avail' and it was then that he began 'to sink in the deep ocean' (ibid:8). For Hull the 'long, slow, lingering death' of his 'basic period of mourning lasted for four and a half years' (ibid:114). He reports, in January 1985, that he is still afflicted by a sharp sense
of grief and loss' (ibid:113). This is caused by his inability to see
the faces of his family or to play with the two children of his second
marriage. The sense of loss is compounded as his 'visual stock of
knowledge', and visual memory in general now that he is in 'blind time',
recedes into the past to become 'less useful, less relevant, less
assured' (ibid:105).

Although Hull's reactions to blindness are similar to those reported
by the other writers discussed here, he insists that he speaks for
himself and not for blind people in general. He says that his book is
unlike the numerous other autobiographies which he read following his
loss of sight because, though some contained 'most inspiring stories of
triumph, acceptance and reconciliation', written to 'proclaim a faith'
or in 'a spirit of stoic acceptance', he was unable to find 'an account
of blindness as I saw it'. He found that though some of the
autobiographies were literary accounts, novel-like with a beginning,
middle and ending of climax or resolution, 'they did not relate to
aspects which were significant to him' (Preface:1X). Hull's comments
come from confident and deeply considered thought borne of, and imbued
with, strong religious faith.

In June 1983, about two and a half years after being registered as a
blind person, Hull began to record, on cassette tape, his daily
experiences of blindness when 'the truth of being blind began to hit
me'. He explains that he had found 'the first couple of years full of
exciting problems to be solved' and that it was only after he began 'to
make the transition from a sighted person who could not see to being a
blind person' that he recorded 'things he felt strongly about'
(Preface:X). The recordings took place over a three year period until
'the need gradually grew less' (ibid:X). He says if there is any repetition 'it is because the same problems and the same experiences went round and round interpreted from many aspects', resulting in a book which 'has no particular ending because blindness has no ending'. He concludes 'it would be nice to be able to say that there was a happy ending, that a miracle happened, but it didn't' (Preface:X).

Taken as it is from recordings about on-going experience, Hull shares the immediacy of his account with the reader as he attempts, both practically and emotionally, to understand and come to terms with what has befallen him. The sense of participation here goes beyond that achieved by either the journalist Chevigny who tried to share and impart the feeling of a newly acquired experience or the accounts, informed by hindsight but relived as if in the present, by Minton and de Montalembert.

Whilst most of Hull's comments inevitably relate to his own reactions and those of his family, friends, colleagues and the world outside the University where he worked, he indicates that he was particularly interested in the responses of his children to his sightlessness, in the nature of consciousness and the content and meaning of dreams, in his changing perception of nature, and in 'the transformation in my understanding of what a person is and the problem of making sense of such terrible loss' (Preface:X). There was to be 'no stoical resignation before an inscrutable destiny, no gritting of the teeth, no acceptance, however courageous, of a meaningless destiny' (ibid:123) for Hull in his search for understanding and meaning but instead, the 'desire for coherence' which here took 'the Christian form'. It impelled him 'to probe the experience, to grapple with it, to
strip off layer after layer from it, to find meaning within it and to relate the meaning to the other parts or aspects of living' (ibid:124).

In Hull's thinking, blindness was 'not inflicted' (ibid:149) upon him nor was it 'fate' (ibid:148). It was 'the result of thousands of tiny accidental happenings' (ibid:148) which, had they happened later in the century, might not have resulted in lack of sight. For him 'it is only as we look back that the fortuitous is endowed with meaning' and 'through faith that we transform the accidental events of our lives into the signs of our destiny'. (ibid:148). He believes that 'retrovidence' (he defines this as a looking back as opposed to 'providence [which] means looking ahead' [ibid:148]) is a 'visionary gift of the Holy Ghost' (ibid:149).

Though initially Hull likens blindness to 'a huge vacuum cleaner which comes down on your life, sucking almost everything away' (ibid:135) he later concludes that out of 'the dark paradoxical gift' (ibid:155) of sightlessness 'one must recreate one's life or be destroyed' (ibid:135). Toward the end of 1986, as the recordings come to an end, Hull remarks that though blindness is 'not a gift he would wish on anybody', nor 'what he would want to receive' it is, nevertheless, one 'he has to accept' (ibid:155). Significantly, he now describes himself as 'a whole body seer' (ibid:164) as he 'begins to take up residence in another world' (ibid:145) rather than as a blind person 'which would define me with reference to sighted people and as lacking something' (ibid:164).

Like so many of the other writers, he comes to believe that sighted people cannot achieve understanding of, nor cross the boundary into, a world which has a separate identity where 'the body itself becomes the
organ of sense' (ibid:118), and so constitutes a different 'order of human being' (ibid:164).

Two linked metaphors, the journey and the tunnel, run through this book in which Hull concludes that the world of the blind 'is an authentic and autonomous world, a place of its own even though surrounded by, and held within, a greater world, the world of the sighted' (ibid:164). Though he has tried to describe the experience as someone who 'has crossed the border, but who wants to remain in communion' (ibid:164), he questions whether the greater world will ever understand the smaller without pity, or even the smaller appreciate the greater without jealousy. Nevertheless his book goes a great deal further than most in offering a deeply considered appreciation of the many aspects of the complex 'autonomous world' of the blind which he has now entered. It is an appreciation informed and bolstered by his final and mould-breaking assertion that 'If a journey into light is a journey into God, then a journey into darkness is a journey into God' (ibid:165).

As he reviews the effects of blindness Hull realises that loss of sight has affected not only his ability to recognize people and places, 'to orient himself in space' (ibid:106), but that it has significantly affected his sense of identity. Concerned at his failure to remember his own face, he asks 'Must I become a blank on the wall of my own gallery?' and wonders 'to what extent... the loss of the image of the face is connected with loss of image of self' (ibid:19). Like Dahl, who also felt impelled to confirm her existence by feeling her face and body, Hull thinks that 'the disappearance of the face is only the most poignant example of the dematerialisation of the whole body' (ibid:42). Similarly, with no means of updating his memories of himself, he asks
'What will become of them, of forty-five years of a sighted self?' and wonders whether he should abandon recall of a now dated appearance which cannot be renewed. He feels that 'the real me has been blown away by a sudden explosion which has split me into two images, each with a different expression' (ibid:109). Since other people have become 'disembodied voices, speaking out of nowhere', he questions if he is not 'like this too, now that I have lost my own body?'. He asks 'Is this one of the reasons why I often feel that I am a mere spirit, a ghost, a memory?' (ibid:19). It seems possible that some of the seeds of old belief which equate death of sight with death itself come from the kind of dislocated sense of being which occasion Hull's 'strange feeling of being dead' now that he has 'become nothing, impotent, unable to survey, to admire, to exercise jurisdiction or discrimination' (ibid:47).

Hull returns time and again to his concern that 'reciprocity of sight' (ibid:45) affects not only his sense of self but also his ability to communicate with others and to initiate relationships. He indicates that it is one of the factors which leads to isolation and separation from the seeing world. Unable to see, he feels that he cannot be seen and thus can be 'ignored, treated as if he didn't exist, spoken about in the third person'. He says 'being invisible to others I become invisible to myself. This means that I lack self-knowledge. I become unconscious...To be seen is to exist' (ibid:45). He is aware that sometimes people pass him by, thinking him ignorant of their presence. He is convinced that, had he been sighted, he would have been acknowledged.

Encountering the isolation and marginalisation brought about by blindness, Hull finds that whilst 'physical mobility is no problem' it is 'social mobility' (ibid:120) which worries him. 'Dropping into a bar'
no longer provides the opportunity to strike up a casual acquaintance since, unable to return smile for smile, he is left to himself. Appreciating that recognizing someone now 'hangs upon knowing his name' (ibid:73) rather than his face, Hull describes himself as 'travelling on people's elbows and not on people's faces' (ibid:120).

He comes to believe that speech is 'all important to blind people', the only means by which they share their 'inner thoughts' because, though normally 'sight is reciprocal' being 'related both actively and passively to other eyes', 'the eyes of the blind are inscrutable' (ibid:50) and thus limit communication. He suggests therefore that the ear is 'transcendent' because, unlike the closed eye which has no power to exclude, it is 'always receptive whether to sound or silence' (ibid:126) no matter how mysteriously it stops and starts. He wonders whether this is why 'it was always considered impious to look upon God but permissible to hear Him' (ibid:126).

Finding, as had Hickford and Levy, that the 'crucial thing in any new acquaintance is the sound of the voice' with its 'amazing power...to reveal the person' (ibid:17) Hull nevertheless finds that he cannot respond 'when bombarded' (ibid:120) with too much noise and this, in turn, adds to the sense of remoteness. A telling instance of this occurred when, in a kind of game of Blind Man's Buff, a group of colleagues surrounded him unexpectedly, all talking at once, to test whether he is able to recognize each one by voice. Whilst this is not the overt mockery of the unknown man who had falsely warned him not to cross the road in the face of supposed traffic, nor the angry, malicious accusation of an unknown passer-by that he was not actually blind, it nevertheless constituted a lack of awareness and sensitivity about his
impaired state and as such brought home to him his want of protection against careless behaviour toward his predicament.

Although lack of sight had brought a too frequent sense of isolation in seemingly empty space, Hull indicates that he found alternative and pleasurable means of orientation by way of 'facial vision' (ibid:19) and 'acoustic space' (ibid:61). He had had moments of the 'much discussed blind experience' of 'facial vision' during the initial loss of sight in his left eye during his teens when it 'took the form of a sudden vivid awareness of an object on my blind side within a few inches of my hand' (ibid:19). This reminds us of de Montalembert's pleasure in achieving what Hull calls this 'strange kind of perception' (ibid:19) when 'the sense of pressure is upon the skin of the face rather than upon or within the ears' (ibid:21). The experience leads Hull to believe that 'the wind has a special beauty for the blind' (ibid:81). For him, 'it has taken the place of the sun' for not only does 'a mild breeze' indicate the position and size of buildings but also 'creates trees ...

...where before there was nothing' (ibid:12).

'Acoustic space' also impresses Hull by 'the range and depth of the contact points between myself and something created by sound' (ibid:61). In the park, for example, it indicates 'an astonishingly varied and rich panorama of movement, music and information which is absorbing and fascinating' (ibid:62). Yet, though it provides 'a world of revelation' (ibid:64) for him, Hull is aware that at the same time it 'heightens the sense of passivity' because unlike 'the perceived world which is still and continuous', and thus ever available, the 'acoustic world' is only 'intermittent' (ibid:63). Not surprisingly, therefore, he finds the 'world of the blind ephemeral since sounds come and go' (ibid:71).
'Smooth open spaces' where there are no 'orientating signals' (ibid:78) are even worse because here 'the blind person lives in a world which is strangely devoid of objects' (ibid:152), and even more dependent on an 'arrangement of sensitivities' (ibid:100).

One of the 'sensitivities' which gave Hull pleasure was that of touch. Although, like Minton, he experienced a claustrophic sense of being 'buried in blindness', of being 'trapped in there for ever' (ibid:154), he indicates that he began quite early 'to appreciate the illumination and sense of real knowledge which came through touch'. With the vivid use of words and phrases which make his experience of blindness so accessible he explains 'I am developing the art of grazing with my hands' (ibid:133).

After a year's experience without sight Hull asks 'Is it true that the blind live in their bodies rather than in the world?', a question which both indicates an unbridgeable gap between the ways of the sighted and the blind and emphasises the isolation of those whose lives are diminished by a reduction in the concrete world. Because of the lack of visual indicators Hull finds that his priorities, particularly his use of time, change to accommodate the routines imposed by blindness which he finds both rigid and restricting. Ironically, now that he has 'less space', he needs 'more time' (ibid:60) in which to cope with the demands of every day life. Like Dahl and Scott Blackhall, or even Ike in Streets of Gold, he counts intersections and steps when finding his way about but, the need for concentration being paramount, finds conversations and offers of help distracting as well as depriving him of independence. Though he is aware that the able-bodied are often rendered 'powerless', not knowing what to do in the presence of disability, he finds it
equally hard to be 'a normal person when one is not a normal person' (ibid:81).

Like all the other blind writers discussed in this chapter, Hull finds himself infantilized, spoken to 'in a kind compassionate voice' as if he were a child, with 'adulthood wrenched from me' (ibid:78). Though it may sound apochryphal he reports, as do many other blind people (e.g. Minton [op.cit:72], de Montalembert [op.cit:161]), that he has been helped across the street when this was not his intended destination. After a year without sight, and exhausted by 'the cumulative experience of the inescapable presence of blindness' with its feeling of lack of control, Hull reports finding enjoyment in intellectual work where he could 'almost entirely forget that I am blind' (ibid:70).

He was not, however, to be allowed to forget either blindness or old belief when accused of sin and disobedience to the will of God by a faith healer who 'took a vigorously punitive view of illness and disability' (ibid:55). Hull stoutly rejects, as 'magical superstitious practice' (ibid:67), the view that 'the Lord had seen fit to afflict him' (ibid:57).

Although the greater part of John Hull's account of his experience of blindness is clearly one of on-going thought and evaluation, he was, as I have already said, interested also in how his unconscious mind struggled with the threats to bodily integrity. He says 'the dream narratives form a sort of sub-plot' (Preface:X) which, though lagging 'about six years behind reality' (ibid:13), chart the move from wish fulfilment dreams to those symbolic of anxiety, loss, failure and punishment. This ends in the summer of 1986 when, even though dreaming, 'he acknowledged himself as a blind person' (ibid:160). In the early
days of his sightlessness he had dreamed that he was still sighted and able to see the face of the son born after the onset of blindness.

Hull's commentary about his blindness is wider ranging and more erudite than that of Vajda. He too identifies a number of stages (four in his case) through which he travelled in order to reach the point where he can claim 'most of the time now the brain no longer hurts with the pain of blindness' and he knows that he has 'managed to survive' (ibid:139). The first period of 'hope' had lasted between twelve and eighteen months after his final eye operation. The second period of 'overcoming problems' lasted for three years and overlapped with the time of 'blindness as a challenge' which began in late 1983 and lasted for about one year when he was 'carried irresistibly deeper and deeper into blindness'. Now, he experienced 'despair' and 'terrible dreams' whilst 'his waking life was oppressed by the awareness of being blind' (ibid:139). The 'current period' began in the autumn of 1984 following a visit to old haunts in Australia. It was then that 'blindness engulfed me' (ibid:139) because of the contrast between his old sighted self and his present state.

Now, because the brain has found 'inner resources and 'sorted out its own function and priorities' Hull says he 'feels clearer, more excited and more adventurous intellectually than ever before in my life'. At this point 'the most important thing in life is not happiness but meaning' (ibid:148).

He had said earlier that his search for meaning involved 'some effort to understand blindness itself as well as my own blindness' (ibid:123). Though he is unable to 'simply accept blindness' as part of his life, he is aware that he 'must not reject it either'. Hull is
determined to 'integrate it', to make it 'coherent with a larger whole'. He decides that as a Christian he must not only tolerate the antitheses inherent in blindness (e.g. blindness and sight, consciousness and unconsciousness) but 'seek to go beyond these differences and to unite them' (ibid:124). In July 1986 he writes that he has recently been 'working through' the idea that blindness could be a gift (ibid:162). Later in the year he concludes that it is a gift which he 'has to accept' a 'dark paradoxical gift' (ibid:155) which 'symbolizes the numinous darkness of the brilliant destructive qualities of blindness' (ibid:156) and which has no equivalent. It is a 'gift' he comes to value as an integral part of his life.

It is in keeping with the general tenor of his work that Hull concludes 'God is the Lord of both light and dark' (ibid:165). In paraphrasing the psalmist's assertion that 'the darkness and the light are both alike to thee' (Psalm 139:12) Hull repudiates the values traditionally attributed to dark and light, blindness and sight, and accords to each one a rare parity.

Hull ends his account by stating that he has 'tried to speak the truth about what must remain a remarkable experience for any human being to undergo'. Wondering whether he has 'come close to understanding blindness' about which there is 'still much to know' he concludes that it is 'a paradoxical world' because it is both 'dependent and independent... in the sense that it is an authentic and autonomous world, a place of its own' (ibid:164). He gives it a uniqueness and value not hitherto indicated in either autobiography, fiction or common belief.
I have given much space to, and quoted extensively from, Hull's autobiographical account of his experience of blindness because it provides a depth of thought and analysis which, informed and supported as it is by an educated and firmly held religious belief, not only illuminates problems common to many blind people but, importantly in the context of this thesis, provides an authoritative repudiation of some of the myths which have served to diminish, in both fact and fiction, the lives of the blind. Uniquely, Hull elevates the quality of darkness to that traditionally held by light in his conclusion that God is 'indifferent alike to both light and darkness' because He 'represents that pure knowledge to which both light and darkness in their ways point' (ibid:51).

3. CONCLUSION.

Themes in Autobiography.

The autobiographies I have discussed here show that, once given a voice and the chance to use it, some blind people over the past years have become increasingly critical and questioning about society's attitudes and beliefs. This is due, no doubt, to the general empowerment of impaired people who challenge stereotyped attitudes in their fight for equal opportunities.

Bearing this in mind then, it is not surprising to find a concentration of autobiographies published within a thirty year period between 1960 and 1990, although it is evident from the work of Villey (1930) and Chevigny (1947), as well as the critical voices of Cutsforth (1933), R.D.French (1932) and Scott (1969), that questions were already
being raised about patterns of belief, their provenance, their perpetuation and their effect.

Although many of the authors state that they do not see themselves as exemplars of blind people in general, since they write for their own purposes from individual and idiosyncratic experience, they nevertheless describe, in articulate, compelling and illuminating ways, both a common range of reactions to the experience of blindness itself as well as evincing a refusal to remain passive recipients of services and attitudes based on dated and largely unquestioned ideas. Theirs is a conscious effort to bring to notice, and at the same time to question, the ingrained beliefs and practises which inform those ideas. The autobiographies also confirm, though in varying degrees, Hull's observation that those who can see are incapable of fully understanding the world of the blind since they typically show little insight into the problems inherent in blindness, their resolution or even amelioration. It is not clear whether this is because, as Hull suggests, they simply do not know how to react in the presence of disability, or whether an unconscious kind of 'reaction formation' (Chevigny & Braverman 1950:148) takes place. If the latter is true then guilt evoking feelings of fear, revulsion and avoidance become transmuted into the more socially acceptable emotion of pity.

1. Blindness and Pity

Pity, with its implied sense of the inferiority of its object, is the most widely reported received response to blindness reported by the writers I have discussed here. It is not surprising that we find it resented and rejected with varying degrees of vigour. Thus Villey's
comment that pity both 'prejudiced a fair evaluation' (op.cit:378) and
gave a 'wrong image' (ibid:14) is a far stronger condemnation than
Hollins' sad observation that pity precluded 'friendship or comradeship'
(op.cit:61) or Levy's confusion of pity and real concern for the
vulnerability of single blind women at the end of the nineteenth
century. Not surprisingly it is Villey's view that is echoed by many of
his successors and not least by the two ex-soldiers who, blinded in war,
were able to benefit from the ethos of that 'very great regiment', St.
Dunstans (Mike Ansell 1973:105) where there was a 'common dread of pity
and magnanimity' (Lord Fraser 1961:89). Since its inception in 1915 St.
Dunstans had promoted a range of training and work opportunities
hitherto unimagined, all based on its founder's belief that 'blindness
was not a soul destroying affliction....no more than a handicap, not a
calamity and by no means unique' (Fraser 1961:31). It was here that
Fraser, blinded in 1916 had followed Sir Arthur Pearson's dictum and
'learned to be blind' (ibid:30). Knowing that the blind were seen as
inferior, 'objects of pity, compassion and charity' (ibid:36) he says
that he himself had initially feared 'looking a fool' and the 'object of
pity and emotional sympathy' (ibid:20). Later however, when Chairman of
St. Dunstans, he was not above invoking these emotions in order to
attract 'public sympathy' (ibid:138)_and money_ for its work.

II. Blindness, Dependency and Special Gifts.

There is also ample evidence that the writers reject stereotyped ideas
of apathy, dependency and helplessness as inevitable concomitants of
blindness, though it should be noted that they largely represent a
particular group of young to middle aged able people, mostly newly
blind, who have both the ability and capacity to attack old views.
Without exception they demonstrate a striving toward independence and autonomy with a rejection of the pity which brings unwanted help as well as resentment of kind voices which infer a correlation between lack of sight and lack of mental capacity. With an ability, sharpened by practise, to replace sight by other senses they demonstrate independence as well as exposing the falsity of belief which promotes ideas of special gifts and a 'sixth sense'. There is no suggestion here of any kind of special compensation. Perhaps it takes the grim humour of someone like de Montalembert to convince sighted people that mobility training and the acquisition of 'facial vision' can, in reality, constitute an 'enjoyable game' (op.cit:62).

iii. Blindness and Darkness

Although there is a commonly expressed sense of grief and regret over a past, sighted life, and an often mentioned claustrophobic sense of entrapment in darkness which does accord with sighted expectations, there is also evidence to suggest that the physical and psychological aspects of darkness are rarely experienced as complete enough to fulfil expectations of inevitable 'gloom, fear, loneliness and whatever else the timorous seeing experience in the dark' (Cutsforth op.cit:129). Cutsforth indeed insists that 'emotionally the blind are not suffering tormenting privation for the loss of sight' (ibid:125). This is a view endorsed by Villey who similarly avers that 'those without sight are not necessarily haunted or tortured as is supposed by the wish to see the light' (op.cit:373). It is a certainty that is voiced much later by Hull who in his turn confirms 'I have no fear of darkness because I know nothing else...So it is with God. He is indifferent alike to both light
and darkness' (ibid:51). In so saying he contradicts, as I have indicated, centuries of fear and belief.

It should be remembered though that the views of Cutsforth and Villey are those of men who were blind from early childhood and consequently their experiences are clearly different from that of those who have previously led sighted lives, often into middle age and sometimes having achieved successful careers. It often seems that there is as little comparability between the experience of the long time blind and the adventitiously blind as there is between the sighted and the blind. They offer fine distinctions of experience which appears to be missing in the fictional accounts of blindness which, uninformed by true experience, define blind people as belonging to one homogeneous group and behaving according to anticipated expectation and belief.

iv. Blindness and Death

It can be seen, however, that despite the protestations of Cutsforth and Villey and the provision of modern aids which encourage life involvement, the fear of loss of light and the threat of encompassing darkness with all its significance, still gives rise to correlations of blindness with death. Many of the writers discussed in this chapter report that they go through similar processes of grief and mourning for the loss of a sense and for a lost pattern of life as they would for an actual death. Some, particularly Dahl and Hull experienced a threat to identity and self severe enough for Hull to speak of 'a strange feeling of being dead', of becoming 'a cipher' (op.cit:147), whilst Dahl felt the need to confirm her very existence by feeling her face and body.

At the same time, though both Hull and de Montalembert liken their experience to death itself, they nevertheless see it as an opportunity
for rebirth. As I have already said, Hull knows he must 'recreate [his] life or be destroyed' (op.cit:135) whilst de Montalembert's comments are even more explicit. It will be remembered that in the early days of his blindness he describes himself as being 'between death and birth'. He is dead to his past life but 'not yet reborn to the new one' (op.cit:25). Death here no longer implies finality but is seen as an entry point into Hull's 'autonomous world' (op.cit:164).

v. Blindness, Sin and Evil

The accusation that Minton was 'difficult to please' (op.cit:75) and de Montalembert's admission that his life had not been led according to 'straight lines' (op.cit:113) hardly constitute attributions of evil intent in these blind men. It is, however, still possible to identify the remnants of old belief which point to sin, guilt and denial of God's will in the causation of blindness. Chevigny was accused of sin (op.cit:162) and Hull was charged with disobedience to the will of God (op.cit:55&57). The family of de Montalembert also appear to believe that his blindness may have been a kind of retribution because his life, as he admits, 'has hardly been that of a saint' (op.cit:106).

Whether this is born of religious fervour or of an abiding need for explanations in the face of intractable conditions is unclear, but it does provide a surprising finding in a late twentieth century world of modern medicine, technology and widespread information which has seen the abolition of much myth and magic. It would also suggest that Michael Stewart's _Blindsight_ is a closer depiction of some current belief than might at first have been believed.
Varying degrees of belief in divine intervention are evident in a number of these autobiographies, the writing of which spans a century. Given the time at which Levy wrote, the poor conditions under which many blind people then existed, and in keeping with the general tenor of his comments, it is to be expected that he should believe that 'the first duty of the Christian is to acquiesce cheerfully and thankfully in whatever is unmistakeably the will of the heavenly Father' (op.cit:185/6). Similarly, taking into account her staunch Lutheran upbringing, it is perhaps not surprising to find that, even in adulthood, Dahl continued to feel that she 'had no right to live and that I was guilty of something...I just didn't know what' (op.cit:41).

As late as the last third of the present century both Scott Blackhall and Colonel Sir Mike Ansell indicate their belief that they have been victims of unfair and undeserved punishment. Blackhall 'felt...that divine or any other kind of justice had misfired' (op.cit:170), whilst for Ansell 'malign fate' had destroyed 'his military life' (op.cit:170).

At the same time, given the nature of their philosophies it is inevitable that suggestions of divine punishment are vigorously denied by Chevigny, de Montalembert and, not least, Hull who states that neither 'fate' (op.cit:148), 'sin' (op.cit:67) nor 'guilt' (op.cit:55) had caused his blindness. As we have seen he vigorously rejects the faith healer's verdict that he had 'refused to obey the word of God' (op.cit:67). De Montalembert's 'Don't insult God' is also evidence of his scathing refusal to accept the Jesuit priest's suggestion that blindness could be 'a blessing from God' (op.cit:79). Since he, like Hull, regards loss of sight as 'a mechanical accident', it follows that it is
'a farce' to believe that it puts him on 'a higher spiritual plane' (op.cit:79).

Chevigny, who was also accused of being 'a great sinner', writes that he had to reject ideas of punishment 'with all the intellectual force at my disposal' (op.cit:162). He reports 'fighting as hard as I could against the suspicion that it might be a personal visitation after all' (op.cit:161/162). Searching for meaning, as do other writers, he concludes that 'God alone knows the answers and He reserves it to Himself'. His advice is, in Goethe's words, "do not look, I beg you, for meaning beyond phenomena" (op.cit:166).

vii. Blindness and Mockery.
The writers discussed in this chapter reveal that there are still those who see 'meaning beyond phenomena' in the fact of blindness. Thus it is less surprising than it might have been to find reported instances of mockery despite society's increased sensitivity to, and knowledge about, handicapping conditions. It is, perhaps, not so unusual to read that Dahl's class-mates, with the unthinking ignorance of childhood in the presence of the 'different', poked fun at her deformed eyes and face, but it is disturbing to hear that Hull (op.cit:58) and de Montalembert (op.cit:161), both attempting to find their way in the street, were deliberately misled about the location of the traffic.

The autobiographical writings discussed above show that Chevigny's comment of fifty years ago is as pertinent now as it was then. He noted that the 'pressure on the blind is social, literary and religious' and 'requires every ounce of realism a man can muster to appraise his standing truly without catching the infection of the prevailing belief'
Notwithstanding the diversity of their accounts I hope I have shown that all the blind writers discussed here were influenced to some degree by the beliefs and mores of their times and that it did indeed 'require every ounce of realism' to stand against 'prevailing belief' which continued to inform, however variably, their own behaviour as well as that of the society in which they had their being. Though they report a common range of reactions to sightlessness it is clear that these blind people respond as individually and uniquely as their characters and circumstances dictate and in so doing provide records of experience which sighted writers, however empathetic and imaginative, might find hard to truly replicate. Challenging habitual and ingrained ideas, the writers give credence to Hull's suggestion of an 'autonomous world' which encapsulates 'a secret life, incommunicable and impossible to share' (de Montalembert op.cit:77).
I have argued in this thesis that ideologies about blindness which have their provenance in religious, mythical or symbolic belief are indeed 'infused into our literature and art' and so become 'an important part of the way we perceive ourselves and others' (Monbeck op. cit:149).

I have argued that these ideologies, which have their genesis in the search for explanation and meaning, are now ingrained in metaphor and symbol. They provide an 'inherited lens' through which we 'perceive and understand the world' (Cecil G. Helman 1990:3). However, though they enrich our language, they also serve to perpetuate habitual belief. The strength of the message they convey appears to be little affected by medical and scientific discovery which defines the true causes of disease and disability.

I hope I have shown that the literary texts which have been discussed in this thesis do more than 'illuminate the understanding of the living process, the meaning of health and illness' (Porter 1993:1). Though they provide a means of charting the process and progress of understanding of disease, its causes and effects, they also promote myth and stereotype regardless of understanding. However, this past century has seen the advent of a number of texts by blind people themselves which chart a kind of parallel progress away from superstition and toward more accurate depictions of the state of sightlessness. These blind people make no claim to divine gifts, scorn suggestions of sin and evil, and challenge assumptions of helplessness, dependency and pity.
They illustrate the truth of Chevigny's comment that the 'pressure on the blind is social, literary and religious' and requires 'every ounce of realism a man can muster to appraise his standing truly without catching the infection of the prevailing belief' (op.cit:149).

Though the changes cannot be directly and solely related to the efforts of the autobiographers, some fictional texts of the past century do in fact show a reduction in belief in divine gifts of prophecy, insight and inspiration following the onset of blindness, though it must be said that some still continue to promote the belief that loss of sight is the outcome of sin. There is also evidence of a reduction in 'the tendency' to regard those affected 'as an element apart' (Twersky op.cit:54), and less of a tendency to 'see the blind through a haze of prejudice and misconception' (Rose op.cit:11). Nevertheless, many writers continue to make use of myth and stereotype in the delineation of their characters, though it is impossible to say whether this comes about as a result of lack of knowledge or from deliberate intent.

It is easy to suggest that nineteenth century authors were writing out of personal creed in the context of the knowledge and mores of their times, but it is less easy to understand why writers of this century, particularly those of the second part of the century, should continue to indicate that the blind are still 'in essence far apart' (Lehmann op.cit:250) and to be seen as pitiable, incapable and dependent, even if possessed of additional skills and extra-fine senses.

Although it might be assumed that informed writers such as Michael Stewart are deliberately employing superstitious belief for the sake of a story, I hope I have demonstrated the extent to which the writers of autobiography attempt to counter and correct prevalent misperceptions.
Outspoken criticism of the outmoded beliefs purveyed in much of the fictional literature of the past two hundred years goes a little way toward reducing the hold of the 'mind forg'd manacles' of myth, stereotype, and metaphor. This myth, the myth that insight is an inevitable concomitant of blindness is, however, a strong one as is evidenced by its continuance in even the most self-conscious of twentieth-century writing, namely the high literary theory of Paul de Man's *Blindness and Insight*. Nevertheless, recent criticism continues to underline the 'gap between sign and meaning' (Herman, Humbeeck, Lernout op.cit:171) and exposes the tenacity of belief which has been exacerbated by 'duplicities of language' (Felperin op.cit:29), instances of 'misreading' (Crosman op.cit:3) and questions of 'authorship [and] authority' (Felperin op.cit:29).
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